4. First Ministers

Jan Smuts and Cabinet Government in the Early Union of South Africa

Bhaso Ndzendze
University of Johannesburg

Introduction

For a figure who generates such widespread interest, and about whom so much has been written, Jan Smuts's assumption of multiple cabinet portfolios has been the subject of very little scholarly attention. Both biographers and historians tend to simply mention his portfolios, with scant analysis as to the precedent and utility of his assumption of more than one ministerial portfolio in Louis Botha's cabinet, as well as portfolios in his own future cabinets (Native Affairs between 1919 and 1924, and then Defence and External Affairs from 1939 when he was Prime Minister once more). Yet it was an extraordinary undertaking, sustained over decades of his cabinet involvement, having been virtually without precedent and destined to prove influential to future administrations.

This chapter seeks to contribute to this under-examined aspect of Smuts's career, and of South Africa's governmental history, by shedding light and hopefully generating debate. It argues that the assumption of multiple ministerial portfolios can account for the successes of the early Union and the post-1948 governments on those important areas that made up the government's policy, namely forming a capable state, reducing white poverty, controlling the black populations, and projecting South Africa internationally. Crucially, then, the converse lack of its adoption explains the shortcomings of the post-1994 government, seen through the lack of state capacity (Tshishonga & De Vries, 2011; Hausmann et al., 2023). That

is, despite different ideological leanings and priorities, the common thread across heads of national executive between 1910 and 1994 (Pime Ministers and later, State Presidents) was the possession of ministerial experience as well as regular assumption of ministerial portfolios by those at the helm. In the first cabinet, formed in 1910, Smuts held three cabinet positions (Interior, Mines and later, Defence when he formed the Union Defence Force in 1912), the first and for a while the only person to do so other than the Prime Minister himself. Barry Hertzog followed suit, taking up Native Affairs, and then External Affairs. His Deputy Prime Minister, Tielman Roos, was also Minister of Justice (two positions later assumed by Smuts himself in the Fusion Government after 1929).

In the apartheid era, the first Prime Minister, Daniël François (D.F.) Malan, came with his own triple-ministerial experience, having held Public Health, Mines and Education. His successor, Johannes Gerhardus (J.G.) Strijdom, who had been Minister of Lands and Irrigation, was the least experienced and shortest-lived Prime Minister. His death in 1958 paved the way for another Prime Minister with Native Affairs experience who had been the 'architect of apartheid,' Hendrik Frensch (H.F.) Verwoerd, as much of the legislative force behind race relations had come from him (Kenney, 1980). His own death, caused by assassination in 1966, led to the ascension of Balthazar Johannes (B.J.) Vorster. He held onto his own ministerial portfolio, Police. He had also been the main mover behind numerous pieces of legislation which consolidated South Africa into not only an apartheid state, but a securitised one as well. Various initiatives such as the General Law Amendment Act number 37 of 1963, the Criminal Procedure Amendment Act number 96 of 1965 and the Internal Security Amendment Act number 79 of 1976, the former entailing the infamous 'Sobukwe Clause' and the latter expanding the scope of the Suppression of Communism Act number 44 of 1950, were passed under him. Pieter Willem (P.W.) Botha, his successor, also resolved to hold onto his cabinet portfolio, becoming Prime Minister in 1978 and Minister of Defence. In both positions, he drove South Africa's

border wars and its nuclear attainment of a nuclear weapon. When he had a stroke in 1989, he was succeeded by Frederik Willem (F.W.) de Klerk, who was unique in that he had the most ministerial portfolios of any national leader by his possession of six prior ministerial portfolios.

