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Jan Smuts Herdenkingslesing



Jan Smuts Memorial Lecture

THE
SOUTH
AFRICAN
INSTITUTE
OF
INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS

A TIME
FOR
GREATNESS

MARGARET THATCHER

THE JAN SMUTS MEMORIAL LECTURE programme was established in 1984 to commemorate General J.C. Smuts as a statesman of international stature and is intended to focus on current world concerns by means of lectures delivered by speakers who are themselves of international reputation.

The first Jan Smuts Memorial Lecture was given by SIR LAURENS VAN DER POST in Pretoria on 24 May 1984 on *The Importance of Smuts in the Future of the Afrikaner*

The second Jan Smuts Memorial Lecture was delivered by Professor J.P. BARBER at Jan Smuts House, Johannesburg, on 15 January 1987 on *Is There a South African Nation?*

The third Jan Smuts Memorial Lecture was delivered by LORD BLAKE in Cape Town on 8 November 1988 on *The World Since Smuts*

The fourth Jan Smuts Memorial Lecture was delivered by the RT. HON. MARGARET THATCHER OM FRS MP in Durban on 22 May 1991.

THE RT. HON. MARGARET THATCHER OM, FRS, MP is one of those rare figures who dominate the international arena from time to time and consequently hardly require description.

Margaret Thatcher is a graduate of Somerville College, Oxford and pursued an early career as a research chemist. Changing direction, she was subsequently called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn, and from there went on to pursue an outstandingly successful political career, culminating in office as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979-1990. Whilst her term of office may have had its controversial elements, none could doubt her ability, acumen and force of personality.

It should be noted that any opinions expressed in this article are the responsibility of the author and not of the Institute.

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INTRODUCTION

The South African Institute of International Affairs is closely linked to the name of Smuts. He encouraged the founding of the Institute in Cape Town in 1934, and he addressed its first major meeting in early 1935. After his death in 1950, the Institute took the initiative in erecting a living memorial to him in the form of a centre of international studies. Jan Smuts House in Johannesburg was opened in 1960 and in the past three decades has become internationally renowned.

Our Institute, originally modelled on the Royal Institute at Chatham House in London, has perpetuated the memory of Smuts as an international statesman. He was a great figure on the world stage from the time of the First World War and the establishment of the League of Nations to the Second World War and the beginning of the United Nations. He played a key role in the founding of both organisations. But he had a special attachment to the Commonwealth and, in particular, to Britain. He was a member of the British War Cabinet during both wars, and in the second World War he developed a close relationship with the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill.

In establishing the biennial Jan Smuts Memorial Lectures, the Institute has sought to bring to the attention of the South African public the views of contemporary international leaders in various fields. This exposure to authoritative opinion on world issues was undoubtedly what Smuts felt was needed when he spoke in 1935 about the role of our Institute in interpreting "the new ideas that are shaking the world [and which] are thundering at our gates, too". He was concerned more than anything that South Africa should not be economically or politically isolated from the world. But the deterioration of South Africa's standing in the world in the decades after World War II was dramatic. Smuts would have found the growing isolation from the international community intolerable, both for his country and for himself.

South Africa is now at last emerging from the long period of international isolation. It is most appropriate that at this juncture the Smuts Lecture should be given by a former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, who has herself played a vital and key role on the international stage for more than a decade. It is also most appropriate in the light of her consistent concern for South Africa; she has played no small part in moving this country along the road of change towards a just and democratic future.

She is no stranger to controversy, and her public position on South Africa – for instance, in opposing sanctions – has at times been controversial. But history will

also undoubtedly recognise the important contribution she made through quiet and unpublicized diplomacy at crucial moments in recent years. Her great personal political influence has been used to the benefit of all the people of South Africa.

It is therefore a special privilege for our Institute and its many members here today to have Mrs. Margaret Thatcher with us to deliver this, the Fourth Jan Smuts Memorial Lecture.

Dr. C.B. Strauss
National Chairman, SAIIA

A TIME FOR GREATNESS

I am greatly honoured to deliver this, the fourth Jan Smuts Memorial Lecture and in doing so to follow in the footsteps of my great friend Sir Laurens van der Post.

Shortly before his 80th birthday, Smuts remarked in conversation, "I belong to antiquity". And, of course, in many ways he does. In assessing Smuts' character and career we have always to resort to superlatives. His breadth of knowledge and experience, his inexhaustible intellectual and physical energy, his vision and sense of purpose – such qualities are truly marks of greatness in every age.

Although not a man of our times he is, I suggest, a man for our times. His vision both of South Africa and of the world is of the greatest significance for us.

