

“The sacred tie”: Sir Thomas Smartt, the Unionist Party and the British Empire, 1912–1920

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The Irish born Thomas Smartt loved South Africa, and fervently believed that his adopted country's highest destiny could only be achieved by being in the British Empire. For him the imperial connection with Britain was a “sacred tie”, and he saw it as his duty to protect and strengthen it. As the leader of the pro-imperial Unionist Party, the official parliamentary opposition, he had all the attributes – a genial personality, eloquence, proficiency in Afrikaans, widely admired integrity, boundless energy and a record of unselfish public service – to bolster the imperial link. And yet, he was a disastrous leader of the Unionist Party, and did much to harm the “sacred tie” with Britain.

Thomas William Smartt¹ was born on 22 February 1858 in Trim, county Meath, Ireland, as a member of the ruling minority Protestant Anglo-Irish community.² His father died soon after his birth and his widowed mother moved to Dublin where Thomas grew up and qualified as a surgeon. In 1880 he arrived in the Cape Colony as a ship's surgeon, eventually opening a medical practice in the Karoo hamlet of Britstown. By 1884, after receiving payment for his services in the form of livestock, he started farming, quickly establishing himself as a leading sheep farmer. He founded the Smartt syndicate, of which

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1. The private papers of Thomas Smartt were on loan to the National Library in Cape Town, but have since been removed by his grandson, Brian Arton, on emigrating to Australia in 2006. However, I was able to consult the papers in 2005 for another research project. These documents are reflected in this article with references to the former National Library file numbers.
2. Smartt's English-born grandfather settled in Trim in the early part of the nineteenth century to become the head of the county jail.

he was the managing director, to improve irrigation and the quality of farming in the Karoo. His abilities as a surgeon and farmer combined with his charm and his willingness to learn Afrikaans, he “spoke Dutch like a Boer”,³ made him popular amongst Afrikaner farmers.⁴ In 1892, with his reputation as a progressive farmer he was appointed chairman of the Scab Commission to investigate a disease in sheep and goats which destroyed wool and sometimes killed large numbers of stock.⁵ His success with the commission attracted the attention of the leadership of the Afrikaner Bond which was in alliance with Prime Minister Cecil John Rhodes. With the Cape fully integrated in the imperial economy, most Cape Afrikaners appreciated the security and financial prosperity the Empire brought and were loyal subjects of Queen Victoria. This loyalty was reflected in the Afrikaner Bond, established in 1880 to further Afrikaner interests. The leader of the Bond, J.H. (Onze Jan) Hofmeyr’s definition of an Afrikaner was inclusive, embracing all whites who strove for the welfare of South Africa. In the party there was a strong desire for Afrikaners to amalgamate with English-speakers to create a South African nation. The Bond advocated a united South Africa, under the British flag.⁶

3. B.K. Long, *Drummond Chaplin: His Life and Times in Africa* (Oxford University Press, London, 1941), p 172.
4. N. Garson, “Smartt, Sir (Arthur Francis) Thomas William”, *Dictionary of South African Biography* (Human Sciences Research Council, Cape Town, 1976), pp 725–726; L.E. Neame, *Some South African Politicians* (Maskew Miller, Cape Town, 1929), pp 87–89; “The late Sir Thomas Smartt”, *The British Medical Journal*, 22 June 1929, pp 1138–1139; Surgeon Captain H.B. Beatty, “The late Sir Thomas Smartt”, *British Medical Journal*, 7 September 1929, p 480. See also B. Arton, “The Story of a Large African Farm. The Smartt Syndicate Ltd., Britstown, South Africa” (Unpublished manuscript in the possession of the Arton family).
5. M. Tamarkin, *Volk and Flock: Ecology, Identity and Politics among Cape Afrikaners in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 2009), pp 34, 43.
6. H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2003), p 239; M. Tamarkin, *Cecil Rhodes and the Cape Afrikaners. The Imperial Colossus and the Colonial Parish Pump* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1996), pp 151, 158, 242–244, 297; T.R.H. Davenport, *The Afrikaner Bond, The History of a South African Political Party (1880–1911)* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1966), pp 127, 132–134, 161–167.

Smartt, who believed that loyalty to South Africa could be combined with loyalty to the British Empire,⁷ became an enthusiastic member of the Bond in 1888. The leadership of the party, eager to secure more high calibre MPs with the potential to serve in the cabinet, replaced the sitting Bond member for the Wodehouse constituency with Smartt as the party’s candidate for the 1894 general election. Smartt duly secured his election to parliament.⁸

When the Bond broke with Rhodes in January 1896 in the aftermath of the Jameson Raid, extending its support to the South African Republic, Smartt followed Rhodes into the newly-founded Progressive Party (PP), a party dedicated to representing the interests of the British Empire. Smartt’s Irish roots played a role in his break with the Bond. Protestants in a Catholic dominated Ireland felt that their safety lay in being part of the United Kingdom.⁹ For Smartt, with English-speakers as a minority in the Cape Colony the same principle applied to the Empire. As a leading PP MP he served as the Colonial Secretary in J.G. Sprigg’s government from May 1898 until the October 1898 election which was won by the Bond.¹⁰

By 1899, Smartt had become a close companion of Rhodes who appreciated his wit and humour, but especially his unselfish devotion. During the South African War they together endured the Boer siege of Kimberley between 15 October 1899 and 15 February 1900.¹¹ In June 1900 the Bond government fell and Smartt became the Minister for Public Works in Sprigg’s government. With L.S. Jameson he attended the gravely ill Rhodes and was in the Muizenberg cottage when he died on 26 March 1902. Like Jameson, Smartt was determined to fulfill Rhodes’s imperial vision for South Africa – a unified and loyal South Africa within the British Empire. The first step was to suspend the constitution of the Cape Colony to ensure the supremacy of Britain

7. Garson, “Smartt, Thomas William”, p 726.

8. Davenport, *The Afrikaner Bond*, p 150.

9. G. Lewis, *Carson: The Man who Divided Ireland* (Hambleton, London, 2005), p xii.

10. Garson, “Smartt, Thomas William”, p 726.

11. P. Jourdan, *Cecil Rhodes. His Private Life by his Private Secretary between 1899 and 1902* (Lane, London, 1911), pp 95, 114–115, 233.

in South Africa. The fear was that the Afrikaner Bond, which Smartt now saw as a disloyal organisation which had supported the Boer republics during the war and encouraged Cape Afrikaners to rebel,¹² could win the next election and undo the hard won victories on the battlefield. Smartt was apparently blind to the irony that the South African War was fought to ensure the right to vote for Uitlanders in the South African Republic, and that now, in victory, he wanted to remove this same right from British subjects in the Cape Colony. Because Sprigg opposed suspension, Smartt resigned from the cabinet on 27 May 1902 to lead the suspension campaign, becoming in the process the leader of the PP. Smartt, emotionally lashing out at Sprigg and the Bond leaders as traitors to the Empire addressed meetings throughout the Colony, securing 30 000 signatures of support for the temporary suspension of self-governance.¹³ Some PP MPs, however, had serious doubts about Smartt’s leadership ability. Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, the Cape governor, explained to Lord Milner:

I am clear that Smartt is no good as a leader, he is utterly wanting in self-restraint, and his speeches are noisy and unconvincing. Many of his people are dissatisfied with him
...¹⁴

Smartt’s limitations as a leader were exposed on 11 September 1902 during a parliamentary debate on the constitution. By then, Joseph Chamberlain, as the Secretary of State for the Colonies, had made it clear that he would not allow suspension. In contrast to Merriman’s passionate and brilliant defence of constitutional freedom in a speech which lasted 95 minutes, a seemingly dazed Smartt responded in a limp speech of five minutes that failed to justify or explain the suspension movement.¹⁵ His feeble response caused consternation amongst the

12. Cape House of Assembly Debates, 27 August 1902, Col. 55–56.
13. J.P. Vanstone, “Sir Gordon Sprigg: A Political Biography”, DPhil thesis, Queen’s University, 1974, p 432; J.T. Molteno, *Further South African Recollections* (Methuen, London, 1926), pp 11, 18, 76.
14. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Alfred Milner Papers, Ms. Milner 174, W. Hely-Hutchinson – Milner, 4 September 1902.
15. *The Cape Argus*, 12 September 1902.