From 1994 onwards, the tide turned. No South African president in the democratic era has assumed a ministerial portfolio, nor has any come with any meaningful prior cabinet portfolio experience. The closest to buck this trend, Kgalema Motlanthe, had been a 'Minister in the Presidency' for three months and would go on to be a caretaker President for about eight months (September 2008 to May 2009). This experience deficit, along with the lack of willingness to attempt the constitutionality of assuming a simultaneous ministerial portfolio, explains to a large extent the difference in capacity to effectively lead the country. As shall be seen, Jan Smuts, alongside Louis Botha, set the pattern of national leaders commanding from the front, both in peace and in wartime, a pattern which was followed by nearly all of their successors. For Smuts in particular, the portfolios he assumed allowed him to be able to put down rebellions, respond to crises, project South Africa's stature within the British Empire / Commonwealth and the rest of the world, and provide policy leadership (no matter how flawed) on race relations.

The following section reviews the context leading up to Smuts's role in the Union government, probing early clues into his future inclination towards dual roles in cabinet. The subsequent section will delve into what he did with those roles, paying attention to key episodes as case studies in miniature. The final section considers the power and limitations of heads of national executives being specialist ministers within their own cabinets.

The Historical Context

By the time Jan Smuts came back from his studies in Cambridge, Paul Kruger was the President of the South African Republic. All departments, including the police, the detective

and secret services, were under his hand with little oversight by the parliament of the day, the *Volksraad* (the Assembly of the Representatives of the People). That body 'obeyed his orders: any Bill he placed before it was passed with little discussion and no opposition.' There was one exception, and one which would catapult Smuts into Kruger's orbit: only the courts asserted their independence from him. This did not prevent him from attempting to interfere with their findings. 'More than once he sent for the Chief Justice and instructed him what he should find in cases before him, but Kotzé refused to take such instructions' (Armstrong, 1938:66). The matter intensified. The major bone of contention was the 'resolutions' through which Kruger tended to issue his dictates, typically rushed through the *Volksraad* to give them force of law. This practice led to a constantly shifting legal framework, affecting commerce (Armstrong, 1938). The dispute between President Kruger and Chief Judge Kotzé became personal between the two men, to the point of the latter threatening to resign from his position. With an election coming up, the President nonetheless bided his time. His popularity was helped immensely by the failed Jameson Raid, and he easily won his fourth term. One of his first actions was to dismiss the Chief Justice. In the Transvaal and the Cape, the legal fraternity was united in its anger against the President, and the blow to one of their own and the judiciary. There was one main exception; a young Jan Smuts, who either saw an opportunity to endear himself to the President or agreed with his actions – or both. 'Alone among the lawyers he backed the President and the politicians against the Chief Justice and the legal profession' (Armstrong, 1938:67). He decided to write a thesis, which drew on research on English and American laws to argue that Kruger had been correct in his actions: 'The President exercised the powers entrusted to him with singular patience and forbearance,' it said. Sidestepping the encroachments on judicial independence, the only aspect in which it disagreed with the President's approach was that he ought to have had the Chief Justice tried before a tribunal for insubordination. Despite the negativity it produced towards Smuts, the work 'lifted Smuts out of the ordinary ruck of briefless barristers

in Johannesburg into the limelight' (Armstrong, 1938:68). The President had needed legal minds who could provide him support against the overwhelmingly united anger of the lawyers in South Africa. He met Smuts, whom he determined could be a useful figure. He appointed him to the position of State Attorney in 1895, from which position he worked closely with the powerful President, soon developing a 'father and son' relationship in Kruger's view (Smuts, 1952), during which the younger man must have observed the older exercise a firm grip on government. As State Attorney, Smuts dismissed the ineffective head of the Criminal Investigation Department, Bob Ferguson, and ran it himself. Reflecting on this decision, Smuts claimed that 'I succeeded in cleaning out the…Stable of corrupt Detective Administration and established in its stead a system which has worked with admirable results' (Smuts, 1952:40). Oftentimes Attorney General Smuts represented President Kruger in important discussions with the British. One of these was the ill-fated negotiations that led to the Second Anglo Boer War, that would eventually produce the Union of South Africa.