SMUTS AND SOUTH AFRICA

Jan Smuts' career was often lived as a player on the international stage. From the beginning, he mixed easily with statesmen and he shone at conferences. But the essential truth about Smuts' involvement in politics was that he loved South Africa. He told an audience in London in 1917 that "..... South Africa must be a special favourite of the Gods. She has known joys and sorrows. She has known the deepest abasement and she has known the highest exaltation."

For Smuts, however, South Africa did not belong exclusively to any one cultural group. Perhaps he had what we would consider today a somewhat paternalist view of South Africa's black population. But his goal was always, as he put it, "to work away from racialism". Of course, the "racialism" to which he specifically referred was the hostility at that time between Afrikaners and British. And we should not forget how extraordinary it seemed for the valiant Afrikaner leader of the conflict with the British at the turn of the Century to become the trusted friend and staunch ally of his former adversaries, taking South Africans with him in the bloody battles of two World Wars to live and die with British servicemen.

Yet the words Smuts used about building South African nationhood can surely be applied more broadly and outside their original context to South Africa today. In that same London speech of 1917 Smuts put the point like this:

"... We must have national unity in South Africa as the one true basis of future stability and strength – and that national unity is entirely

consistent with the preservation of our languages, our traditions, our cultural interests, and all that is dear to us in our past. ... The ideal of national unity means a continuous effort towards better relations, towards mutual respect and forbearance, towards cooperation, and that breadth of view and character which will be the most potent instrument for dealing with our problems."

It would be difficult to find a better text on which to base your future Constitution – a remarkable piece of foresight!

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF SOUTH AFRICA

By the time of his death, just over forty years ago, Smuts' South Africa had become an economically strong and politically powerful state. But moves towards the establishment of apartheid had already begun. Within a few years, the whole international climate had changed. Where South Africa had once played the role of senior statesman and world conscience, she had moved to a position where her leadership was shunned and her policies rejected as morally wrong.

This year, for the first time since Smuts, and with the abolition of the apartheid laws, South Africa is truly rejoining the international community. South Africans now have good reason to be optimistic about the future.

In Britain we have long wanted and worked for the re-emergence of a free, fair and democratic South Africa into the world community. Indeed, that has been a central part of our approach to the problems of the region as a whole.

Whereas some of those problems involved the task of bringing colonies to independence, South Africa is different: it is a sovereign State. But our objective of achieving a fully democratic constitution, with protection for minority and individual rights, has remained the same.

We urged on successive South African Governments the need to release Mr. Mandela and other leaders, to unban the ANC and other parties and to engage in negotiation of a new constitution in which all the black leaders and leaders of other groups could participate. It was easier to get our message across because we, in Britain, had refused to break off contact with the South African Government. We recognised that if you genuinely want to help people, you do not set out to destroy their economy by comprehensive economic sanctions: that would only harm most those vulnerable sections of the community, whose rights you are seeking to

advance.

But President de Klerk has taken the whole world by surprise by moving further and faster than either his opponents or some of his supporters imagined likely – a great tribute to his qualities of leadership.

Yes. There are difficulties, there are fears. And no doubt disappointments ahead. But South Africa has shown she can weather that well-known wind of change.

The world into which South Africa has moved is one where neither the dogma of race nor the dogma of class can carry conviction. It is a world where truth and honesty are slowly edging out cant and doubt standards – even from international debate! It is, in short, a world where the new South Africa can flourish – and where with her strong economy she will be the dynamo of sub-Saharan Africa.

THE WORLD RESPONSE

The changes in South Africa should now be fully and openly recognised by all other nations. They deserve a vigorous, positive response.

First, we must encourage the progress of reform. That is not just a question of pressing the South African Government to make unlimited concessions; it is also a matter of urging all those concerned to proceed quickly to the negotiation of a new constitution. And we must make clear that Government alone cannot keep order: to uphold the law requires the full cooperation of all leaders and their supporters.

Second, South Africa must be openly and warmly welcomed back into the world community. Among other things, that means the renewal of sporting ties. It is difficult to imagine a better way for South Africans of every colour and background to unite than in pride at the success of multi-racial South African teams in international competitive sport.

Third, South Africa needs massive investment if her economy is to create the wealth required to alleviate the poverty and deprivation which afflict millions of black South Africans. Now is the time to encourage investment to return.

SMUTS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Ladies and Gentlemen, events of both war and peace repeatedly conspired to push General Smuts to the forefront of international affairs. He brought to the work of international statesman both idealism and commonsense.

But Smuts was never so much an idealist that he forgot the need for effective action to match the rhetoric. Speaking in London in November 1943, he put his finger on the problem which had ultimately proved fatal to the League of Nations which he had helped to found:

"What was everybody's business in the end proved to be nobody's business. Each one looked to the other to take the lead, and the aggressors got away with it."