PP MPs.¹⁶ Desperate for strong leadership, the Progressives turned to the charismatic Jameson of the Raid fame, as their leader. In 1903 Smartt willingly stood back for Jameson, who had replaced Rhodes as a hero to be followed.¹⁷

Smartt played a leading role in the PP’s 1904 election victory and as an efficient Commissioner for Public Works in Jameson’s government, implementing new dipping and irrigation legislation.¹⁸ Importantly, he supported Jameson who through the force of his personality persuaded the jingoistic Cape Progressives to support his conciliation of Cape Afrikaners.¹⁹ Jameson found Smartt “loyal to the backbone”,²⁰ it was he who kept Smartt’s jingoism in check. After the Bond election victory in 1908 Smartt attended the National Convention to unify South Africa. In January 1911, he received a knighthood on the recommendation of the newly installed South African government, for his role in the unification process. However, this was a reward by the premier, Louis Botha (who had a close relationship with Jameson), for Smartt’s loyalty to Jameson, because according to B.K. Long, a close friend of Smartt, he was completely out of his depth when it came to the drafting of a constitution.²¹

During the first South African parliamentary election on 15 September 1910, Smartt was elected unopposed for Fort Beaufort as a candidate of the Unionist Party. The party was formed after the pro-imperial parties of the Transvaal, Cape and the Orange Free State had merged under the leadership of Jameson to protect the “sacred tie” with Britain.²² The electoral alliance of three predominately

16. Molteno, *Further South African Recollections*, pp 31–32; P. Lewsen, *John X. Merriman: Paradoxical South African Statesman* (AD Donker, Johannesburg, 1982), p 257.
17. *Cape Times*, 18 April 1929.
18. Molteno, *Further South African Recollections*, p 117.
19. I. Colvin, *The Life of Jameson*, I, (Edward Arnold, London, 1922), p 242.
20. British Library, London, Letters to Lady Milner, Add.mss 63 591, L.S. Jameson – Lady Edward Cecil, 20 December, no year.
21. Long, *Drummond Chaplin*, pp 135–136.
22. W.A. Kleynhans, *SA General Election Manifestos 1910–1981* (Unisa Press, Pretoria, 1987), p 26.

Afrikaner political parties which became the South African Party (SAP) in 1911, led by Louis Botha won the election with 69 seats to the 39 of the Unionists, making Jameson the leader of the official parliamentary opposition. In March 1912, when Jameson's poor health made it impossible for him to continue as party leader, he strongly recommended Smartt as his successor. Despite the misgivings of some members, the Unionist parliamentary caucus unanimously accepted him as its new leader on 10 April 1910. Percy FitzPatrick, who seconded Smartt's nomination, was fond of him, but thought that he was a political lightweight.²³ This was an opinion shared by Governor-General Herbert Gladstone, who opined that Smartt was a “vigorous talker, but he doesn't impress me at all”.²⁴

Smartt was a popular member of the House of Assembly, but carried no weight as a politician. Although a great fighter when roused on imperial issues he was temperamentally easy-going and lenient.²⁵ According to Long he was the “most delightful of men – affectionate, good humoured, chivalrous, and quite incapable of letting political differences poison personal friendships”.²⁶ The cantankerous Merriman viewed him as one of the “kindest and most feeling of men”.²⁷ Merriman could, after clashing with Smartt in the House of Assembly, amiably dine with him and then share a cab to the station.²⁸ Smartt's political weakness was what *The South African News* (11 April 1912) described as his lack of restraint and lack of dignity of speech. A hallmark of his public persona was his loquaciousness and a magnificent voice tinged with an Irish brogue. Yet it was his loquaciousness that harmed his reputation. The

- 23. J.P.R. Wallis, *Fitz: The Story of Sir Percy FitzPatrick* (Macmillan, London, 1955), p 171.
- 24. British Library, London, Viscount Gladstone Papers, Add.mss 45 998, Gladstone – Harcourt, 25 November 1911.
- 25. Neame, *Some South African Politicians*, p 91.
- 26. B.K. Long, *In Smuts's Camp* (Oxford University Press, London, 1945), pp 5–6.
- 27. P. Lewsen (ed.), *The Correspondence of John X. Merriman 1905–1924* (Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1969), Merriman – Sir Abe Bailey, 26 January 1917, p 292.
- 28. Lewsen, *John X Merriman*, p 285.

journalist L.E. Neame, in a warm and sympathetic biographical essay, points out that Smartt excelled in the chaffing speech and jests in the House of Assembly, but was inclined to overdo it and to become melodramatic when he adopted a graver tone.²⁹ This combined with his addiction to long and emotional speechmaking, on even the most trivial of issues, made him a figure of fun.³⁰ Jameson, according to his biographer Ian Colvin more than once whispered to Smartt when he was in full flight, “Oh! For God’s sake, stop it, Smartt! Dry up and sit down!”³¹ Tommy Boydell, a Labour Party MP, summed up the view of parliament by describing Smartt as a “cheery and voluble Irishman who sometimes found it difficult to be taken seriously”.³²

Despite serious doubts about his abilities the Unionist caucus accepted him as there was no alternative. Apart from Patrick Duncan, there was a dearth of political talent in the party. Duncan towered head and shoulders over his fellow Unionist MPs, but his pro-labour politics made him a peripheral figure in a party supportive of big capital.³³ Smartt, according to Long, had no illusions about his own shortcomings and he knew that he lacked the abilities to be a good party leader, but believed that it was his patriotic duty to accept the leadership as he was the only candidate acceptable to the majority of the caucus.³⁴

Jameson had secured the leadership for Smartt because he hoped that his loyal lieutenant would continue his strategy of supporting the Botha government. The reality was that the Unionists, as an English-speaking party, represented a demographic minority and could not win an election. To gain the political influence needed to secure the

29. Neame, *Some South African Politicians*, p 91.
30. Long, *Drummond Chaplin*, p 135; *The Friend*, 11 April 1912.
31. Colvin, *The Life of Jameson*, II, p 314.
32. T. Boydell, *My Luck was in* (Stewart Printers, Cape Town, no date), pp 59–60.
33. D. Lavin, *Friendship and Union: The South African Letters of Patrick Duncan and Maud Selborne 1907–1934*, Van Riebeeck Society, Second series no. 41 (Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 2010), pp 123, 161–162. Bodleian Library, Oxford, Lewis Harcourt Papers, Ms Harcourt dep. 485, Lord Gladstone – L. Harcourt, 6 February 1912.
34. *Cape Times*, 18 April 1929.

imperial tie the party had to collaborate with Botha and support him against those Afrikaners, especially J.B.M Hertzog, who were critical of his conciliation towards English-speakers and Britain. Jameson saw it as his duty, as the Unionist leader, to counter the resentment and the superior attitude of many in the English-speaking community to an Afrikaner dominated government. He wanted to encourage a South African identity because he believed that South African patriotism would strengthen the imperial link.³⁵ His vision was for Botha’s SAP and the Unionist Party to merge in the wake of a split between Botha and Hertzog. Such a merger would firmly attach South Africa to the Empire.³⁶ Jameson’s parting advice to Smartt was to co-operate with Botha. “We must frankly acknowledge to ourselves that our best alternative is ... to choose Botha ..., and hope for the inclusion of our people with Botha’s immediate party.”³⁷ Jameson’s policy was, however, against the wishes of many Unionist MPs who demanded partisan opposition to a government which they saw as representing the interests only of the Afrikaner.

