THE POSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

MEMORANDUM BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS.

THE attached memorandum on the position in South Africa, which I have received from Mr. Amery, will be of interest to the Cabinet. It will be seen that it was written on the 5th October, and, therefore, before the settlement of the flag question in the Union, but it seems best to circulate it as it stands.

S. B.

November 24, 1927.

THE POSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

I THINK it will be desirable that I should lay before my colleagues the impressions which I have received from my visit to South Africa before I proceed to other Dominions, and while those impressions are still fresh in my mind.

I landed at Cape Town on the 8th August and proceeded at once to Pretoria, where I had brief talks with General Hertzog and some of his Ministers, and with General Smuts. I then went on to Southern Rhodesia, where I stayed for eight days with Sir J. Chancellor at Salisbury and Bulawayo. After leaving Southern Rhodesia I spent one day in Northern Rhodesia, two days each in Bechuanaland and Basutoland, and three days in Swaziland. I spent the better part of a week both at Pretoria and at Cape Town, and from there, or on my train and motor journeys across country, I visited most of the principal centres in the Union—Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Bloemfontein, Kimberley, Mafeking, Grahamstown, Port Elizabeth, Kanya, George, Worcester and Stellenbosch, at all of which places I received a public welcome and had to deliver one or more speeches. I had ample opportunity during my stay in Pretoria for discussions with the Governor-General, and with General Hertzog and his colleagues, and in the course of our tour I or members of my staff visited innumerable universities, schools, agricultural colleges, research institutions, ranches, orchards, mines and docks, and were able to discuss various aspects of South African affairs with every class of the population, English and Dutch—ex-Ministers, civil servants, prominent lawyers, professional men, financial and commercial leaders, ranchers, farmers, fruit growers, &c. I should add that for the whole of our visit to South Africa our party were the guests of the Union and Southern Rhodesia Governments. General Hertzog also placed his own special train at our disposal, which not only added greatly to our comfort but also enabled me to cover much more ground in the time at my disposal.

Apart from the general purpose of maintaining personal touch with the members of the Union Government and their possible successors and of learning what I could about the political and economic situation in South Africa, I went out with certain definite objects in view. I had promised General Hertzog last year that I would let him know definitely after visiting the High Commission Territories whether I could consider any possibility of the early transfer to the Union of Swaziland or of certain border districts of Bechuanaland, a matter which had been under discussion for some time past. I was also anxious to make sure that both by the Government and by the general public the conclusions of the last Imperial Conference were clearly understood and acted upon, as it appeared that there was a real danger of one side in South Africa treating those conclusions as a justification for a separatist policy, and of the other regarding them as a retrograde step in Imperial policy, a tacit abandonment of all hope of closer Imperial unity. Lastly, I hoped, by expounding
to the South African public the opportunities before South Africa as a partner in the Empire, to do something to help the growth of a forward-looking Imperial nationalism in the place of a racialism feeding on the quarrels of the past. Such an appeal might even, I thought, conceivably strengthen the widespread desire for a reasonable compromise on the flag question and avert a bitter political campaign on racial lines.

I propose to deal with the question of the High Commission Territories in a separate memorandum. For the present purpose it is sufficient to say that I decided that no transfer was possible in the near future, and was able to put my difficulties and conclusions before General Hertzog, and to assure him of my readiness acceptance of what was to him no doubt a disappointing decision—a decision which it would have been by no means easy to convey otherwise than at first hand and in frank and friendly conversation. As regards the working out in practice of the Imperial Conference conclusions, I found General Hertzog and his colleagues in every way reasonable and well disposed. There can be no doubt that our attitude and that of the other Governments at the Conference made a profound impression on all except a few fanatical extremists on the Nationalist side (including, however, I fear two or three Ministers), and that General Hertzog and most of his party are now prepared not only to drop the demand for secession and accept the Empire, but to look upon proposals for Imperial co-operation with goodwill instead of with suspicion.