At the time of the establishment of the Union, the norm had been the occupation of single office by national leaders in the Western world. Fears of an Imperial ruler date as far back as antiquity; in Rome, a consul had to forgo his position if he was to be governor, and vice-versa, and could not command soldiers on Roman soil. Nevertheless, by the time South Africa was being colonised by the British, there had been a regular practice for a Prime Minister to play more than a single role – William Pitt the Younger had been his own Chancellor of the Exchequer and so had Robert Peel and the nineteenth century's arch rivals Benjamin Disraeli and William Gladstone. Indeed, when the Boer Republics were warring with the British during the Second Anglo Boer War, their rival, Lord Salisbury, was both Prime Minister and his own Foreign Secretary (the equivalent of a Minister of International Relations and Cooperation in our system). Salisbury had been appointed a third time in 1895, having been Prime Minister twice before (1885-86 and 1887-92) – and both of those times he had

chosen to be his own Foreign Secretary. In its profile of past Foreign Secretaries, the UK Government (2024) remembers him for his notable combination of both offices, recording that 'Salisbury much preferred the Foreign Office to Downing Street. It was as Foreign Secretary that he could pursue a sophisticated intellectual policy in relative peace and quiet.'

After the Union of South Africa was passed in the British parliament, the King determined that it would come into effect in May 1910. Louis Botha was invited by the Governor-General, in terms of section fourteen of the constitution, to form a cabinet. The cabinet would be in office between May until September (the date Botha determined set for the election). His first cabinet consisted of the following members.

1. L. Botha: Prime Minister and Agriculture
2. J.W. Sauer: Railways and Harbours
3. J.C. Smuts: Interior, Mines (until 1912), Defence (from 1912)
4. J.B.M. Hertzog: Justice, and later, Native Affairs (1912)
5. F.S. Malan: Education
6. A. Fischer: Lands
7. H. Burton: Native Affairs
8. F.R. Moor: Commerce and Industries
9. D. Graaff: Public Works
10. C.O. Gubbins: Without Portfolio

Smuts was thus the only Minister other than the Prime Minister himself to hold more than one cabinet ministry. Although there was a limit of ten Ministers, Botha still saw it fit to grant Smuts more than one portfolio, despite the availability of Gubbins (of Natal). When he eventually succeeded Botha in 1919, Smuts gave up his two remaining portfolios and took up Native Affairs, which the late Prime Minister had taken up in 1912. In his second Premiership he took up Defence and External Affairs.

Jan Smuts: Interior, Finance, Defence and Native Affairs

Like Grover Cleveland in the United States, Jan Smuts is the only person in his country to have assumed leadership of the executive in non-consecutive stints. In him, the first Premiership (1919-1924) seems like a rehearsal for the second (1939-1948): confronting internal rebellion, world war, international statesmanship, and political defeat at home due to the race question. Throughout both periods, Smuts was both Prime Minister and Minister of two portfolios – Defence and Native Affairs at first, and then Defence and External Affairs in the second.

The Defence portfolio had always been particularly important to him, in part because he had founded it. For about two years after its founding in 1910, South Africa did not have a national military. The Defence Act number 13 of 1912 made provision for a permanent force, as well as a part-time active citizen force, and a citizens' reserve. Military training would be compulsory for eligible men, who would either join the Union Defence Force, or rifle clubs that were akin to the commando system that had existed in the Boer Republics. Smuts, already Minister of the Interior and of Mines, 'with great energy' went about building the armed forces to 'enable the country to participate in the defence of Empire' (Steyn, 2015:175).

In July 1913, a white miners' strike on the Witwatersrand mines turned violent. 'In the rioting, shops were looted, the Johannesburg railway station set alight and the office of *The Star* newspaper, regarded as the mouthpiece of the mine owners, burnt down. Twenty-one people died and forty-seven were injured' (Steyn, 2015:186). The police were unable to control a mass meeting that turned violent. Here, his simultaneous command of multiple ministries proved advantageous. Being both Minister of Mines and Defence, he would be able to respond directly. At this time, however, the country still had to rely on Imperial troops, as the South African army was still practically non-existent (the Boer Republics had relied on voluntary citizen armies in the *commando* system).

