

**“In the crisis, who would tamper with the existing order?”
The political and public reaction
of English-speaking South Africans to the 1914 Rebellion**

*Louis Grundlingh**

In recent decades, research and writing on the history of white politics in South Africa has declined but for some notable exceptions by Alex Mouton and Lindie Koorts.¹ On the other hand, the social history of war has been budding, and even the First World War, which traditionally received less attention from South African historians than the South African War and the Second World War, has lately been well served by important studies from, among others, Bill Nasson and Albert Grundlingh.² The Rebellion of 1914 has likewise experienced renewed interest from historians such as Albert Grundlingh and Sandra Swart, and Anton Ehlers.³

Even so, this work has not quite taken cognisance of the fact that in the past couple of decades there has been a growing interest in social and ethnic identities worldwide, and the same is true of South Africa. Much attention has been paid to Afrikaner identity as well as to African identities such as those of the Zulu and Xhosa. However, lacunae exist on the identity of English speakers. Vivian Bickford-Smith corroborates this: “Strangely ... there is still very little analytical writing about the history of Englishness ... though England and the English are obviously present in an array of South African grand narratives ...”⁴

In the 2000s John Lambert undeniably established himself as a leader in this field. He produced a significant body of ground-breaking work on the history of

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1. F.A. Mouton, *Prophet without Honour: F.S. Malan, Afrikaner, South African and Cape Liberal* (Protea Bookhouse, Pretoria, 2012); and L. Koorts, *D.F. Malan and the Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2013).
 2. B. Nasson, *Springbooks on the Somme: South Africa in the First World War* (Penguin Books, London, 2007); A. Grundlingh, “Mutating Memories and the Making of a Myth: Remembering the SS Mendi Disaster, 1917–2007”, *South African Historical Journal*, 63, 1, 2011.
 3. A. Grundlingh and S. Swart, *Radelose Rebelle? Dinamika van die 1914–1915 Afrikanerrebelle* (Proteaboekhuis, Pretoria, 2009); A. Ehlers, “Rescuing the Rebels from Ruin: Afrikaner Nationalism and the Political Economy of the Helpmekaar (Mutual Aid) Movement and its £100 Fund, 1915–1917”, *Economic History of Developing Regions*, 26, 1, 2011, pp 75–100. However, this article does not focus on English language sources. There are numerous English language sources on the rebellion but they do not address issues of English identity. See for example, T.R.H. Davenport, “The South African Rebellion”, *English Historical Review*, 78, 1963; J. Bottomley, “The South African Rebellion: The Influence of Industrialisation, Poverty and Poor Whiteness”, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, Seminar Paper, June, 1982; and J. Kearney, “The Boer Rebellion in South African English Fiction”, *Journal of Literary Studies*, 14, 3/4, 1998. Sandra Swart has made a major contribution. See S. Swart, “Men of Influence’: The Ontology of Leadership in the 1914 Boer Rebellion”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 17, 1, 2004; S. Swart, “The ‘Five Shilling Rebellion’: Rural White Male Anxiety and the 1914 Boer Rebellion”, *South African Historical Journal*, 56, 2006; and S. Swart, “Motherhood and Otherhood’: Gendered Citizenship and Afrikaner Women in the South African 1914 Rebellion”, *African Historical Review*, 39, 1, 2007.
 4. V. Bickford-Smith, “Writing about Englishness: South Africa’s Forgotten Nationalism”, in G. MacPhee and P. Poddar (eds), *Empire and After: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective*, (Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford, 2007), p 57.

white English-speaking identity in early twentieth-century South Africa. He has literally kept the flag flying.⁵ He demonstrated that there was a growing awareness amongst British South Africans of a distinctive dominion/South African identity. However, he points out that compared to other Commonwealth countries, relatively little has been written on a budding South Africanism.⁶ His valuable contribution has strongly informed this article.