Botha, believing that Unionist support was necessary for conciliation to succeed, congratulated Smartt on his election, expressing the hope that he would be as co-operative as Jameson had been in creating a nation in which all would have the same love for South Africa.³⁸ Smartt, however, did not have the stature and strength of Jameson’s personality. According to Vere Stent, ultra-jingoistic editor of the *Pretoria News*, he was too diffident and lacking in self-confidence,³⁹ to control rebellious party members. Under pressure from MPs such as Lionel Phillips, Percy FitzPatrick, Hugh Wyndham and Drummond Chaplin, as well as pressure from Stent, who believed that Botha had manipulated Jameson with the intention of securing an Afrikaner dominated South Africa,⁴⁰ Smartt buckled

35. *Cape Times*, 5 June 1907.
36. Colvin, *The Life of Jameson*, II, pp 260, 295–298; *Cape Times*, 5 June 1907.
37. Colvin, *The Life of Jameson*, II, p 306.
38. House of Assembly Debates, 10 April 1912, Col. 1704.
39. *Pretoria News*, 17 April 1929.
40. P.F. van der Schyff, “Die Unioniste Party in die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek, 1910–1921”, MA, dissertation, Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys, 1964, p 47; *Pretoria News*, 9 April 1912; A. Duminy and B.

and modified Jameson’s pro-Botha strategy. While proclaiming support for the premier against Hertzog, he made it clear that the Unionists would be more critical in examining government policies and, if necessary, oppose them. Without the moderating influence of Jameson, Phillips, FitzPatrick and Chaplin created an environment which encouraged Smartt’s lack of self-restraint when it came to the Empire and the rights of the English-speaking community. This was evident in May 1912 with the Hull affair.

Smartt, under pressure from FitzPatrick, forced Botha to make a statement in parliament when H.C. Hull, the Minister of Finance and the leading English-speaker in the government, resigned from the cabinet. Hull was in a conflict with the Minister of Railways, over the financial control of the Department of Railways, and resigned in a huff when Botha did not come to his support.⁴¹ In the ensuing debate Smartt went overboard by launching a personal attack on Botha, accusing him of treating parliament with “scant courtesy” and not living up to his “very high position”. Smartt’s intervention in the affair served no purpose as it did not prevent Hull’s departure from the cabinet, while it infuriated Botha who had hoped to resolve the cabinet split in private.⁴² It was an ominous start to Smartt’s relationship with Botha.

Relations between the premier and Smartt deteriorated even further in June 1912 when, once again egged on by FitzPatrick, Smartt opposed the clause on compulsory bilingualism in the civil service in the Public Service Bill.⁴³ In contrast to Botha’s conciliatory speech, which was against the wishes of many SAP MPs, Smartt emotionally accused the premier of violating a sacred pledge and solemn trust made at the National Convention on the language clause. The *Cape Times* (21 June 1912), the leading English-medium

Guest, *Interfering in Politics: A Biography of Sir Percy FitzPatrick* (Lowry Publishers, Johannesburg, 1987), pp 193–199.

41. Duminy and Guest, *Interfering in Politics*, pp 202–203.
42. House of Assembly Debates, 20 May 1912, Col. 2775–2777; A.H. Marais, *Politieke Brieve 1911–1912* (Instituut vir Eietydse Geskiedenis, Cape Town, 1973), pp 74–75.
43. Duminy and Guest, *Interfering in Politics*, p 201.

and pro-imperial newspaper and supporter of the Unionist Party, was aghast at Smartt’s lack of self-restraint. Apart from dismissing the accusation of pledge breaking as baseless, the newspaper warned him that this type of behaviour could only alienate the public. Apart from angering Afrikaners, Smartt had embarrassed many English-speakers. Morris Kentridge, a Unionist who defected to the Labour Party in 1912, described Smartt’s attempt at policy statements as “invective without initiative, bristling with diatribe, but devoid of policy”.⁴⁴

Like Kentridge, an increasing number of English-speakers joined the Labour Party because they felt that the Unionist Party with its focus on language rights and the imperial tie ignored the challenges facing a modern industrialising society. In January 1912, the Unionists had lost Georgetown, a “safe” Unionist seat, to Labour in a by-election. On 29 June 1912, the party was again defeated by Labour in the Durban-Greyville by-election, a seat it had won with ease in 1910. By September 1912, Botha, concerned about the rise of the Labour Party and fearful of socialism, considered the possibility of merging the SAP and Unionist Party, with two to three cabinet seats for the Unionists, to create a strong government to deal with South Africa’s challenges. Smartt was, however, kept in the dark because Botha feared that he would leak the information before Botha could discuss the issue with the cabinet.⁴⁵

In October 1912, Smartt toured Natal in an attempt to arrest the declining support for the Unionist Party by advocating opposition to compulsory bilingualism in the civil service and support for Botha against the extremism of Hertzog. Hertzog retaliated with a speech in which he advocated the principle of “South Africa first”. He emphasised that South Africans had to put the interests of the Union before those of the Empire and condemned Smartt as a foreign fortune seeker. Smartt was certainly no fortune seeker and he sincerely believed that a good imperialist made a good South African, but Hertzog used his jingoistic utterances and harped on the fact that ten years earlier Smartt had called for the suspension

44. M. Kentridge, *I Recall* (The Free Press, Johannesburg, 1959), p 24.

45. Marais, *Politieke Briefe*, pp 109–111.

of the self-governance of the Cape Colony as proof that he placed the interests of the Empire above those of South Africa.⁴⁶ Hertzog’s speech caused an outcry amongst English-speaking SAP supporters because it created the impression that no English-speaker could ever be recognised as a South African.

The opportunity, predicted by Jameson, to split Botha and Hertzog and to secure a Unionist merger with the SAP had arrived. Smartt, however, could not rise to the occasion. His desperation after two by-election defeats to retain Albany, Jameson’s former seat, in a by-election on 9 December 1912 made it impossible for him to reach out to Botha. Botha had high, and realistic, hopes of winning the seat to show his Afrikaner critics that his conciliation policy was achieving results. He campaigned in Albany with the message that it would be to the Empire’s benefit if Afrikaners and English-speakers were united in a South African nation. Smartt, motivated by political expediency, went on the attack by holding Botha responsible for Hertzog’s actions. To Botha’s disappointment Smartt’s strategy paid off and the Unionists retained Albany with a comfortable majority.⁴⁷ It was, however, a pyrrhic victory because Smartt’s tactics, combined with the emotional outpouring of Afrikaner support for Hertzog after Botha dismissed him from the cabinet in the wake of the Albany defeat, made a merger between the two parties impossible. An exasperated Gladstone, aghast by Smartt’s tactic of portraying Botha as the villain in the affair, informed London that there was a want of leadership in the Unionist Party.⁴⁸

Hertzog’s dismissal from the cabinet left the Unionists in dire straits because the party had lost, in the words of Duncan, “a great asset to us as a party – about the only one we have”.⁴⁹ The party