Eventually Prime Minister Botha and Minister Smuts, both military men and bitter-enders of the Second Anglo Boer War, were forced to capitulate to the striking workers and signed the 'Bain Treaty.' It was a humiliating experience, and Smuts said it was one of the hardest things he had ever had to do and vowed that he would never find himself in a similar situation again (Steyn, 2021:186).

Just a few months later, a Natal coalminers' strike spread to railway workers in Pretoria, and gold miners of the Witwatersrand (where a general strike involving some 20 000 workers of all races had been declared. Steyn (2021:186) observes that:

> This time, Smuts was ready. He called up units of the newly mobilised UDF, ordered burghers in the rural districts to protect railway stations and other strategic points, and sent General Koos de la Rey and his men into Johannesburg to train their guns on Trade Hall, the strikers' headquarters.

The miners realised that they were outgunned and quickly capitulated. Smuts, who was not entirely pleased with this outcome and wanted to take no further risks, rushed nine migrant trade union leaders by special train to Durban, where they were put on a ship, the *Umgeni,* bound for Britain. Having both the Departments of Defence and the Interior, effectively the precursor of the present-day Department of Home Affairs, must have enabled Smuts to accomplish this with ease. Still, the deportation was not legal; thus Smuts had to argue his case before the parliament, which eventually indemnified the government's actions.

Smuts at the Helm: Internal Rebellion, World Wars and Race Relations

August 1914 saw the outbreak of a war in Europe which roped in much of the world. After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (effectively the Crown Prince of Austria-Hungary) and his wife Duchess Sophie, by a Serbian Nationalist in Sarajevo on 28 July, his uncle, Emperor Franz

Joseph, soon sought retribution, to which Russia began mobilising, ready to defend its smaller ally, Serbia. In return, Germany, an ally of Austria-Hungary, offered a 'blank cheque' – Germany would come to Austria's defence no matter what. In turn, Russia called on its Western ally, France, to join in on its side should Germany enter the war. The Germans were perfectly happy to go to war with their long-standing rival; however, the most effective way to do so was to overrun Belgium and invade France through its less-defended north-eastern border. Britain was in turn obligated by treaty to be a guarantor of Belgian neutrality and security and was brought into the war by the German plan. International law was especially important to the British who, as a trading empire, were reliant on some of its key principles and conventions, including freedom of navigation of the seas. The network of obligation was extended not only to allies in Europe, but also the colonies in Africa and Asia. British entry compelled South Africa to enter the conflict.

In particular, the British soon requested South Africa to invade German South West Africa (later, Namibia). On 10 August, 'after intense discussion among members of a divided cabinet, South Africa informed the British government that its request would be met. But parliamentary approval had first to be obtained, and only volunteers would be used in any invasion of South West Africa' (Steyn, 2021:190). At this time, the UDF consisted of two arms: the Permanent Force led by Brigadier-General H.T. Lukin, and the Active Citizen Force led by Commandant-General Christian F. Beyers. Neither commander outranked the other; both reported directly to the Minister of Defence. Beyers disliked the Union Defence Act being used to realise the ideal of national statehood by integrating Englishmen and Afrikaners under arms.