The implications of the Imperial Conference decision as to the Governor-General’s position were fully discussed between Lord Athlone, General Hertzog and myself, and an agreement arrived at as to the kind of information which is to go automatically to the Governor-General, which, if carried out, will put him in a decidedly better position to know all that is going on than hitherto, when he has seen the direct messages to and from the British Government, but very little else. On the question of the High Commissioner’s status I found General Hertzog quite clear as to the difference between a foreign Minister who represents another sovereign, and a High Commissioner who, under a common sovereign, represents one Government of the Empire to another. He is anxious that his High Commissioner should be treated with the consideration and frankness with which we should treat one of his ministerial colleagues, and is even toying with the idea of following the precedent set by Sir R. Borden when he retained Sir G. Perley as a member of his Cabinet when he made him Canadian High Commissioner. I told him that we were always prepared to extend to the Dominion High Commissioners every confidence which their own Governments were prepared to extend to them, and that the difficulty in using them as a channel of personal communication had lain hitherto mainly in the fact that their own Governments did not appear to trust them sufficiently. I added that the key to the problem was to be found in the personality and ability of the High Commissioner himself, and that only a first-rate man could, in the long run, represent his Government effectively with British departments or with the British public. As regards the development of an alternative channel of personal communication at the South African end, General Hertzog concurred with me that nothing ambitious was required, and it was agreed that, under the technical authority of the High Commissioner, the present Imperial Secretary should act as personal liaison with the British Government. Beyond the assistance of one junior official conversant with foreign affairs, this need involve no enlargement of the existing staff of the High Commissioner’s office. We also discussed freewheeling problems of foreign policy and defence, as well as General Hertzog’s particular difficulties with the Portuguese over the Delagoa Bay railway position. General Hertzog more than once told me that only the Imperial Conference had made it possible for him to consult me on these matters or express his views to me; he now felt that he was not being drawn into any admission of subordination to some super-State centred in and controlled by Britain, but was simply claiming his right and doing his duty as a member of the family interested in the common welfare.

His colleagues met me in an equally friendly spirit. Colonel Creswell spoke to me about his anxiety to secure the closest possible touch on defence questions, adding that he was sending an officer to the new Imperial Defence College, and asked me to suggest to Sir Samuel Hoare the possibility of some direct interchange of officers between South Africa and the Royal Air Force in Iraq. Mr. Havenga assured me of his anxiety to help British trade, and promised to give the most sympathetic consideration to any specific proposals for an increase of preference that our Trade Commissioner might submit to him. He also undertook to give favourable consideration to the idea of helping Kenya and other tropical Colonies, by modifying the South African duties on coffee, cocoa, &c. As a further small but typical
instance of general goodwill towards the idea of Imperial co-operation, I might add that he informed me that he had persuaded his colleagues to contribute £250 a year for five years to the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture at Trinidad. I also found General Kemp, the Minister for Agriculture, a very aggressive and bitter Nationalist and one of the rebels in 1914, very well disposed to co-operation with the Empire Marketing Board. I might add, in this connexion, that General Hertzog made no difficulty about the short-issue of £600,000 of Empire Marketing Board money and its diversion to general revenue purposes, on the understanding that the money should become available again at a later date if the growth of the work required it.

In dealing with the conclusions of the Imperial Conference in my public speeches, I emphasized throughout that the Dominions had now attained to a status essentially higher than that of ordinary nations living in isolated independence. They were Imperial nations, just as Great Britain was an Imperial nation, with Imperial interests, Imperial responsibilities and an Imperial consciousness. Empire for them, as for us, signified not an external controlling authority, but an enhancement of their own national life, a self-imposed responsibility, inherent in their constitutions in virtue of the common Crown, and a sphere of greater real freedom and greater opportunity through co-operation. I pointed out the particular local application of this by dwelling on South Africa's responsibilities, as well as her opportunities for the extension of her political and economic influence, in connexion with the whole development of Africa to north of the present boundaries of the Union. This theme of the Greater South Africa of the future also enabled me to work in on several occasions, and more particularly in my farewell speech at Cape Town, an earnest appeal for racial unity. My speeches met with approval in every section of the Press, each side using them freely as a text-book from which to quote against the other, and both General Hertzog and General Smuts thanked me warmly for what I had done to focus the attention of the South African public, away from party and racial issues, on to the greater problems of South Africa's future.