46. J.H. le Roux, P.W. Coetzer and A.H. Marais, *Generaal JBM Hertzog: Sy Stryd en Strewe*, I (Perskor, Johannesburg, 1987), pp 144, 150.
47. O. Geyser and A.H. Marais, *Die Nasionale Party*, I, *Agtergrond, Stigting en Kon-solidasie* (Instituut vir Etiydse Geskiedenis, Bloemfontein, 1983), pp 108–110; Long, *Drummond Chaplin*, p 173.
48. R. Keiser, *The South African Governor-General, 1910–19*, (D.Phil, Oxford University, 1975), p 60.
49. Lavin, *Friendship and Union*, p 137.

was now unable to justify its existence as Botha’s defender against extremists in his own party. The premier’s strong handling of Hertzog raised his prestige amongst English-speakers who were increasingly of the opinion that they did not need the Unionists, or the imperial tie, to protect their rights. Smartt was unable to adapt to the changing circumstances and his inability to provide clear direction was exposed on 29 April 1913 when the Labour Party introduced a motion of no-confidence in the government. The Unionist caucus was deeply divided on whether to support or oppose the motion, or to abstain. Jameson had always opposed any such motion, arguing that to support it would serve no purpose because the government could not be defeated, or replaced with a better one, and such a stance could only alienate Botha.⁵⁰ After a long discussion it was decided to support the motion of no-confidence, and that Smartt would be the only Unionist to speak in the debate. To the vocal contempt of the Labour Party, and the SAP, Smartt made a feeble speech justifying the party’s decision. His argument that the Unionists had to vote against the government because Botha’s policies were still determined by Hertzog, convinced no one.⁵¹

Ironically, the only field in which Smartt provided clear leadership, namely support of big capital in a period of white labour unrest, cost the Unionist Party dearly. The Unionists opposed any measures by the government to improve the position of the ordinary white miner and worker,⁵² while supporting its drastic action in January 1914 when it had trade union leaders arrested and illegally deported to Britain during a general strike. English-speaking workers deserted in droves to the Labour Party.⁵³ On 18 March 1914, the Labour Party won control of the Transvaal Provincial Council, the Unionists suffering a crushing defeat by winning only two seats to the 23 of Labour. Two days later salt was rubbed into Unionist wounds when the party lost

50. *The Transvaal Leader*, 20 March 1912.
51. House of Assembly Debates, 29 April 1913, Col. 2618–2623; Lavin, *Friendship and Union*, pp 151–152.
52. M. Fraser (ed.), *L. Phillips: Some Reminiscences* (AD Donker, Johannesburg, 1986), pp 150–152.
53. J. Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist: JT Bain, a Scottish Rebel in Colonial South Africa* (Jacana, Johannesburg, 2004), pp 229–240.

the Liesbeek constituency by-election in Cape Town to Labour, a seat which Unionists had won in 1910 with a substantial majority.

The Unionist Party’s youth wing, the Young Unionists, concerned about the future of the party began a “Smartt must go” campaign. The Young Unionists had been founded in November 1912 with Duncan at its head to attract the support of the “moderate working man”. Smartt and his supporters went on the offensive and at the 1914 party congress in Johannesburg the Young Unionists were condemned for disloyalty. Duncan decided to disband the movement as he feared that it would break the party. The reality was that the Unionist MPs had no desire to replace Smartt who encouraged affection and loyalty. Even a critical Duncan had a soft spot for him as “... a most loveable person ... transparently loyal and unselfish and he had that plain good intention which as [Edmund] Burke said is no small force in the government of mankind”.⁵⁴ Leslie Blackwell, who as a leading member of the Young Unionists campaigned for the removal of Smartt, changed his mind when he became an MP in 1915, describing Smartt as a genial Irishman who commanded the affection of all his followers.⁵⁵ With the disbandment of the Young Unionists, however, a number of Unionists joined the Labour Party.⁵⁶ On 29 July 1914, Labour won Durban-central from the Unionists in a by-election. The Unionist Party seemed doomed to extinction, but on 4 August 1914 the outbreak of the First World War changed the fortunes of the party.

South Africa, as part of the British Empire, was automatically at war with Germany, but had the right to determine its active participation, if any, in the conflict. Botha introduced a motion in a special session of parliament on 9 September to reflect South Africa’s loyal support to the king and to co-operate with the imperial government to

54. Lavin, *Friendship and Union*, pp 186, 493.

55. L. Blackwell, *Blackwell Remembers: An Autobiography* (Howard Timmins, Cape Town, 1971), p 43.

56. L. Blackwell, *African Occasions: Reminiscences and Thirty Years of Bar, Bench, and Politics in South Africa* (Hutchinson & Co., London, 1938), pp 40–43; Lavin, *Friendship and Union*, pp 172–173, 183, 186, 210; A. Barlow, *Almost in Confidence* (Juta & Co., Johannesburg, 1952), pp 149–150.

defend the Empire. He had no hesitation in accepting the British request to invade German South-West Africa. This encouraged an intense anti-British feeling, accompanied by republicanism amongst Afrikaners and more than 11 000 resorted to an armed rebellion against the decision to fight for the British Empire. Although the government suppressed the rebellion with relatively little bloodshed, it deeply divided Afrikaners, thousands of whom deserted the SAP to join the National Party (NP), founded by Hertzog in January 1914 to campaign for Afrikaner interests. The policies of the new party resulted in a more exclusive Afrikaner identity with strong group identification and Afrikaans as a symbol of its “nationality”.⁵⁷ The term Afrikaner now implied a cultural identity for Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, politically opposed to British influence. Increasingly, Afrikaner nationalists claimed that they were the only true South Africans.

Smartt gave the Unionists’ unconditional support to the government.⁵⁸ Smartt and Botha, however, had conflicting reasons for supporting the war. For Smartt and the Unionists the war provided an opportunity to tighten South Africa’s ties with Britain and to unify the two white language groups as Britons. Botha and the SAP believed that the war would encourage a national patriotism to unify English-speakers and Afrikaners, encouraging an allegiance to the Union.⁵⁹ The war against Germany also provided the opportunity for South Africa to raise its status and strengthen autonomy within the Empire, turning the Empire into a Commonwealth, a group of equal and co-operative nations. By 1914, the ideal of South Africanism was trapped between the passions of Afrikaner nationalism, fully supported by the Dutch Reformed Church, and the jingoism of the Unionists.⁶⁰ This jingoism found expression in public pressure on the government to comply with the request of the British government in April 1915 to deploy

57. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, p 356.
58. House of Assembly Debates, 9 September 1914, Col. 63–65.
59. B. Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War 1914–1918* (Penguin, Johannesburg, 2007), pp 17–18.
60. H. Giliomee, “The Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism”, *South African Historical Journal*, 19, November 1987, p 140.

combat troops not just in German East Africa, but also in France.

In an attempt to moderate Smartt’s loyalism, Governor-General Lord Buxton, in contrast to Gladstone, who had loathed Smartt, went out of his way to cultivate a close relationship with the Unionist leader.⁶¹ With regard to English-speaking pressure to deploy troops in France, he made it clear to Smartt that most Afrikaners opposed a greater involvement in the war, and that it would be held against the SAP in the coming election. Imperial interests required that the Botha government should not suffer a reverse at the polls.⁶² Ironically Unionist jingoism did not safeguard Unionist parliamentary seats, because English-speakers were determined to vote for Botha in appreciation of his standing by Britain in its hour of need. As a result the Unionist Party lost the financial backing of the mining industry and the editorial support of the Johannesburg newspapers the *Star* and the *Rand Daily Mail*. On 2 September 1915, the *Rand Daily Mail* went as far as to condemn the party as an encumbrance in South African politics, saying that it should disappear as soon as possible and that English-speakers had to join the SAP.