In the House of Assembly, 92 to 12 voted in favour of invading South West Africa (SWA), while the vote was 24 to 5 in the Senate. On 14 September, parliament adjourned and that same night the first UDF troopships departed for the coast of German SWA; Beyers resigned on 15 September. At a cabinet meeting on 26 October, Botha informed his colleagues that

he would 'have no truck with treason but would go into action himself against Beyers' (Steyn, 2021:210). He took personal command of the UDF forces and invaded. Smuts would later be tasked with instituting Martial Law in 1914 (October). With German SWA defeated and virtually annexed by July of 1915, Smuts was soon compelled to turn his attention towards German East Africa (Tanganyika), doing so in 1916. With his core objectives accomplished in January 1917, he returned to South Africa before setting off for Britain to join the Imperial War Cabinet. During this time, he began to be regarded as seeing himself too big for South Africa. He retorted that:

> South Africa is not too small for me, and ... every drop of blood and every bit of courage and determination I have in me will go to the service of my country. Whether it is here in the Union, whether it is away in East Africa, or whether it is in the Council Chamber of the Empire, I pray that I may have the strength to do my duty (Smuts, 1952:179-180).

This was incredible foreshadowing of the global career he was to embark on, straddling both his home country and the world, and always advancing the interests of the British Empire, to the perception that he neglected the domestic situation. With his time in the Imperial War Cabinet expiring, he was upgraded into the War Cabinet of Britain itself. British Prime Minister David Lloyd George pushed through for an exception to be made to the six-member limit to make Smuts its seventh member. With Germany and its allies defeated by the beginning of 1919, Smuts took part in the Paris Peace Conference, which platformed negotiations to determine the post-war order. Though not playing a leading role – that was reserved for the Big Four: Woodrow Wilson (US), Lloyd George (UK), Georges Clemenceau (France), and Vittorio Orlando (Italy) – Smuts did influence the agenda in informal ways, and through Lloyd George. At the beginning of the conference, he published a pamphlet titled *The League of Nations – A Practical Suggestion*, which argued that the League of Nations, a Wilson proposal, to be the main item on the agenda of the conference.

Moreover, he argued for a broader mandate for the League than was being entertained at the time:

> It is not sufficient for the League merely to be a sort of *deus ex machina* called in in very grave emergencies when the spectre of war appears: if it is to last, it must be much more. It must be an ever-visible living, working organ of the policy of civilisation (Smuts, 1952:215).

While the League never became this, another institution since established has come close: the United Nations (UN). Smuts would be the only person to sign the founding documents of both the League and the UN. Where Smuts did succeed, however, was in securing South African rule ('mandate') over German SWA.

After Botha's death in 1919, Governor-General Buxton called upon Smuts to form a new government (Steyn, 2021:267). 'Reluctantly, Smuts accepted, aware of the 'colossal responsibility' that he had inherited, but also keenly aware of his own temperamental deficiencies. At his first party caucus meeting, he warned his colleagues that, unlike Botha, he had 'neither tact, nor patience'; they would have to take him for what he was worth' (Steyn, 2021:267). But, like Botha, he did carry on with the act of running a cabinet Ministry of Native Affairs.

Historian and political sociologist Bongani Ngqulunga observes that before assuming the Premiership in 1919, Smuts had never particularly dealt with what was then referred to as 'native policy' (Ngqulunga, 2022:7). He notes, however, that Smuts picked up the Ministries of Defence and Native Affairs, both of which would be relevant in his tenure. 'It was in his capacity in this latter portfolio that Smuts introduced two pieces of legislation that expanded upon the notorious 1913 Natives Land Act by entrenching territorial and institutional segregation' (Ngqulunga, 2022:7) – these being the Native Affairs Act number 23 of 1920 (creating an all-white Native Affairs Commission and entrenching 'cultural' segregation)

and the Native (Urban Areas) Act number 21 of 1923 (which codified residential segregation in urban areas).