According to Saul Dubow, an imperial South African identity developed as an important offshoot of the political and economic context of the years following the South Africa War. He quotes the post-war high commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner's, view of an imperial South Africanism:

The solution was for British and Dutch alike to unite in loyal devotion to an Empire-State, in which Great Britain and South Africa would be partners and could work cordially together for the good of South Africa as a member of that greater whole. *And so, you see, the true Imperialist is also the best South African* (emphasis added).⁷

There were at least three strands of thought on the notion of "Britishness".⁸ Milner, convinced of the "racial" superiority of the British, envisaged that Afrikaners would willingly relinquish their identity for a South Africanism and become culturally, politically and economically dependent on Britain. Prime Minister Louis Botha foretold a South Africa where both races⁹ would be equal. The other source of their security would be to support moderate Afrikaners such as Botha and Jan Smuts (the Minister of Defence, Mines and the Interior).¹⁰ The latter, more in line with Milner's vision, saw a very close relationship with Britain as a powerful unifying force. The fact that they were in the minority strengthened their resolve to maintain their sense of "Britishness". Lambert writes that at the outbreak of the

5. J. Lambert, "South African British? Or Dominion South Africans?", *South African Historical Journal*, 43, 1, 2000, pp 197–222; J. Lambert, "Britishness, South Africanness and the First World War" in P. Buckner and R.D. Francis (eds.), *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2005), pp 285–305; J. Lambert, "An Identity Threatened: White English-speaking South Africans, Britishness and Dominion South Africanism, 1934–1939", *Kleio*, 37, 1, 2005, pp. 50-70; J. Lambert, "'The thinking is done in London': South Africa's English Language Press and Imperialism", in C. Kaul (ed.), *Media and the British Empire* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2006), pp 37–54; J. Lambert, "'Their finest hour': English-speaking South Africans and the Second World War", *South African Historical Journal*, 2008, 1, pp 69–70; J. Lambert, "Maintaining a British way of life: English-speaking South Africa's Patriotic, Cultural and Charitable Associations", *Historia* 2009, 54, 2, pp. 55–76; and J. Lambert, "'The last outpost: The Natalians, South Africa and the British Empire", in R Bickers (ed), *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Sea*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010), pp 150–177.
6. Lambert, "South African British? Or Dominion South Africans?", p 197.
7. Cited in S. Dubow, "Colonial Nationalism, the Milner Kindergarten and the Rise of 'South Africanism', 1902–10", *History Workshop Journal*, 43, 1997, p 56.
8. For a discussion of the term see C.V Reed, "Respectable Subjects of the Queen: The Royal Tour of 1901 and Imperial Citizenship in South Africa", in C. McGlynn, A. Mycock and J.W. McAuley (eds), *Britishness, Identity and Citizenship: The View from Abroad British Identities since 1707* (Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, Oxford, 2011), p 11. Saul Dubow focuses on the utility of the term in the context of the "British World". See S. Dubow, "How British was the British World? The Case of South Africa", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 37, 1, 2007, pp 2–3; C. Saunders unpacked the term in his, "Britishness in South Africa: Some Reflections", *Humanities Research*, 8, 2006, pp 61–69; while Bill Nasson indicated how it manifested in the British Empire, see B. Nasson, *Britannia's Empire: Making a British World* (Tempus Publishing, Stroud, 2004).
9. "Race" was culturally defined, hence the use of the term for English speakers and Afrikaans speakers.
10. Lambert, "South African British? Or Dominion South Africans?", pp 203 and 213.

First World War, English-speaking South Africans "... regarded themselves and South Africa as an integral part of the British World ..."¹¹ The imperial connection gave them security as did the visible manifestation and preservation of the British inheritance, i.e. parliamentary procedures and the loyalty of English language newspapers which reinforced British and imperial ideology and thus also a British identity.¹² By the time of the outbreak of the First World War, the concept of "Britishness"¹³ in combination with South Africanism was well established among influential South African politicians who fully supported this notion. The war was truly pivotal in encouraging the development amongst English speakers of South Africanism. As Lambert puts it:

The concept of a united South Africanism in partnership with the "Britishness" was bound to find a ready acceptance amongst British South Africans and proved as attractive to Cape politicians such as J.X. Merriman who had resolutely opposed British Imperial policy under Milner as it did to jingoist imperialists like Percy Fitzpatrick.¹⁴

This controversy did not concern average English-speaking South Africans. Their loyalty was enthusiastically bound to King and Empire, whose authority was unquestionably symbolised by the Union Jack.¹⁵ Thus, within two months of the outbreak of the First World War, Patrick Duncan, member of parliament, confirmed the dual loyalty of English-speaking South Africans – to Britain but also to Botha:

We had a great meeting here at the Wanderers last Friday to express our loyal and patriotic feelings – Bothaites and Labour and ourselves all on the platform together – in fact we are for the time all Bothaites and so far as I can see are likely to remain if he plays his political cards well...¹⁶

It is against this background that this study investigates the opinions of these hitherto-ignored observers of the 1914 Rebellion during the First World War. The article discusses and analyses the reaction of the chief opinion-makers of English-speaking South Africans to the Rebellion as expressed by male politicians and newspaper editors. John Lambert regards the English press as a "significant barometer" of British South African society.¹⁷

With a strong South African identity powerfully linked to the British Empire, and the prospect of a truly united South Africa for white people, the very idea of a Rebellion against this new, carefully crafted, political dispensation was far-fetched for English-speaking South Africans. It was no surprise, then, that they were bewildered by the Rebellion, the actions of the rebel leaders and the complicity of their silent political backers. Their belief in the sustainability of the Union was

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11. Lambert, "Britishness, South Africanness and the First World War", p 285.
 12. The English language newspapers determinedly expressed the same unconditional loyalty to Britain and the Empire during the Second World War. See Lambert, "'Their finest hour': English speaking South Africans and the Second World War", pp 69–70.
 13. For an extensive discussion of the way it manifested in white civil society see Lambert, "South African British? Or Dominion South Africans?", pp 208–211.
 14. Lambert, "South African British? Or Dominion South Africans?", p 201.
 15. Lambert, "South African British? Or Dominion South Africans?", p 202. Also see J Lambert, "Munition Factories ... Turning out a Constant Supply of Living Material: White South African Elite Boys' Schools and the First World War", *South African Historical Journal*, 51, 2004, pp 67–86.
 16. Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, P. Duncan Collection (hereafter Duncan Papers), BC 294, D.5.8.39, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 6 October 1914.
 17. Lambert, "'The thinking is done in London': South Africa's English Language Press and Imperialism", p 39.

severely challenged by these events. Their efforts to understand and explain the Rebellion, and their views on the penalties that were later meted out, form the main focus points of this article.

An inexplicable event

Many English speakers were baffled by the 1914 Rebellion. Duncan, one of their most influential leaders, was also bewildered: “What is it all about? It is really not easy to say ... it may even yet end in comic opera. On the other hand it may be very serious.”¹⁸ On a later occasion he described it as a “funny business” when the rebels in Heilbron pulled down the Union Jack, trampled it, and hoisted the old Free State flag. However, they pulled it down again, not knowing which flag properly represented their cause.¹⁹

The Rebellion raised many questions among English speakers. Firstly, why would the rebels take up arms for their independence and freedom? According to J.C. MacNeillie, a member of parliament, there was no better time in South Africa than the present. After all, South Africa had a responsible government and white representatives from all four the provinces agreed with the vast majority on a constitution that guaranteed their freedom.²⁰ P.A. Silburn, another parliamentarian, added that rebels now had more freedom under the British flag than they had ever enjoyed in the old Boer republics.²¹ No rebellion could guarantee them more freedom than they already had.²² H.A. Olivier added that their own government was, after all, in power and that they could pass legislation without any interference from Britain.²³ Rebellions were usually only successful if there were no other avenues to raise grievances. This was not the case in South Africa because there were regular elections in which the electors could oust an unpopular government.²⁴

The editor of the *Pretoria News* somewhat sarcastically wrote:

You say we took your country from you. Nonsense! We gave it to you ... It is true that we deprived you of your independence as a State, but in the place of it we gave you your independence as a vast Dominion; one of the sister nations of the British Empire. Daughter in your step-mother's house, if you like, but certainly mistress in your own.²⁵

For the editor of the *Rand Daily Mail* it was likewise incomprehensible that intelligent men such as General C.F. de Wet (officially still a government senator) sided with the rebellion. How could the rebels make propaganda for a so-called suppressed group that had already been ruling themselves for seven years? In a rather scathing attack on De Wet, he wrote:

18. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.42, P. Duncan to Lady Selborne, 28 October 1914.

19. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.42, P. Duncan to Lady Selborne, 28 October 1914.

20. Parliamentary Debates (Hansard), (hereafter Debates), 10 March 1915, column 269, speech by J.C. MacNeillie.

21. Debates, 17 March 1915, columns 460–461, speech by P.A. Silburn.

22. National Archives of South Africa (hereafter NASA), Transvaal Archives (hereafter TAB), G.S. Preller Papers (hereafter Preller Papers), A787, Volume 212, file 144, *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 December 1914.