The SAP, however, threw a lifeline to the Unionists on the eve of the 1915 election. Botha, concerned about the growth of the NP, agreed to an unofficial election agreement with the Unionists to avoid contesting constituencies in which a split vote could allow a NP or a Labour Party candidate to win a seat. As a result of the agreement the majority of Unionist-held seats were not contested by the SAP. While campaigning, Botha realised that he had made a miscalculation because his support amongst English-speakers was so extensive that the SAP would have won a number of the seats, especially in Natal and the Transvaal, allocated to the Unionists.⁶³ The Unionist Party, protected from the SAP and facing a feeble Labour Party challenge (because the party was demoralized after internal divisions on whether to support the war had left the party with the stigma of

61. Keiser, “The South African Governor-General, 1910–19”, p 118.

62. Smartt Papers, Box 2, File C, Lord Buxton – Smartt, 5 June 1915.

63. A.H. Marais, “Aspekte van die 1915-verkiesing”, *South African Historical Journal*, 5, November 1973, pp 70–72.

being unpatriotic) won 40 seats. Although the SAP was returned to parliament as the largest party with 54 seats, the NP attracted the majority of Afrikaner votes and won 27 seats. With Labour’s four seats and six won by Independents, the SAP had lost its overall majority, becoming dependent on Unionist support to govern.⁶⁴

Botha was depressed by this result and wanted to resign, recommending that Smartt form a government. Buxton, however, pointed out that it could only happen if the SAP gave its full and unconditional support to the Unionists. Botha had no choice but to soldier on, deeply resenting being tied to the Unionists.⁶⁵ Some members of his cabinet found the situation so humiliating that they considered resigning.⁶⁶ Being dependent on the Unionists, portrayed by the NP as the symbol of British imperialism and big capital, the mortal enemies of the Afrikaner, provided Hertzog with a propaganda coup to undermine the credibility of the SAP amongst Afrikaners.⁶⁷ To counter NP propaganda, Botha avoided any appearance of consulting the Unionists or being influenced by them.⁶⁸ That Unionist support was taken for granted by Botha fuelled resentment amongst Smartt and his MPs.

The strain between the SAP and Unionists was aggravated by the difficult personal relationship between the party leaders. Botha, after Albany and the Hull affair and their clashes on bilingualism, was immune to the Unionists leader’s charm, and reluctant to hold meetings with him. Buxton had to liaise between them and became a mediator on the issue of soldiers’ pay. In September 1915 the

64. Marais, “Aspekte van die 1915-verkiesing”, p 70.

65. D. Waley, *A Liberal Life. Sydney, Earl Buxton, 1853–1934: Statesman, Governor-General of South Africa* (Newtimber Publications, Hassocks, 1999), p 279; F.V. Engelenburg, *Generaal Louis Botha* (J.L. van Schaik, Pretoria, 1928), p 332.

66. Waley, *A Liberal Life*, p 281.

67. C.F.J. Muller, *Sonop in die Suide: Geboorte en Groei van die Nasionale Pers 1915–1948* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1990), pp 120, 713.

68. Lavin, *Friendship and Union*, p 295.

First South African Infantry Brigade was deployed in Europe.⁶⁹ Botha, fearful of losing Afrikaner support organised that the British government would cover the pay of the Brigade. This meant that South African troops fighting in East Africa were receiving the South African daily pay rate of three shillings, while the First Brigade received the lower British rate of one shilling. The Unionists demanded that South Africa had to carry the full cost of the Brigade. In parliament in December 1915 they argued that South Africa’s contribution in terms of men and money to the imperial war effort, compared to that of Canada, New Zealand and Australia, was negligible. The debate was not taken to a vote after Jan Smuts, Botha’s deputy, pointed out the volatile political situation in the country.⁷⁰ A number of Unionist MPs were unappeased because they felt that the political situation was exaggerated.⁷¹ During the parliamentary recess Unionists played a leading role in mass public meetings to protest the Brigade’s pay. These Unionists ignored the traumatic legacy of the South African War and that the other dominions did not have the same divisions and opposition to the war effort. Duncan, in a letter to Lady Selborne on 27 February 1916, bemoaned their short sightedness:

The great thing is to have Botha in power as the head of a loyal government, supported by a large following of Dutchmen whose orthodoxy even the most rabid Nationalist cannot question, and to have Smuts in command as an Imperial Officer of an important sphere of war operations. What would we not have thought these things worth a few years ago? And now we are urged by our followers in the towns to throw them out of office because they are unreasonable over this matter of pay.⁷²

Smartt, prompted by Buxton, did see the worth of the Botha government and did his best to control the anger and frustration in his own caucus. He forced Leslie Blackwell to withdraw a parliamentary question on how much it would cost to place the First Brigade’s pay

69. P.K.A. Digby, *Pyramids and Poppies: The 1st SA Infantry Brigade in Libya, France and Flanders, 1915–1919* (Ashanti Publishing, Rivonia, 1993), p 27.
70. *Cape Times*, 7 December 1915.
71. National Archives (hereafter NA), Kew, London, CO 551/83, Buxton – Bonar Law, 18 February 1916.
72. Lavin, *Friendship and Union*, p 276.

on parity to that of troops in Africa.⁷³ With the opening of parliament in 1916, Smartt was under intense pressure to introduce a motion to demand that the First Brigade receive the South African pay rate. Smartt’s desire to control his rebellious MPs had, however, its limits because he shared their view that South Africa had to do more for the imperial war effort. There was also a personal aspect as he was given the credit in the English-speaking community for getting the government to send the Brigade to France, and he was referred to as the “father of the contingent”.⁷⁴ In France, the South African troops held him responsible for their low pay and in a popular soldiers’ ditty he was referred to as “Sir Effing Smartt” and “Smartt a fart for his heart”.⁷⁵ Another source of pressure was that the Labour Party had shaken off its unpatriotic image with Colonel F.H.P. Creswell, the party’s leader, commanding the Eight South African Infantry Brigade in East Africa, and acting as the champion of the interests of the South African soldier.⁷⁶

On 29 January 1916, Smartt wrote to Botha, urging him to make a concession on the pay issue as there was pressure on him to raise it in parliament.⁷⁷ Botha, however, was in an impossible situation because the Afrikaner SAP MPs were adamant that the country had done more than its share in supporting Britain, and that they would oppose any pay rise to the First Brigade. Fearing a break in his party he made it clear there could not be any concession:

*Should you force matters in a particular direction, I fear that a crisis may be caused thereby from which no good can result. I trust therefore that you will fully discuss this question with others before you take any steps. The government has done its best but a serious difficulty has arisen and this question is in my opinion such a delicate one that it should be wrong to cause any division in the people through it. I realise your difficulties are great, but believe me my difficulty is just as serious.*⁷⁸

73. Blackwell, *African Occasions*, p 74.

74. *Cape Times*, 12 April 1916.

75. Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme*, p 191.

76. Boydell, *My Luck was in*, pp 114–119.

77. National Archives (hereafter NA) Pretoria, Private Secretary to the Prime Minister 1910–1983 (MEM), File 1/14, Smartt – Botha, 29 January 1916.