It was during his first Premiership that Smuts effectively signed off on the massacre of 163 black South Africans, in May 1921, in what has become remembered as the Bulhoek Massacre (Ngqulunga, 2022:7). As both Prime Minister and Minister of Native Affairs, he denied repeated requests made by a religious group of black people called the 'Israelites,' who had overstayed their permit for religious observance in Bulhoek, in order to listen to their pleas. Instead, he sent members of his department's Native Affairs Commission (NAC) to negotiate with the congregation (Ngqulunga, 2022:1). When these negotiations failed, and the Israelites still refused to move, he deployed some 800 policemen, armed with rifles and machineguns. Ngqulunga (2022:11) rightly argues that:

> [Secretary for Native Affairs] Barrat's presence is significant because of his official relationship to Smuts, who was not only the prime minister but was also Minister of Native Affairs, which means that Barrat reported to him directly. This indicates the Smuts government's involvement at the highest level in the massacre.

In his second Premiership, Smuts's coalition government was centred on the war, and is remembered for having been largely incompetent, with the exception of the Prime Minister himself and Jan-Hendrik Hofmeyr. In his triple capacity of Prime Minister, Minister of Defence and Officer Commanding the South African Forces, 'Smuts threw all his amazing energy into the South African war effort' (Liebenberg, 1984a:442). He established the office of Director-General of Supplies and duly appointed Dr Van der Bijl to its leadership. Smuts also took charge of growing the Union Defence Force. As evident in Table 1, the Army, Air Force and Navy grew dramatically.

Table 1: Growth of the UDF.

	Army	Air force	Navy
1939	17 038	1 837	432
1948	132 194	44 569	9 455

Source: Liebenberg (1984a) and Wessels (2022).

In the battlefields of Eastern and North Africa, the UDF enjoyed successes in El Wak (1940), Addis Ababa (1941, April), Sidi Rezegh (1941, 18 to 23 November), Taon el Esen (1941, 22 to 26 November) and Bardia and Sallum (16 December 1941 to 17 January 1942). But there were catastrophic reversals in Tobruk on 21 June 1942, where 25 000 men under Major-General H.B. Klopper surrendered to the Germans. There were also contributions in El Alamein in Egypt under General Montgomery, but that was effectively the end of the war in Africa.

But, still eager for South Africa to play a role in the war in Europe, Smuts revoked his 1939 promise to his countrymen that South Africans would only fight in Africa and not be sent overseas. On 27 January 1943, he asked Parliament's approval to send South African soldiers to Europe (Liebenberg, 1984a:443). In April of that year, the Sixth South African Armoured Division entered the war in Italy. There was a total of 753 South Africans killed in Italy, 152 in East Africa, and 2 014 in North Africa. What of the domestic situation back home? Would there be another internal revolt? Liebenberg (1984a:444) observes:

> Although there was no repetition of the 1914 rebellion, the political conflict which erupted over South Africa's entry into the war was extraordinarily bitter. The Afrikaners were sharply divided into two groups, those who supported South Africa's war effort and those who opposed it.

The National Party (NP) had remained under the leadership of Hertzog until July of 1940, when his constitution was rejected. At this time, there were various other Afrikaner

parties, as Hertzog's followers either stayed on with Malan's NP or those who were more loyal formed the Afrikaner Party under Havenga. Oswald Pirow founded the *Nuwe Order*, a pro-German grouping. The *Ossewa-Brandwag* was also established during this time, ostensibly as a 'cultural group', but it had an overtly political character. In light of these domestic threats, Smuts made the decision to confiscate all privately licensed firearms to prevent another 1914-style rebellion.

The 1943 elections were a showdown between a divided opposition against a self-confident United Party (UP). Further aiding the UP is the fact that in 1943, the war was beginning to turn around and the Allies were making advances. To quote Blackman and Dall (2022:200), Smuts, the UP and its pre-war allies in Labour and the Dominion Party 'had a relative cakewalk' (Blackman & Dall, 2022:200). With the war being the main issue in the voters' minds, the UP grew by 105 seats, and was supported by two Independents and three black representatives. The opposition declined from 63 to 43.

