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Malan's Retirement

c/o J. M. Pennington
5, Elm Street,
Houghton, Johannesburg
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
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Dear Mr. Rogers :

Dr. Malan has finally done it. Two days ago he announced, in the course of a normal cabinet meeting, that he was retiring, effective November 30. Later that night he made an exclusive statement to all Afrikaans-language newspapers in the country confirming the rumor of his retirement.

The reaction throughout the country was certainly not one of surprise--the decision had been expected ever since Malan turned 80 on his last birthday in May. Instead, it gave rise to a great deal of speculation over what is coming next. There are several important questions to be answered, including: Who will succeed Malan? Will there be an internal split between extreme and moderate elements of the Nationalist Party? And, if so, will the United Party be able to capitalize on such a split?

I do not know enough about the inner machinations of the Nationalist hierarchy to predict with certainty who will replace Malan. I know, however, that the heirs-apparent to the premiership are J. G. Strydom, Minister of Lands and Deputy Prime Minister, N. C. Havenga, Minister of Finance and second-in-command of the Nationalist Party, and T. E. Donges, Minister of the Interior and leader of the Cape Province Branch of the Nats.

Of these men, Strydom is the most extreme. He is a vigorous 61 and is strong among ultra-National Nationalists of the Transvaal, with lesser strength among extremists in the Free State and Cape Province. Even during the compromising days of Smuts, Strydom stood alone, staunchly pro-Republican, anti-Commonwealth and anti-Native. His election as Prime Minister by the Nationalist Parliamentary Caucus on November 30 would mean a wider split between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans than ever before and, if such a thing is possible, stricter control of the Natives. He would be apt to sacrifice amicable relations between the Union's population groups in order to obtain a republic outside the Commonwealth and to attain, with Verwoerd's help, purified apartheid.

The other candidates are more moderate--and on past performance the English-speaking population would most welcome Havenga as their Prime Minister. He is leader of the Nationalist Party in Natal, the last British stronghold, and has held with considerable distinction the more uncontroversial portfolio of Finance. He would also be most acceptable to moderate Afrikanerdom which, according to Otto Schwelnuus, editor of Dagbreek en Sondagnuus (PBM-25), makes up the largest part of the Nationalist Party and which would remain loyal in spite of division among extremists and liberals, if there is such a thing as a liberal Nationalist.

Havenga, however, is the oldest of the candidates--he is 72--and it would not be long before he, too, would have to retire, throwing the Nationalist Party again into a leaderless state. In spite of this, he seems most likely to be the man chosen if Dr. Malan has any voice in the decision. For one thing he was, according to the Nationalist press, the only cabinet minister informed beforehand that Malan was to announce his impending retirement. And, in 1949 when Malan and Havenga made the "Malan-Havenga pact" joining the Nationalist and Afrikaner Parties, Malan is supposed to have promised Havenga

leadership of the Nationalist Party when he retired.

The conflict, if it does arise, will be between Strydom and Havenga. In such case, if the dispute seems serious enough to cause a split in the ranks of the Nationalist organization, another moderate, Donges, would probably fill the gap as compromise Premier. Donges' claim to the Prime Ministership arises out of the fact that he was made leader of the Cape Province Nationalist Party when Malan retired from that post a few months ago. He withstood a serious challenge by Eric Louw, Minister for Economic Affairs, but came crashing through when Malan let it be known that he preferred Donges. If Strydom went so far as to oppose Donges as well as Havenga in the struggle for the Prime Minister's berth, it would cause and almost unmendable split in the Nationalist Party. Strydom, I feel, is too good a Nationalist to permit this.

A split also seems unlikely in view of the line being taken by the Nationalist Afrikaans-language press. It has been hinting strongly that the decision has already been made and points out, logically enough, that if there were any dispute the Nationalist Parliamentary Caucus would not wait until the day Malan's retirement becomes effective to hold their meeting to elect the new Prime Minister. Die Transvaaler asserts smugly that the decision will be unanimous. There is a close connection between the Government and the Afrikaans-language press. Many of the present cabinet ministers were at one time owners, publishers, editors or staff members of Afrikaans-language papers and are therefore careful to see that the information contained therein is accurate and favorable to the Nationalist Party.

Malan has picked his retirement time astutely. The next general election is not until 1958 and the Provincial elections have just been completed. There will be plenty of time to heal any breach before the Nats must wage another major campaign. He has also chosen a time when the United Party is torn with indecision-- it has committed itself to the formulation of a new Native policy at its meeting in Bloemfontein in the middle of next month. At present there is a struggle going on within the U. P. between the conservatives and the liberals as to whether the Native policy will remain as it is (in effect, no policy at all), become liberal along the lines of "equal rights for all civilized men" or compromise, reverting back to the Native Representative Council of middle 1930's which proved such a failure.