78. NA Pretoria, MEM, File 1/14, Botha – Smartt, 2 February 1916.

Smartt did not proceed with a parliamentary motion, but the Labour Party did so in a debate on 15 February 1916. Botha threatened to resign if there was a vote on the motion. Smartt, going against the wishes of his party, supported Botha.⁷⁹ On April 1916 the Labour Party again raised the pay question in parliament. Smartt had to intervene to rein in some of his MPs when they expressed their support of the motion. However, he used the opportunity to urge Botha to reconsider the Brigade’s pay.⁸⁰ As the number of South African casualties in France rose, especially after the heroics of the First Brigade at Delville Wood in July 1916, pressure increased on Smartt to secure equal pay. The difficulty of recruiting volunteers for the First Brigade fuelled the debate as it was argued that the lower pay rate was responsible for the situation. This argument baffled Botha’s Afrikaner supporters. *Die Volkstem* of 5 January 1917 pointed out that in the South African War the Boers had fought for their republics without any payment at all, and if English-speakers were so eager to fight for Britain why did they insist on the South African pay rate?⁸¹

The deadlock on the First Brigade was broken in November 1916 when the British government offered to pay soldiers the South African rate if the South African government undertook to make a financial contribution. Botha agreed, if approved by parliament, to pay a lump sum of £1million sterling to the British government in addition to the expenditure for which South Africa was liable for general war purposes.⁸² Botha had the difficult task of convincing his party to accept the compromise and wanted to keep the agreement secret until the SAP caucus had approved it. Smartt, however, insisted on an immediate public announcement to encourage recruitment for the First Brigade. In this he was reflecting the anger and frustration of his MPs who were demoralised by the fact that they were prevented from condemning the government’s stance on the First Brigade, but were held responsible by their constituents for not doing more for the troops.

79. *Cape Times*, 16 February 1916.

80. *Cape Times*, 12 April 1916.

81. Geyser and Marais, *Die Nasionale Party*, I, p 297.

82. Keiser, “The South African Governor-General, 1910–19”, p 297.

Unionist anger reached boiling point when on 26 January 1917 the Labour Party with Creswell as its candidate, won the safe Unionist seat Troyeville in a by-election. The same day the SAP won a bruising by-election in Victoria West with a majority of 16 votes. The NP had hounded Botha from meeting to meeting as a traitor who was selling out the Afrikaner and South Africa to imperial interests.⁸³ Smartt, buckling under the pressure from his party, tabled a parliamentary motion on 16 February 1917 to debate the pay issue, despite Botha’s plea not to do so, and although he knew that the SAP caucus was meeting in two days time to discuss the British offer.⁸⁴ With his motion he seriously jeopardised the possibility of the SAP caucus accepting the proposal. The Afrikaner SAP MP’s, many of whom were elected in 1915 with the promise that they would oppose any extension of South Africa’s contribution to the war effort, were outraged and saw the motion as an attempt to force their hand. It was only with great difficulty that Botha managed to persuade the rebellious caucus to accept his offer to the British government. Smartt then withdrew his motion.⁸⁵ Unaware of events behind the scenes the English-medium press profusely praised Smartt for his statesmanship. Botha was outraged, pointing out to Buxton that “the Unionists had put a pistol to the heads of himself and his party and made it very difficult to come to terms”, and that the party’s tendency to push the SAP “into a hole and then save them” undermined the prestige of his government, driving Afrikaners away from him.⁸⁶ Buxton concurred and complained to the Colonial Office that the Unionists out of the matter with very little credit.⁸⁷

For the NP, Smartt’s motion was a gift from heaven and the party used it to great effect as proof that Botha was a spineless Unionist puppet.⁸⁸ For many Afrikaners who had remained loyal to Botha after

83. *The Star*, 27 January 1917; *Cape Times*, 31 January 1917.

84. Geyser and Marais, *Die Nasionale Party*, I, pp 296–297.

85. Earl Buxton, *General Botha* (John Murray, London, 1924), pp 246–255, 293–296, 300.

86. Buxton, *General Botha*, pp 241, 253.

87. NA Kew, CO 551/94, Buxton – Walter Long, 10 March 1917.

88. *Die Burger*, 7, 8 and 10 March 1917.

August 1914, the pay compromise was the final straw. Their anger and disillusionment was reflected in the Provincial Council elections of June 1917 when the NP won, apart from the seats already gained in 1915, 18 more seats from the SAP. Victoria West was comfortably won by the NP.⁸⁹ Smartt, although warned by Buxton in July 1915 that a South African infantry brigade in France would be a drop in the ocean and that the weakening of the Botha government would be a disaster for the Empire,⁹⁰ had harmed not only Botha, but also imperial interests in South Africa. In contrast to Botha’s immense sacrifices to maintain his policy of conciliation and loyalty to the Empire, going so far as to take up arms against former comrades of the South African War, Smartt lacked the strength of character to control and direct the emotional loyalty of the English-speaking community to Britain. In this leadership vacuum imperial loyalty degenerated into destructive jingoism, fuelling the rise of the NP and republicanism.

Oblivious to the damage he had done to Botha, Smartt placed pressure on him to form a coalition government. Botha, fearing that such a step would encourage SAP members to defect to the NP, made it clear to Smartt in February 1918 that there would be no coalition.⁹¹ Unionist jingoism, however, continued to harm Botha. On 29 March 1918 the premier introduced a parliamentary motion to express support for the Allied forces, including the First Brigade, reeling in front of a massive German offensive in France. Outraged by NP criticism of the motion, Lieutenant-Colonel Henwood, Unionist MP for Durban Central, stepped to the centre of the House of Assembly shouting: “The King!” which led to the singing of “God Save the King”. While SAP MPs stood solemnly to attention, the NP MPs remained seated.⁹² For Duncan it was a melancholy demonstration as it was obvious that this type of behaviour by the

89. Geyser and Marais, *Die Nasionale Party*, I, pp 288, 295–298, 310.

90. Smartt Papers, Box 2, File C, Buxton – Smartt, 5 June 1915.

91. W.K. Hancock and J. van der Poel (eds), *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, III, June 1910–November 1918 (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1966), p 608.

92. *Cape Times*, 29 March 1918.

Unionists, and the NP's blatant rejection of the British connection, placed Botha in a difficult position to defend his policies and reputation amongst Afrikaners.⁹³ *Die Burger* (29 March and 4 April 1918) reflected the disgust and contempt of many Afrikaners with Botha for choosing to stoop so low as to join in the demonstration.

Even with the Allied victory on 11 November 1918, Smartt's lack of self-restraint continued to strain his relations with the SAP and to harm Botha's policy of conciliation. The British government invited delegates from all dominion governments to attend the peace conference in France. This automatically excluded Smartt, but Botha, in an attempt to show gratitude for Unionist support, informally invited him as an advisor. This took political courage. *Die Burger* (13 November 1918) wasted no time in making it clear that if Smartt should go to France it would be seen as proof that the Unionists were in a *de facto* coalition with the SAP. Smartt, however, insisted on a formal invitation from the British government, and Botha left for Europe without him. The English-medium press and Unionist Party MPs were furious that their leader did not get a fair deal for his loyal war service, and that Botha had seemingly ignored the sacrifices of the English-speaking community during the war.⁹⁴

By January 1919, Smartt was physically and mentally in a bad state. He was diagnosed with a heart condition, angina, and was feeling hard done by and sorry for himself that he had missed the peace conference. He also found it difficult to control his restless MPs who wanted to attack the government at all cost, while he was nervous and worried about the future of the Unionist Party.⁹⁵ On 19 February 1919 in a by-election Labour won East London, traditionally a Unionist stronghold which Smartt had represented in the Cape parliament between 1903 and 1908. He was especially concerned about a growing feeling among Afrikaner SAP MPs that they should reconcile with the NP; they were making no attempt to hide their

93. Lavin, *Friendship and Union*, p 296.

94. Blackwell, *African Occasions*, p 73; Waley, *A Liberal Life*, pp 291–292; *Cape Times*, 14 November 1918; *Pretoria News*, 15 and 18 November 1918.