Whether by my speeches—in none of which the word flag was ever uttered—or in the private talks I had with General Hertzog and with Opposition leaders, I have been able to do anything to help to avert a wholly unnecessary and unwanted cat and dog fight over the flag question, is, I fear, more doubtful. What is certain is that if the Flag Bill had not already been introduced before the Imperial Conference it never would have been brought forward at all, except on the basis of a general agreement. General Hertzog—to whom I made no reference to the subject till he himself raised it and invited my opinion—told me frankly that he had on his return from the Conference informed his colleagues that he had decided to postpone the matter more or less indefinitely till agreement came about naturally, but that he had not persisted in the face of a threat of resignation from Dr. Malan, supported by two others. The Labour Ministers, though English, and at heart opposed to the Flag Bill, would seem to have played a sorry part in these transactions, being influenced partly by the fear of losing office if there were a real split and partly by the fear of becoming superfluous if Hertzog succeeded and secured the support of those Dutch who at present support Smuts.

There can be no doubt, from all I heard in every quarter, that if General Hertzog had only stuck to his guns he would, whether the dissident Ministers had really resigned or not, have been in a quite unique position and have completely spiked the guns of the Opposition. But I am afraid he lacks the courage required for big decisions, and is haunted by the fear of being successfully displaced in his own party by some one more extreme than himself if it came to a split. Last, but not least, he is obsessed by his personal dislike of General Smuts whom he firmly believes to have hoofs inside his boots and a tail in the seat of his trousers, and is convinced that any generous gesture on his part over the flag question will at once be twisted into a party weapon by his adversary. General Smuts on his side regards the Prime Minister as a muddle-headed and untrustworthy old ass, with whom it is hopeless to try and settle anything. He, too, has to consider his own extremists and the danger of breaking up his party over a compromise which might not be acceptable to them. Consequently, though the great majority of South Africans of both races would gladly accept a compromise or let the whole matter drop, and though the leading Ministers, such as Hertzog, Tielman Ross and Havenga, as well as the Opposition leaders, would like a compromise, the probabilities are that the mere momentum of party politics will now carry things forward and that the issue will be fought out at a referendum over the Government's present proposals.
There is, however, one possible solution which might yet prove acceptable. If no compromise can be reached on a single flag, which one side insists shall be a purely South African flag with only the smallest of Union Jacks on a shield as a souvenir of past history, and which the other insists must have the Union Jack as a living part of the flag and in the leading quarter, it is conceivable that it might be reached on the basis of South Africa flying two flags, the Union Jack as her Imperial flag, and some entirely different flag as her domestic or "national" flag. The Government proposals now include a rather vague recognition of the Union Jack as the emblem of South Africa's relationship to the rest of the Empire, and I believe if that recognition were made more definite, and the Bill prescribed that both emblems should be regularly flown together on all Government buildings, the force would be largely taken out of the Opposition, and agreement might then be arrived at on the size and position of such Union Jack as might still form part of the national flag. A similar insoluble difficulty over the choice of a capital for the Union was got over by the device of having the administrative capital at Pretoria and the legislative capital at Cape Town, and compared with the inconvenience and expense of a dual capital and of bilingualism, the few extra yards of bunting for a dual flag on every Government office would be a small affair. I found General Hertzog personally very much interested in the idea, but very suspicious lest his concession should be accepted and then followed by a fresh deadlock over the domestic flag. Opposition leaders thought it would give them all they really wanted, if only the Government could be trusted to work the arrangement honestly, but felt that their supporters would suspect it was a mere device to get the Union Jack off the local flag and then get rid of the Union Jack altogether. But for the intensity of mutual suspicion, I believe a compromise on these lines would be generally acceptable to the public, and very much preferable to the revival of racial bitterness which must follow if the referendum campaign is to be proceeded with.