By the 1948 election, however, matters had changed drastically. That year's singular issue was domestic policy, particularly the direction of the country on race relations. It was a referendum on either the Fagan report (mid-way between equality / integration and segregation) and the Sauer report (apartheid) (Liebenberg, 1984c:457). For voters, 'apartheid' was something clear and concrete: 'it was not the stumbling, bumbling, piecemeal patchwork approach that had characterised Botha, Smuts and even Hertzog's segregationist policies: it was total onslaught' (Blackman & Dall, 2022:213). When the results were counted, the *Herenigde Nasionale Party* (HNP) had received 70 seats (up from 43), and its ally, the Afrikaner Party, 9 (from 0). The two would enter into coalition government, and merge to form the National Party in 1951. For its part, the United Party declined to 65 from 89. The Labour Party lost three seats, coming back with only six seats.

Conclusion: The Power and Limits of Multiple Portfolios

Smuts's middle way on race relations was out of step internationally and domestically: with the rest of the post-war international mood, as espoused by the United Nations, its worldview was passé, but for the white voters at home it was too timid. The alliance between Malan and Havenga thus won a majority of five seats against the United Party, the Labour Party and the black representatives (Liebenberg, 1984c:462). Smuts, bitterly disappointed about the outcome, duly resigned and Malan formed a cabinet.

The United Party had emerged so strongly in 1943 because of the war tide, but by 1948 the issues had changed. Under Prime Minister and Minister of Defence Jan Smuts, the UP had not kept up with the domestic and economic issues that took precedence. The apartheid policy of the NP was also attractive to the white voters, particularly the Afrikaner section, which represented 60% of the voting population at that time. Many of these were drawn to apartheid in light of decolonisation in Asia. On the other hand, food shortages began during the war, but continued afterwards (Liebenberg, 1984c:464). Though the issue had abated in 1946, housing remained an issue. Liebenberg (1984c:465) writes:

> The war was its chief issue, but the government was not blameless in the matter. In February 1944, there was a shortage of 30 000 houses for whites and 120 000 houses for the other races. The government made many promises but did little to fulfil them.

That Smuts and his party were out of touch is demonstrated by the focus of their attack on the HNP's poor war record (Blackman & Dall, 2022:214). By 1948, global events were no longer front of mind to the voters. Indeed, housing shortages had grown by another 6 000 in 1947 (Liebenberg, 1984c:465). This was a consequence of Smuts, preoccupied by his Defence portfolio and the war abroad, surrounding himself with a largely hapless cabinet on the domestic front, whose only

leading light, as seen, was Hofmeyr (Blackman & Dall, 2022:211).

The Deputy Prime Minister merits a close look as well. A single account will suffice to illustrate his immense capacity for work. In June of 1940, Hofmeyr, speaking at the opening of the Great Hall of the University of the Witwatersrand, was attending in three capacities: as Chancellor (having been appointed in March 1939), as Minister of Finance, and as Minister of Education. According to Murray (2022:9), in his address, Hofmeyr, as Minister of Finance, thanked the Chancellor for the proper spending of state funds; as Minister of Education, he congratulated the Chancellor on the University's trajectory; finally, as Chancellor he thanked the Minister of Finance for his interest and the Minister of Education for his message of congratulation! Taking over the three ministerial portfolios from DF Malan in 1933 (Public Health in addition to the two already mentioned), 'he mastered the business of his three departments in as many days' (Paton, 1964:201). Finance, however, 'Hofmeyr took over … with a mixture of elation and trepidation.' (Paton, 1964:330). His first budget was nevertheless an outstanding success. It has been said that 'he was the brain and power behind the South African war machine, in all except the military. Smuts did not hesitate to load him with work and he did not hesitate to accept it' (Paton, 1964:333-4). One of these was the role of Deputy Prime Minister. His relatively progressive views on race, from such a prominent position, further tilted voters towards the right-wing alternatives. According to Paton (1964:473):

> The strategy was clear – to exploit post-war dissatisfactions, the dangers of UNO (United Nations Organization) and communism, the breakdown of the Natives Representatives Council, the menace of the Indian population, and above all, the colour policy of the United Party, which, now that Hofmeyr had been appointed Deputy Prime Minister, was clearly the colour policy of Hofmeyr.