95. Bodleian Library, Ms. Milner, 378, Memo by Lord Buxton on his meeting with Smartt, 16 January 1919.

contempt for the Unionists. To prevent this Smartt was desperate that the Unionists should become part of a coalition government “to keep a hold over the government”.⁹⁶ That F.S. Malan was the acting premier aggravated Smartt’s anxiety because they had a history of enmity. As the editor of the Cape-based *Ons Land*, Malan had been a vehement critic of British military tactics and the Empire during the South African War, and Smartt hounded him as a traitor;⁹⁷ the two could not overcome their mutual antipathy. Malan furthermore resented being told that the Unionists were keeping the SAP in office. Relations between the two parties were at such a low ebb that Buxton feared that without the influence of Botha, anything might happen.⁹⁸ For the SAP leadership Smartt was a cross to bear, especially as his jingoism continued to bedevil the party’s attempts to counter the growth of republicanism amongst Afrikaners by encouraging a South African identity within the Empire.

In response to President Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points on the recognition of national sovereignty, the NP requested Britain to restore the independence of the former Boer republics. In addition, the party also decided to send a deputation to the peace conference in Paris to demand the restoration of the old republics. As a result of the war, South Africanism was also taking root. Apart from a significant number of Afrikaners who were prepared to follow the SAP, the war with Germany had encouraged a South African identity amongst English-speakers. The SAP’s commitment to the war helped to forge a sense of common identity between English-speakers and moderate Afrikaners. Furthermore, English-speaking soldiers returning from the war after serving in South African units saw themselves as South Africans.⁹⁹ Smartt, instead of focusing on the growing South African

96. Bodleian Library, Ms. Milner, 378, Memo by Lord Buxton on his meeting with Smartt, 5 February 1919.
97. F.A. Mouton, *Prophet without Honour. F.S. Malan: Afrikaner, South African and Cape Liberal* (Protea, Pretoria, 2011), p 47.
98. Bodleian Library, Ms. Milner, 378, Memo by Lord Buxton on his meetings with Malan, 13 January and 25 January 1919.
99. J. Lambert, “South African British? Or Dominion South Africans? The Evolution of an Identity in the 1910s and 1920s”, *South African Historical Journal*, 43, November 2000, pp 213–214.

national consciousness within the Empire, reacted emotionally and in a jingoistic fashion to the threat of republicanism. In February 1919 he tabled a motion in parliament condemning the agitation for the restoration of the former Boer republics. He made the provocative statement that Britain would not accept a republic even if the nationalists obtained a majority in favour of it, and that the whole force of the Empire, including that of India, would be used to prevent secession. Buxton was disappointed, describing the speech as “... rhetorical and not particularly effective”.¹⁰⁰ Duncan also regretted the outburst because he believed that it reinforced the NP’s argument that South Africa was a vassal state. For him, Smartt’s stance on the Empire was too narrow because membership of the Empire meant a continued growth in national consciousness and responsibility for South Africa.¹⁰¹

Despite his vehement rejection of republicanism, Smartt supported the right of the NP deputation to go to Europe after the crew of the passenger liner *Durham Castle* refused to sail with them on board. Smartt did his best to persuade the crew to change their minds, but they refused.¹⁰² Eventually the delegation sailed on a Dutch vessel. In March, however, he again exposed his lack of self-restraint by forcing the government to table the Enemies Repatriation and Denaturalisation Bill as a means to deport all Germans. Duncan was aghast:

I think it is a great mistake on our part in the present critical state of S. Africa to have driven the Govt., as we practically have, into this legislation. But nothing could stop us from doing it. I certainly could not, and so I look at what to me is at best a piece of folly
...¹⁰³

Hertzog, reflecting the pro-German sympathy among Afrikaners, claimed that the Bill insulted the Afrikaner and was a racial measure

100. NA Kew, CO 551/111, Buxton – Milner, 15 February 1919.
101. University of the Witwatersrand, J.H. Hofmeyr Collection, Fc, P. Duncan – J.H. Hofmeyr, 10 March 1919.
102. NA Kew, CO 551/111, Buxton – Milner, 15 February 1919.
103. Lavin, *Friendship and Union*, p 307.

to weaken the Afrikaner nation and to work for its downfall.¹⁰⁴ Bombarded with petitions by Afrikaners, the government eventually dropped the Bill. By then the NP had once again succeeded in portraying the SAP as a puppet of the Unionist Party.¹⁰⁵

Botha returned from France in July 1919 a sick man; he died on the evening of 27 August and was succeeded by Jan Smuts. Smartt placed his hope on Smuts to secure a coalition government and in October 1919 publically stated that the Unionists were prepared to work with the SAP as one party. However, Smuts refused, fearing that such a step would lead to a landslide victory for the NP in the coming election.¹⁰⁶ He was convinced that even without a coalition Smartt’s jingoism would harm SAP efforts to encourage a South African identity. That Smuts was correct in this assumption was proved by Smartt’s reckless statement on 24 December 1919 that a South African flag replacing the British Union Jack could be interpreted as the first step towards breaking the British connection and that under no circumstances, even to death, would the English-speaking community allow this.¹⁰⁷ Eventually Smartt had to be satisfied with an unofficial election agreement that the two parties would not oppose each other in certain seats that could benefit the NP and the Labour Party in the March 1920 election. For the NP the agreement provided a powerful slogan: “A vote for the SAP is a vote for the Unionist Party, the enemy of the Afrikaner”.¹⁰⁸

In the midst of post-war economic difficulties the Unionists and SAP had a disastrous election and the NP returned to parliament as the largest party. The majority of Afrikaners voted for the NP as the party representing their aspirations, while as a result of high living

104. T.M. Dederding, “‘Avenge the Lusitania’: The Anti-German Riots in South Africa in 1915” (unpublished paper).
105. *Die Burger*, 5 February 1919; 15, 19 and 22 March 1919; 2, 9, 19 April and 25 June 1919.
106. Bodleian Library, Milner Papers, MSS Milner, dep. 380, Buxton – Milner, 20 October 1919.
107. H. Saker, *The South African Flag Controversy 1925–1928* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1980), p 4.
108. *Burger*, 8 March 1920.

costs, many English-speakers supported the Labour Party, punishing the Unionist Party for supporting the government’s economic policies. The Unionists returned with 15 seats less than in 1915 and the party lost its status as the official parliamentary opposition to the NP. The result was SAP 41, NP 44, Unionists 25 and Labour 21. The Smuts government remained in power with a small minority; again with the support of the Unionists. Smuts toyed with the idea of a “best man” cabinet, but he realised that most Afrikaners wanted a reunion between the SAP and the NP.¹⁰⁹ When the NP and Labour Party rejected the idea of a national government made up of all the parties, an attempt was made to reunite the SAP and NP at a re-unification congress on 22 September 1920 in Bloemfontein. The conference collapsed when the SAP delegation refused to accept the principle of secession from the Empire, or to allow propaganda for it to be part of the principles of an amalgamated party.¹¹⁰

After Bloemfontein, Smuts, convincing himself that the Unionists were so changed that it was no longer the same party which had done so much to harm South Africa, approached the Unionists to be absorbed into the SAP. On 2 November 1920 at the party’s conference in Bloemfontein, Smartt urged delegates to disband the party and to join the SAP as individuals to maintain “... that sacred tie which bound the Union of South Africa among the commonwealth of the peoples which composed the British Empire”.¹¹¹ To pacify unhappy Afrikaner supporters, Smuts claimed that the dissolution of the party was a glorious landmark on the road to South Africanism. Many Afrikaners, however, saw the merger as the SAP being absorbed by the Unionists.¹¹² To allay Afrikaner suspicions Smuts attempted to keep Smartt out of the cabinet by offering him the post as South Africa’s High Commissioner in London. Buxton, concerned about the political situation, did his utmost to get him to accept this

109. Bodleian Library, Milner Papers, MSS Milner, dep. 381, Buxton – Milner, 17 March 1920.
110. Geyser and Marais, *Die Nasionale Party*, I, p 373.
111. Van der Schyff, “Die Unioniste Party in die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek, 1910–1921”, p 159.
112. Muller, *Sonop in die Suide*, pp 695–697.

appointment. Smartt, however, rejected the offer because he feared that it would be construed as him leaving his party in the lurch. He insisted on the agriculture portfolio in the Smuts cabinet and being acknowledged as next in rank to the prime minister. Smuts had no choice but to back down, but with his eye on the ballot box, decided it would be wise to reconstruct his cabinet only after the election.¹¹³ On 8 February 1921, the SAP won with an increased majority with 79 seats to the 45 of the NP and Labour's nine. The SAP victory was mainly at the cost of the internally divided Labour Party.