What the result of the referendum would be is quite uncertain. While the broad issue will be between the Union Jack and "our own flag," the Government proposals will be defended in English-speaking districts as making provision for the Union Jack, and attacked in the Transvaal and Free State for not giving sufficient recognition to the old Republican flags! With so confused an issue, and with a majority, as I believe, of the electorate against the change, one might be inclined to predict the rejection of the proposals. But Englishmen tend to be so apathetic, and Boers so intensely keen, on what is at bottom a purely racial issue, that a small majority for the proposals is at least equally probable. Failure of the Government proposals at the referendum would not only kill the proposals themselves, but would be a very severe setback to the extreme racists in their own party. Success would similarly, for the time being at any rate, enhance their influence, and so keep the racial issue alive. The more serious consequences talked of in some quarters—secession of Natal from the Union or Eastern Cape Colony—seem to me unlikely to be realised. The Government, if wise, will hoist the Union Jack together with the new flag in places where the new flag is likely to be unpopular. Private citizens will fly more Union Jacks than ever. On a change of Government, General Smuts will, I think, see to it that the Union Jack is flown regularly with the new flag on all public buildings till some generally acceptable South African flag can be substituted for it.

Nor am I altogether without hope that the present conflict may mark a turning-point for the better in South African affairs, even if a compromise is not arrived at now. The fever of controversy over an artificial issue may bring about its own reaction, and in doing so give impetus to the new ideas which are beginning to dawn on the public consciousness in South Africa. The accession to power of the present Government, with the help of the pact with Labour, won a triumph for extreme racialism which neither its numbers nor its real strength as a natural, growing movement of public opinion justified. It brought into power the men who had never forgotten the bitterness of the South African War and those who had been educated under the immediate influence of that bitterness. Meanwhile, a new generation is growing up which is less interested in the South African War than in the future, in the problem of the Union's relations to Southern Rhodesia and the territories beyond, and above all in the fundamental problem of all, the problem whether the white race and white civilisation are to hold their own in South Africa against a fourfold majority of the black man. There is no solution to either of these problems compatible with the narrow racial Afrikanderism at present in the ascendant. Only a more liberal and enlightened policy than one which sacrifices all efficiency to the
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and to racial jobbery can ever hope to persuade Southern Rhodesia to reverse her decision of four years ago to stay out of the Union. Only a systematic and progressive policy of immigration can ever hope to save the white race from being submerged or economically displaced by the rising tide of colour. And the new population, even when not British, as most of it naturally would be, would always be indifferent to the old Boer grievances against Britain and opposed to being dragged into learning Afrikaans. Even the Germans in South-West are much more anti-Afrikander than anti-British, and dream—if reunification with Germany is out of the question—of being allowed to join Rhodesia with its British traditions and speech rather than the Union.

Economic forces, meanwhile, are steadily working towards the breakdown of racialism. The development of the last twenty-five years, based in no small measure on the remarkable work of creative reconstruction carried out by Lord Milner after the South African War, has been very great. But I believe the development of the next few years will be even greater. All development tends to the diffusion of English speech and ideas, of British traders and settlers. If, under political pressure, more Afrikaans is taught in the schools than formerly in some parts of South Africa, and Dutch policemen and railway workers are planted on to purely English districts, economic influences are making English more and more the business speech of the whole country. Government notices may be bilingual, but commercial advertisements and shop signs are almost invariably English. The fact is that South Africans are beginning gradually to be blended more and more into one people—religion happily being no bar here to inter-marriage or social intercourse. And once they are one people, convenience rather than racial rivalry will dictate their language policy.