I have first-hand knowledge of this struggle within the U. P., having had several talks during past weeks with South Africans intimately connected with political life. The most revealing talk I had was with Ronald Butcher, United Party Member of Parliament from Durban. Butcher is a member of an old Natal family and is in the fortunate position of being a politician without having to worry about his personal finances. He is serving his first term in Parliament, along with several other backbenchers including Prof. Fourie of economic integration fame (PBM-19).

The Butcher money comes from ownership of one of the largest wholesale general merchant establishments in Natal and, as a matter of course, we had lunch together in the ultra-conservative Durban Club. During a conversation which showed that he is in close sympathy with the ideals of the Central African Federation Butcher mentioned the Bloemfontein meeting.

"Fourie didn't point out anything that everyone didn't know already," Butcher said. "But I must say it was high time that someone pointed it out. The U. P. as it stands has no Native policy at all. When we had Smuts, we didn't need a policy--

he was enough of an institution to win an election on his own. But now we don't have a policy and we don't have Smuts and as a result the U. P. is losing ground every day. Something must be done and I think a more liberal Native policy is one of the answers.

"We're going to have a bit of a fight on our hands, passing such a policy over the objections of men like Piet Van der Byl, who was Smuts' Minister of Native Affairs. When Fourie was giving his speech Piet kept shaking his head and afterwards, in the lobby he looked absolutely lost. 'We didn't talk that way in the old days,' he said when someone asked him what he thought of the speech. There are a lot of men who agree with old Piet--and we're going to have trouble with them at Bloemfontein.

"It's plain that without a change in the policy we don't have a hope. Maybe they'll try to put a lot of compromising changes over on us that won't mean a thing. That won't help, it'll just mean that we go on struggling as we have been, never quite strong enough to put up a strong fight against the Nats.

"With a liberal policy we would probably lose a lot of support we have now among the moderate Afrikaners and conservative British, but we'd be in a lot stronger position if something came along that the Nats couldn't control. They call us the opposition now--it might be better if we actually were the opposition, with a policy clearly different from apartheid.

"I'll tell you one thing, though. There are about 12 of us back benchers who are prepared to resign from the U. P. unless some real steps are taken in November to give us a really concrete, reasonably liberal Native policy. Fourie will be the first to go and there are lot of us who would follow him."

Further light on the ability of the Nationalists to withstand any internal conflict was shed by a man with long experience in South African politics, former Senator E. H. Brookes. Brookes served under both Malan and Smuts as Senator representing Native interests. He retired from politics a few years ago following a heart attack and perpetual headache, the latter being the result of butting his head against the stone wall of Malan's apartheid.

Brookes is lecturing in history at the University of Natal at Pietermaritzburg and lives in a pleasant old house with a wide verandah that catches the morning sun. "The most you can hope for at Bloemfontein is a compromise that will be so vague that each politician will be able to interpret it in his own way," he said in the middle of an exceedingly gloomy conversation about South African race relations. "It will do no good at all. The old guard will be too timid to try anything drastic and the young guard won't have enough strength to scare anyone by threatening to resign. There are still too many middle-aged people voting for the United Party for old times' sake--they're voting for Smuts or voting the way their fathers voted.

"It's the Nats who've got the appeal because they have an ideal and they've been preaching that ideal to people from kindergarten on up through the universities. I've seen them, indoctrinating their young people to sleep, eat, think and breathe Nationalism. I don't think a dispute between Strydom and the moderates would have any effect on the strength of the Nationalists--they haven't made the mistake of basing all their strength on one man and Malan's retirement won't make any difference (we were talking about a week and a half before Malan's retirement announcement.)

"It will take something entirely unexpected," he went on, reminding me of Lituli (PBM-29), "to change the political situation. The Nationalists may well be in for the next 50 or 100 years--but then, you never can disregard the fact that no matter how static a situation is, there may be something--a war, an accident, the coming of a great man--that can change the situation completely in a short time.

"But it will take a lot more than Malan's resignation to hurt the Nats--especially with the United Party engaged with internal troubles of its own."

There will be a great deal written and said about Malan's resignation and his possible successor during the next few weeks. But as things stand now the change will make little difference, except in degree--more extreme with Strydom and less extreme with either Donges or Havenga. The possibility of a serious split between Nat extremists and Nat moderates is remote. And the possibility of the United Party girding its loins and making political hay while the sun shines is even more remote.

I have the feeling I'm watching one of the most uneventful changes of Prime Minister in the history of the Union of South Africa.

Sincerely,



Peter Bird Martin

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