Smartt duly entered the cabinet as the Minister of Agriculture and as with Jameson and Rhodes, became a loyal lieutenant. Smuts found him an unselfish and devoted friend.¹¹⁴ Sharing a parliamentary caucus with Afrikaners for the first time since his break with the Bond, and coming under the moderating influence of Smuts, Smartt's imperialism shed its jingoism. In addition, his love for the land, support of farmers and efficiency as minister, combined with his charm and willingness to speak Afrikaans, won Afrikaners over. *Die Volksblad* (18 April 1929), mouthpiece of the NP in the Free State, concluded that he was a friend of the Afrikaner farmer and a true South African. R.H. Henderson, elected to parliament in 1921 as a SAP MP was struck by Smartt's exceptional popularity amongst all parliamentarians.¹¹⁵ Smartt's career had thus moved through a full circle, because in the early 1890s he had also been popular and respected amongst Afrikaners.

Smartt's ministerial career was a short one because in the 1924 election, with the country in the grip of an economic slump and a severe drought, the SAP was defeated by the Pact. After the 1921 election the NP had toned down its republicanism in an attempt to win English-speaking support, which led to an electoral alliance with

113. Bodleian Library, Milner Papers, MSS Milner, dep. 380, Buxton – Milner, 27 August 1920; J. van der Poel (ed.), *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, V (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973), pp 44–45; Lavin, *Friendship and Union*, pp 348–349.

114. *Cape Times*, 18 April 1929.

115. R.H. Henderson, *An Ulsterman in Africa* (Unie-Volkspers, Cape Town, 1944), p 123.

the Labour Party, the so-called Pact of 1923. In the official opposition as the longest serving MP, when his years in the Cape parliament were added, Smartt became the beloved “father of the house”. Seriously ill with an undiagnosed disease, he retired from parliament at the end of the 1929 session. Hertzog, Smuts and Creswell praised him profusely in their farewell speeches.¹¹⁶ Smartt died on 17 April 1929 on his farm Glenban outside Stellenbosch. In a public statement Hertzog praised his conviction, honesty and purpose, concluding that he was one of South Africa’s most worthy sons. He offered the family a state funeral, but in terms of Smartt’s wishes he was buried in a small and intimate ceremony on his farm. On the day of the funeral all flags on public buildings were flown half mast.¹¹⁷ To commemorate Smartt’s career a portrait and bust of him were placed in parliament.

On 18 April 1929 Long, as the editor of the *Cape Times*, wrote an emotional leading article under the heading “A Dear Friend Gone”, claiming that Smartt’s true worth would be assessed in the future when he would be reckoned as among the greatest South Africans. As Long’s emotions subsided, he realised that his friend, although loveable, was a political lightweight. Writing for the *Dictionary of National Biography, 1922–1930*, he pointed out that Smartt was not in the “very front rank of South African leaders”, but “an ideal political lieutenant, loyal, disinterested, and always ready to throw himself, without display, into the thick of political fighting”.¹¹⁸ In his 1941 biography of Drummond Chaplin, a leading Unionist MP, Long was even more critical of Smartt’s shortcomings. What he did not admit, although he must have realised it, was that the Unionist leader had harmed the imperial cause in South Africa. For Smartt, without the moderating influence of “Onze Jan” Hofmeyr, Jameson or Smuts, politics was not the art of the possible when it came to the imperial link with Britain. Smartt’s mind, according to Duncan, did not move on lines of reason or logic,¹¹⁹ and his lack of self-restraint meant

116. House of Assembly Debates, 27 March 1929, Col. 1805–1809.

117. *Cape Times*, 18 and 19 April 1929.

118. B.K. Long, in J.R.H Weaver (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography 1922–1930* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1937), pp 778–779.

119. Lavin, *Friendship and Union*, p 493.

that instead of controlling and guiding the attachment of English-speakers to Britain, as Jameson had done with the Cape Progressives and the Unionists, he fuelled jingoism between 1912 and 1920. In the process he harmed the efforts by Botha and Smuts to reconcile the two white groups after the trauma of the South African War, and to create a united and loyal South Africa within the Empire. Smartt in his love for the Empire was never able to rise to the occasion. In the words of Vere Stent: “He was a good man – a very, very good man – but not a great man”.¹²⁰

Abstract

The Irish born Thomas Smartt loved South Africa, and fervently believed that that his adopted country’s highest destiny could only be achieved by being in the British Empire. For him the imperial connection with Britain was a “sacred tie”, and he saw it as his duty as the leader of the pro-imperial Unionist Party, the official parliamentary opposition between 1912 and 1920, to protect and strengthen it. He was, however, a disastrous leader of the Unionist Party, and did much to harm the “sacred tie”. His lack of self-restraint when it came to imperial interests meant that instead of controlling and guiding the attachment of South African English-speakers to Britain, he fuelled a destructive jingoism. In the process he harmed the efforts of Louis Botha and J.C. Smuts to reconcile the two white groups after the trauma of the South African War, and to create a united and loyal South Africa within the Empire.

Keywords: Sir Thomas Smartt; Unionist Party; British Empire; South Africa; First World War; L.S. Jameson; Louis Botha; J.C. Smuts; J.B.M. Hertzog; South African Party.

120. *Pretoria News*, 17 April 1929.

Opsomming

Die Iers gebore Thomas Smartt was lief vir Suid-Afrika en het vuriglik geglo dat sy aangename land net die hoogste voorbestemming kan bereik deur deel van die Britse Ryk te wees. Vir hom was die imperiale verbintenis met Brittanje 'n “onskendbare band”, en hy het dit tussen 1912 en 1920 as sy plig gesien om hierdie band, as die leier van die pro-imperial Unioniste Party, die amptelike parlementêre opposisie, te beskerm en te versterk. Hy was egter 'n rampspoedige leier van die Unioniste Party wat die “onskendbare band” ernstige skade berokken het. Sy gebrekkige selfbeheer oor imperiale belangte het tot gevolg gehad dat hy nie die Engelssprekendes in Suid-Afrika se gehegtheid aan Brittanje kon beheer en lei nie, en 'n vernietigende jingoïsme aangemoedig het. In die proses het hy die pogings van Louis Botha en J.C. Smuts ondermyn om die twee blanke groepe na die trauma van die Suid-Afrikaanse Oorlog te versoen, en 'n verenigde lojale Suid-Afrika binne die Ryk te skep.

Sleutelwoorde: Sir Thomas Smartt; Unioniste Party; Britse Ryk; Suid-Afrika; Eerste Wêreldoorlog; L.S. Jameson; Louis Botha; J.C. Smuts; J.B.M. Hertzog; Suid-Afrikaanse Party.