In this connexion it is almost impossible to over-emphasize the importance of immigration, and more particularly of the establishment of a good type of English settler on the land. Even a handful of such settlers, by the example they set of more progressive methods, may alter the whole standard of farming in a district. They very soon find themselves elected to the leading positions on all the agricultural bodies, and even if, for the time being, their neighbours may continue to vote Nationalist, their nationalism is all the time being insensibly modified. The 1820 Settlers' Association is doing admirable work in guiding and training settlers and it is unfortunate that, for the moment, the unsettled political situation in South Africa is frightening settlers away. But here, as elsewhere in the Empire, settlement cannot be considered except in relation to general economic development and more particularly to the market available in Great Britain. The local market in South Africa is very limited and it is to the export market that the success of additional settlement must mainly look. Anything that we can do to increase our purchase of South African products is thus calculated to have a far-reaching effect on the whole national life of South Africa and on its attitude to the Empire. The existing British preferences on wine, tobacco, sugar, and dried fruits have been of great value both in affecting the general attitude of the public towards the Imperial relationship and in promoting British settlement. The work of the Empire Marketing Board has already attracted widespread attention and exercised a very considerable political influence. It is no exaggeration to say that an extension of preference which would include fresh and preserved fruit, dairy produce, meat and maize would transform the whole political as well as the economic life of South Africa, and make it definitely one of the strongest instead of one of the weaker links in the Imperial chain.

In no part of South Africa has development been so marked during the last few years as in Southern Rhodesia, a development based in very large measure on the British tobacco preference. Settlers of a very fine type are coming in at the rate of 400-500 a month, many, I regret to say, from the Union, and the general atmosphere of confidence and enterprise is most encouraging. Even more refreshing is the spirit of the country, a spirit of fervent loyalty to the Crown and to the Imperial idea, coupled with a firm conviction that Southern Rhodesia is destined to play a great part in shaping the future of the whole African continent on Imperial lines. There is a universal agreement that Southern Rhodesia was wise to stay out of the Union and a determination never to enter the Union except on terms that will enable Rhodesia not only to maintain its own British character, but also to be sure of the generally Imperial character of South African policy, and, failing that, to build up, to the north of the Union, an independent Central South African Dominion to check and counterbalance a parochial South African Union. From this point of view public opinion in Southern Rhodesia is now keenly interested in absorbing the
whole, or, at any rate, the western half of Northern Rhodesia, and in the construction of a railway to Walvis Bay, with the idea not only of securing a more direct outlet for Rhodesian trade, but also of linking Bechuanaland and South-West Africa more closely with Rhodesia. These ideas may be over-ambitious, or at least premature, but they show the spirit of what is to-day one of the finest British communities in the whole Empire.

I might add that I was also most favourably impressed by what I saw of the Southern Rhodesian Government and administration. The doubts entertained four years ago as to whether so small a community could possibly find the men to conduct its affairs successfully have been effectively disproved. Ministers struck me as practical, public-spirited men, and though the death of Sir Charles Coghlan is a heavy loss, they will, I have no doubt, be able to carry on successfully under Mr. Moffat, especially as they will for some little time still continue to have the advantage of the advice of so sound and experienced an administrator as Sir John Chancellor, the present Governor. The administrative services built up under the Chartered Company are efficient and progressive, especially, so it seemed to me, the agricultural department. Native affairs have been handled in a much more liberal spirit than in the Union, and an early settlement of the question of native lands on the lines of the Carter Commission’s Report should remove the one serious cause of native discontent.

If I were to sum up the position in South Africa as a whole in a sentence, it would be that the political situation in the Union, if unsatisfactory, is less unsatisfactory than it is sometimes painted, and contains within itself the seeds of its future improvement, and that there are also influences from without, in Southern Rhodesia, in the High Commission Territories, and in the economic policy of the British Government, which may contribute very powerfully to shape things in the right direction.

Capetown, October 5, 1927.

L. S. A.