For future prime minister J.G. Strijdom, it was a 'Hofmeyr election' (Paton, 1964:473). In the devastating defeat of that

election, Smuts's loss of his own seat in Standerton by W.C. du Plessis, a virtually unknown figure in South African politics, by 3 750 votes to 3 535 was especially humiliating (Blackman & Dall, 2022:215). A national head of executive who also wishes to drive a specific portfolio should therefore avoid becoming so great a specialist that other portfolios and issues receive less attention than they should. It is also prudent to have a broadly capable cabinet, so that the work is distributed amongst capable hands. In this regard, Smuts failed where his predecessors (both Botha and Hertzog) and future successors would not; forming a capable cabinet that would give expression to different priorities, whilst he drove that area in which he most excelled: war and international relations.

References

Armstrong, H.C. 1938. *Grey steel: JC Smuts: A study in arrogance*. London: Arthur Barker.

Blackman, M. & Dall, N. 2022. *Spoilt ballots: The elections that shaped South Africa, from Shaka to Cyril*. Cape Town: Penguin.

Hausmann, R., O'Brien, T., Fortunato, A., Lochmann, A., Shah, K., Venturi, L., Enciso, S., Vashkinskaya, E., Ahuja, K., Klinger, B., Sturznegger, F. & Tokman, M. 2023. *Growth through inclusion in South Africa*. CID Working Papers 434, Center for International Development at Harvard University.

Kenney, H. 1980. *Architect of apartheid: H.F. Verwoerd – An appraisal*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.

Liebenberg, B.J. 1984a. Botha and Smuts in power, 1910-1924:385-411 in C.J.F. Muller (ed), *500 Years: A history of South Africa*. Academica: Pretoria and Cape Town.

Liebenberg, B.J. 1984b. Hertzog in power, 1924-1939:412-441 in C.J.F. Muller (ed), *500 Years: A history of South Africa*. Academica: Pretoria and Cape Town.

Liebenberg, B.J. 1984c. Smuts in power, 1939-1948:442-465 in C.J.F. Muller (ed), *500 Years: A history of South Africa*. Academica: Pretoria and Cape Town.

Liebenberg, B.J. 1984d. The National Party in power, 1948-1961:466-507 in C.J.F. Muller (ed), *500 Years: A history of South Africa*. Academica: Pretoria and Cape Town.

Liebenberg, B.J. 1984e. The Republic of South Africa, 1961-1978:508-549 in C.J.F. Muller (ed), *500 Years: A history of South Africa*. Academica: Pretoria and Cape Town.

Murray, B. 2022. Wits: The 'open' years. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press. https://doi.org/10.18772/12022088127

Ngqulunga, B. 2022. Jan Smuts and the Bulhoek Massacre: Race and state violence in the making of South Africa, 1919-1920s. *New Contree*, 89(4):1-19. https://doi.org/10.54146/newcontree/2022/89/01

Paton, A. 1964. *Hofmeyr.* London: Oxford University Press.

Smuts, J.C. 1952. *Jan Christiaan Smuts*. Cape Town: Hainemann & Cassell.

Steyn, R. 2015. *Jan Smuts: Unafraid of greatness.* Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball

Steyn, R. 2021. *Louis Botha: A man apart*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball.

Tshishonga, N. & de Vries, M.S. 2011. The potential of South Africa as a developmental state: A political economy critique. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 4(1):58-69.

UK Government. 2024. *Past foreign secretaries*. [online]. Available from: https://www.gov.uk/government/history/past-foreign-secretaries/robert-cecil#:~:text=After%205%20years%20out%20of,in%20relative%20peace%20and%20quiet.

Wessels, A. 2022. *A century of the South African navy*. Johannesburg: Naledi.