23. Debates, 10 March 1915, column 269, speech by H.A. Oliver.

24. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 156, speech by T. Boydell.

25. Preller Papers, A787, Volume 263, file 252, *Pretoria News*, 9 October 1915.

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If so, perhaps one of them can explain the hotchpotch of absurdity, that headedness and misrepresentation which De Wet presented to the people of Vrede, with the aid of a sjambok, as the case for overthrowing the Government elected by the people of South Africa and ignoring the Parliament in which that Government has an overwhelming majority. A more hopelessly illegal and ridiculous case it is impossible to conceive.²⁶

The above quotations clearly demonstrate that leading English speakers were rather uninformed of other forces such as a nascent Afrikaner nationalism and the economic hardship many of the rebels had been enduring. For many English speakers the rebellion was simply incomprehensible. Duncan even thought that the “thing may fizzle out” if Botha could catch Beyers²⁷ within a few days,²⁸ but less than two weeks later he reversed his opinion stating that “we seem to be slowly drifting into a sort of civil war here”.²⁹

English speakers were furthermore offended by what they perceived as the “base ingratitude”³⁰ being shown towards the British Empire. The Treaty of Vereeniging had guaranteed advantages to both sides. After all, the former republican burghers were surely motivated to pay allegiance to the British crown because they realised that Britain would honour her commitment by granting a liberal constitution to South Africa.³¹

Moreover it was seen as shocking and outrageous that the rebels staged their rebellion to change the terms of the Treaty of Vereeniging in their favour, renounce the British connection and demand a republic at the same time that the British Empire was involved in a war and was in serious danger. The vehement reaction condemning the rebels of disloyalty and cowardice is proof of this.³²

The editor of *The Friend* lamented the fact that rebels and their sympathisers were not honest to openly acknowledge that they used the British Empire’s misfortune as their chance to rebel.³³

Trying to understand the causes of the 1914 Rebellion

Duncan suggested that the rebels might simply be anti-government, objecting to Botha’s expedition to German South West Africa but he also acknowledged that an “old anti-British feeling and the republican sentiment” might form part of the reasons.³⁴ He, more than any other English politician, seems to have had some awareness of the dynamics underlying the 1914 Rebellion when he said: “All these things – political quarrels, personal animosities, racial antipathies, republican

26. Preller Papers, A787, Volume 212, file 144, *Rand Daily Mail*, 10 November 1914.

27. Before the 1914 Rebellion, General C.F. Beyers was commandant-general of the Union Defence Force. He resigned and subsequently became the leader of the rebellion.

28. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.42, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 28 October 1914.

29. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.44, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 11 November 1914.

30. *The Friend*, 4 March, 1915.

31. Debates, 8 March 1915, columns 187–188, speech by H. Burton.

32. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 187, speech by H. Burton; 10 March 1915, column 240, speech by W.B. Madeley; 10 March 1915, column 271, speech by H.A. Oliver; 11 March 1915, column 310, speech by H.L. Currey; 12 March 1915, column 325, speech by T. Smartt; 17 March 1915, column 436, speech by C. Henwood; and 21 April 1915, column 1400, speech by J.X. Merriman.

33. *The Friend*, 4 March 1915.

34. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.42, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 28 October 1914.

sentiments and bitter memories of the old war – are the material on which Beyers and his friends have worked...³⁵

Other English speakers pointed to specifics. To them the rebels clearly indicated that they wanted to lower the British flag and hoist those of the old republics, or to establish an independent South African republic.³⁶ Although this might have been the general impression among English-speaking South Africans, J.M. Carpell, employed by the Intelligence Service, was of the opinion that this was not the intention of the rebels.³⁷ Duncan interpreted the rebellion as a “purely political movement and not against the flag but this is only because the mass of the people do not really feel any grievance against the flag”.³⁸ However, he missed the importance of the flag. After all, it represented everything British. Duncan was furthermore convinced that the rebels did not grasp – nor did the wish to grasp – the meaning of the British Empire or her traditions.³⁹ They regarded it as negative or even as a fake: “... it is to them merely England which they have not yet become reconciled to ... it is a mission field for some of us to make the non-British races in the Dominions realise the Empire.”⁴⁰ For J.X. Merriman, again, the fundamental reason for the rebellion was an intense hatred for everything British.⁴¹

