

FIELD MARSHAL SMUTS: STATESMAN AND SOLDIER

His Influence on Current Political Thought

By 595939

JAN CHRISTIANN SMUTS, the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa, is known to the world as one of the greatest figures in the war effort of the United Nations, and as one of the greatest statesmen and soldiers of the age. But not so many, perhaps, are aware of the tremendous influence Field Marshal Smuts has had upon current political thought and of his part in shaping an international philosophy which has become one of the chief formative influences in the modern world.

He is not only a soldier and a statesman, but, by profession a lawyer—a King's Counsel, in fact—he is a man of highly-trained intellect and the author of several philosophical works of some importance, as well as a botanist and biologist of distinction. Field Marshal Lord Birdwood wrote, on the occasion of Field Marshal Smuts' reception of an honorary degree at Cambridge, that "had he never entered the service of his country and the Empire, he would have been honoured at Cambridge for his work as a philosopher alone."

As a statesman, Field Marshal Smuts owes much to his intellectual capacity, to his powers of analysis, and to his ability to see the relevance of all aspects of highly complex problems. These qualities, together with a remarkable breadth of vision, have made him able to diagnose political trends in a way which seems almost prophetic. He foresaw, perhaps, better than any other, the conflicts of interests between the British Commonwealth and Japan when he addressed the Imperial Conference of 1921. At Versailles he foresaw the new rise of the power of Prussia and warned the conference against the danger of destroying the south German power, in favour of the new Slav nationalisms, so that Vienna could not defend herself against Berlin. He advocated the conferring of complete

autonomy on the component races of the Hapsburg Empire, but the preservation of its entity within a federal constitution. Had his view prevailed, many believe that the present war might well have been prevented.

This same breadth of vision has led Field Marshal Smuts to base his policies as Prime Minister of South Africa on what he terms "Pan-Africanism."

One of the most difficult lessons of this war to grasp is that for the future we must think in terms of continents in our politics where we have thought in terms of countries. Technical developments have made this inevitable. The American isolationists are the people who most conspicuously fail to understand it. But it is understood well enough in South Africa, and this is what Field Marshal Smuts means when he speaks of Pan-Africanism. When the war broke out, General Hertzog and some of his colleagues maintained that this was a local European quarrel, but the far-seeing Field Marshal realized full well that it was world domination that Hitler sought, and that the Cape was as immediately concerned as Poland. The Ministry was split, but both Houses at Cape Town supported Field Marshal Smuts and war was declared. The invasion of Holland greatly strengthened his position, because of the Dutch origin of more than half of the European population of South Africa. But when Italy entered the war, his policy was truly vindicated. Within a few hours of Italy's declaration of war the South African Air Force was co-operating with the Rhodesian on the Kenya frontier, and since that time South African soldiers and airmen have acquitted themselves in the North and East African campaigns with a valour surpassed by none. There is still pro-Axis feeling in South Africa, of course, but it is insignificant compared with the