The events in the Gulf have shown that, under the leadership of the United States and her ally Great Britain, the world has learnt that lesson.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: GROUNDS FOR HOPE

There are two powerful reasons why we, today, can be more optimistic about our international future than in the time of Smuts.

First, we have seen a waning of the Soviet military threat with which we have lived for so many years. And, of course, that is of great importance to Africa. President Gorbachev urged the revolutionary movements which the Soviet Union had previously supported to adopt the path of peaceful negotiation. That he did so is yet another tribute to his courage and far-sightedness. But it is also a tribute to the determination of Presidents Reagan and Bush – with a little help from their British friends – to keep our Western defences strong.

Second, the spread of democracy across the Iron Curtain and elsewhere has been accompanied by the advance of free-enterprise – sometimes preceding it, sometimes in its wake. Hardly anyone now seriously believes that Socialism can generate the wealth required to offer progress and prosperity to the peoples of the world. The task now is to help countries long used to command economies to move swiftly to free market economics.

Smuts could not have foreseen all this. But he would have understood the importance of leadership in making it possible – leaders, like President Reagan and

Gorbachev able to identify and harness the spirit of the times.

One of Smuts' last contributions to international affairs was to draft the preamble to the United Nations Charter. Today's new international conditions, so favourable to freedom are giving us great hopes at last of fulfilling the objectives set down in that document.

Smuts, I suspect, would have drawn our attention to that injunction in the Charter "to practise tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours". How relevant that is to the Middle East today – the land which has been fought over more than any other in history, the place where three great religions meet, where so much hatred burns.

Such reflections lead me now to try to emulate Smuts' realistic foresight in looking ahead to the risks which confront that international framework of freedom we are now building. Let me mention three which should absorb our attention in the months and years ahead.

THREE INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGES

Regional Wars

The first challenge is the devastation caused by regional wars.

As we consider the terrible consequences of regional wars in Africa – famine, homelessness, poverty and disease – we cannot doubt that the prevention of such wars is a moral duty and a practical necessity. We have to work together to deprive unstable countries, run by dictators and extremists, of advanced military technology and weapons of mass destruction. Let me add that we must on all occasions speak the truth about the nature and ambitions of these regimes. For, as South Africa knows full well, nothing does more to discredit the force of international opinion than repeated application of double standards.

Free Trade

The second challenge we have to face is that of protectionism.

Free trade underpins prosperity. Today, however, the open trading system, sustained by the GATT, is at risk. Bilateral agreements – even ambitious ones

which reach across a continent – cannot provide a substitute for global open trade. Moreover, like other controls, tariff and other barriers distort. And as the distortions and disputes accumulate everyone loses out.

But the greater losers are always the low cost producers, those who in a free market would be able to take advantage of open competition. These are often the very poorest countries. That particularly applies in agriculture, so important to the economies of African countries.

What folly it is for Western countries to keep third world countries in poverty by effectively excluding them from our markets – and then provide billions of dollars worth of aid to palliate the consequences.

We cannot allow the GATT to fail. But we have to do better. We need a crusade for open trade throughout the world. And I trust that the new South Africa will enlist in that crusade.

The Environment

The third challenge I want to mention is that to our environment.

Smuts was a botanist, passionately interested in and deeply knowledgeable about South Africa's rich plant life. But it went further than that. For Smuts, the environment was a total manifestation of the beauty of creation. Something to be studied, treasured and conserved.

There is much to be done to tackle the causes of climatic change and to curb pollution. And it requires action at the international level. At least as important, though, is for individual countries and communities to take pride in and conserve their own particular environmental legacies and treasures.

Perhaps the most important truth we should bear in mind, however, is that conservation of whatever kind is costly: and so wealth must be created to pay for it. It is therefore, a romantic myth – and indeed a dangerous falsehood – to claim that economic progress must result in environmental destruction. And it is surely not the least of South Africa's contributions to Africa to show that prosperity and conservation can go hand in hand.

A TIME FOR GREATNESS

Ladies and Gentlemen, of our times, as of the time when Smuts wrote his famous "Great Paper" on the League of Nations, it can be said that....

"... mankind is once more on the move, the very foundations have been shaken and loosened, and things are again fluid. The tents have been struck, and the great caravan of humanity is once more on the march".

Today once more, South Africa, as when Smuts wrote those words, is marching with history. There will be setbacks to suffer and obstacles to overcome. But the destination is clear and your hearts are strong. You advance in the knowledge that great causes, ideals and issues are at stake; that you are not only securing your own future, but providing us with hope for a better world.

At this momentous time for South Africa, let me use of your country the words used by Jan Smuts in 1942 of mine:

"Glory has not departed from this land."