Furthermore, there was a consciousness amongst some English speakers that the rebels entertained pro-German sympathies and wished that Germany rather than Britain would win the war, thus making it possible for them to regain their independence.⁴² There was indeed a very strong suspicion that Germany was involved in the rebellion. Some claimed that Germany launched a propaganda programme throughout the country.⁴³ This was also the view of the editor of *The Friend*. The paper argued that General Manie Maritz’s⁴⁴ agreement with the governor of German South-West Africa automatically implied that the German government in Berlin was consulted. This was sufficient proof that Germany had planned aggression against the Union long before parliament decided on 9 September 1914 to launch a campaign against German South-West Africa.⁴⁵ J.X. Merriman, however, based on the evidence which served before the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Rebellion ... denied any definitive evidence of a German

35. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.42, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 28 October 1914.

36. Union of South Africa, Judicial Commission of Inquiry into the Causes and Circumstances Relating to the Recent Rebellion in South Africa – Minutes of Evidence (UG 42-1916), p 71, evidence from T.E. Turner; p 183 evidence from E. Reading; p 235 evidence from H. Rose-Innes; p 258 evidence from C.L.S. Cherry; p 327, evidence from Commandant A. Ross; p 294 evidence from A.E. Leary and p 337 evidence from J.B. Skirving. See also Union of South Africa, Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Rebellion (SC 1-1915), p 189, evidence from J.C. Juta; and pp 191 and 198, evidence from W Whippi. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.42, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 29 October 1914; and P. Lewsen (ed.), *Selections from the Correspondence of John X Merriman, 1905–1924* (Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1969), p 269; Merriman to Lady Courtney, 4 November 1914.

37. Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee on the Rebellion, SC 1-1915, pp 62 and 65, evidence by J.M. Carpell.

38. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.43, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 4 November 1914.

39. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.48, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 9 December 1914.

40. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.47, P Duncan to Lady Selborne, 1 December 1914.

41. Debates, 21 April 1915, column 1401, speech by J.X. Merriman.

42. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.43, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 4 November 1914.

43. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.42, P Duncan to Lady Selborne, 28 October 1914.

44. He was one of the leaders of the 1914 Rebellion.

45. *The Friend*, 13 October 1914. Also see Preller Papers, A787, Volume 212, file 144, *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 December 1914.

propaganda campaign.⁴⁶ Be that as it may, some English speakers supported the idea that the mere possibility of German help and moral support was an additional reason for the rebellion.

Opposition to the actions of Botha and his government was also raised as another reason for the rebellion. According to Duncan, some Afrikaans speakers had already contemplated a rebellion when they discovered that Botha and Smuts had pledged their unquestionable loyalty to the British Empire. The rebels might have thought that Botha was only paying lip service to the British Empire and would break the imperial ties once the time was ripe: "But lately they have come to realise that Botha does not mean to do anything of that sort and that he has accepted the imperial connection as final ... That has turned them into bitter enemies of Botha and Smuts."⁴⁷

Similar views were expressed before the Select Committee. The Afrikaner rebels wanted to get rid of what was to them a *verengelste* (anglicised) Botha.⁴⁸ Some English speakers even held the view that the political jealousy of J.B.M. Hertzog⁴⁹ against Botha was at the root of the rebellion.⁵⁰

In addition, the English speakers were aware that there were other less pronounced, but nevertheless important reasons for some rebels. In his evidence before the Judicial Commission of Enquiry, H.T. Watkins, a member of parliament, claimed that there was a real fear amongst the rebels that they might, according to the provisions of the Defence Act, become British soldiers in service of the British government. General J.H. de la Rey⁵¹ had already warned the burghers about this possibility in November 1913. Consequently he urged them not to sign the service oath.⁵²

In another attempt to understand the reasons behind the 1914 Rebellion, Duncan, acutely aware of the prevailing agricultural circumstances and that most of the rebels were farmers, wrote to Lady Selborne, pointing out that the current drought had been devastating for the burghers:

The long drought in the Free State has turned a great part of the Province into a desert and many of the people are ruined. That will help to swell old de Wet's commandos and his personal influence with them is very great.⁵³

46. Debates, 2 April 1915, column 1400–1401, speech by J.X. Merriman.

47. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.43, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 4 November 1914. E Reading raised a similar view before the Judicial Commission of Inquiry, UG 42-1916, p 183, evidence from E. Reading.

48. Report of the Parliamentary Select Committee, SC 1-1915, pp 62 and 65, evidence by J.M. Carpell; pp 190 and 196, evidence by W. Whipp; Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.42, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 28 October 1914; and R.K. Cope, *Comrade Bill. The Life and Times of WH Andrews, Workers' Leader* (Stewart Printers, Cape Town, c1944), p 155.

49. Before the 1914 Rebellion, he was a member of the Botha cabinet as Minister of Justice and Native Affairs.

50. Lewsen, *Selections from the Correspondence of John X Merrimann*, p 269, Merriman to Lady Courtney, 4 November 1914.

51. Before the 1914 Rebellion, he was a member of the newly established Defence Council.

52. Judicial Commission of Inquiry, UG 42-16, pp 251–252, Evidence from Captain H.T. Watkins.

53. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.42, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 28 October 1914.

Duncan went on to argue that this might well have made the burghers reckless because they had lost what little they had and “rebellion does not seem such a serious thing to desperate men.”⁵⁴

In addition, in his attempt to understand the minds of the rebels, Duncan wrote rather patronisingly that the rebels had been obliged to adapt to many political changes since the South African War. He had hardly restored his own farm and stock when he had to accept the notion of “responsible government”, the British parliamentary system and party politics, and the formation of the Union:

He [the burgher] has been dragged rather breathlessly through all this while the men whom he had followed into it and who understood what had been happening were too busy or too indifferent to him to be careful about showing him his way ... anything that led away from the old paths was wrong.⁵⁵

The role of Afrikaner military and political leaders

The role of military and political leaders was another important dimension in the thinking of English-speaking South Africans about the causes of the 1914 Rebellion. The first sign of dissatisfaction among some Afrikaans speakers was the surprise resignation on 15 September 1914 of C.F. Beyers, barely a month after Britain had declared war on Germany. English speakers were outraged and shocked, accusing him of treason.⁵⁶ Judge T. Graham wrote to H. Rose-Innes, the chief justice of South Africa: “The news of De Wet’s and Beyers’ defection came as a great shock to this community ... I thought that Beyers was too well educated to play the traitor in this fashion.”⁵⁷

Allegedly Beyers claimed that South Africa’s intention to take steps against German South-West Africa was unlawful because the Germans had not attacked South Africa. English speakers dismissed this viewpoint. The British Empire was involved in a war against Germany. Because South Africa was a part of the empire former and German South-West Africa part of Germany, they were both (on their respective sides) also involved in the war. For English South Africans it would be a poor strategy to wait for the enemy to cross the border into South Africa before they responded.⁵⁸

Beyers’s decision baffled them. Two weeks before his resignation, at a citizen force meeting at Booyens, Johannesburg, Beyers still expressed the conviction that it was a soldier’s duty to carry out orders irrespective of whether or not he agreed with these orders. Therefore, if the Union was to be attacked, Boer and Brit would defend the country side-by-side.⁵⁹ *The Cape Argus* lauded his speech and believed that this would bring the two language groups closer sooner rather than later.⁶⁰ When Beyers resigned he still reiterated the point he had made

54. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.48, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 9 December 1914.

55. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.9.11, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 18 March 1915.

56. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.43, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 4 November, 1914.

57. South African National Library, Sir J. Rose-Innes Papers (hereafter Rose-Innes Papers), no 538, T. Graham to J. Rose-Innes, 21 October 1914. Also compare NASA, A1, J.C. Smuts Papers, (hereafter Smuts Papers) File 190, no. 102, L. Phillips to Smuts, 24 September 1914.

58. *The Friend*, 22 September 1914.

59. *The Star*, 31 August 1914.

60. *The Cape Argus*, 31 August 1914.

at Booyens. The editor of *The Friend* was quick to point out the contradiction, accusing him of “trimming his sails to the wind”.⁶¹

Beyers’s actions unleashed a huge hate campaign against him. The strategy was to ignore him and to pretend that he had not resigned. According to the editor of the *Pretoria News*:

The English press treat him with the contempt he deserves. The Government have declined to give him the notoriety that he would pursue; they prefer that he should seek that oblivion which his conscience and the contempt of his fellowmen may grant him.⁶²

This viewpoint reverberated throughout parliament. For MPs such as Thomas Smartt and E. Nathan, the former respect they had for Beyers now changed into scorn.⁶³

The ignominious death of Beyers provoked little compassion among the ranks of English speakers. To many of them he deserved what had befallen him and it would be wrong to present him as a martyr.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, *The Cape Argus* took another, more sympathetic view. The newspaper mourned the fact that a man with so many exceptional talents, respected by both English and Afrikaans speakers, had become a traitor.⁶⁵

Earlier, *The Star* had regretted De Wet’s resignation from the Union Defence Board in January 1913. After all, his appointment had carried general approval because he was universally acclaimed as an excellent soldier and according to the paper, had declared himself eager to support the interests of both language groups.⁶⁶ However, when it became known that De Wet was one of the leaders of the rebellion, the attitude of English speakers changed radically. *The Friend* launched a sharp attack against him: “Two months ago the name of Gen. C de Wet, patriot and warrior, was an honoured one throughout South Africa and the world generally. Today the patriot is a rebel and the warrior a handsupper ...”⁶⁷

English-speaking South Africans attacked De Wet from various angles: He was uninformed,⁶⁸ his followers were scared of him⁶⁹ and he threatened the country with a new kind of terror.⁷⁰ Furthermore, they blamed him for again raising issues that had already been solved in 1902 – for English speakers at least. He had now painted himself into a corner.⁷¹ Duncan wrote that many Afrikaners

61. *The Friend*, 27 October 1914.

62. Preller Papers, A 787, Volume 263, file 86, *Pretoria News*, 23 September 1914.

63. Debates, 12 March 1915, column 331, speech by T.W. Smartt; and 12 March 1915, column 343, Speech by E. Nathan.

64. *The Friend*, 10 December 1914, quotes from *Transvaal Leader*; *Rand Daily Mail*; *The Star* and *Pretoria News*, 9 December 1914.

65. *The Cape Argus*, 9 December 1914.

66. *The Star*, 9 January 1913.

67. *The Friend*, 4 December 1914. “Handsupper” became a derogatory term used against Afrikaners who laid down their arms during the South African War. It is quite significant that the English speakers used the same term to describe De Wet’s decision to take up arms against the government. An explanation for this could be that he was now seen as betraying the cause of establishing a unified South Africa.

68. L.E. Neame, *General Hertzog* (London, undated) p 174.

69. NASA, Archive of the Prime Minister (hereafter PM), 1/1/149, J.M. Taylor to the acting private secretary of the Prime Minister, 9 November 1914.

70. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 190, speech by H. Burton.

71. Rose-Innes Papers, no 535, Duncan to Rose-Innes, 23 October 1914.

though he had lost his balance.⁷² De Wet's ostensible indignation about the decision to invade German South West Africa was rejected but also seen as a smoke-screen for the real reason for the 1914 Rebellion – the declaration of a republic.⁷³

The condemnation that was meted out on General Manie Maritz, the other prominent leader of the rebellion, was vehement. *The Cape Times* accused him of being a mercenary fighting for the Germans. He was accused of deceiving his followers and persuading them to commit treason.⁷⁴ English-speaking parliamentarians castigated him. Thus M. Kentridge maintained that he was a traitor bent on a coup,⁷⁵ while Merriman described him as a kind of anachronism: "Maritz lived out of his country. He should have been on a pirate ship ..."⁷⁶ Sir David Harris also demolished him, describing him as "the most despicable character who had disgraced this earth since the Christian era".⁷⁷

Duncan, conscious of the assumed close bond between Maritz and Hertzog, was very curious about the latter's take on Maritz's actions: "But what is interesting now is to see if Hertzog and his family will disown Maritz. Hitherto they have been silent."⁷⁸

It indeed seems as if Hertzog had to bear the brunt of English speakers' attack. Some were convinced that Hertzog should take primary and moral responsibility for this "national calamity",⁷⁹ loss of lives and property, and the commensurate suffering.⁸⁰

According to this view, Hertzog spread anti-British sentiments and thereby deceived many of his followers. Hertzog's speeches not only had the potential to lead to a catastrophe – this was exactly what happened.⁸¹ Although Merriman did not accuse Hertzog of any specific role, he alleged that he had delivered "the most foolish and most injudicious speeches" with the intention "to do a great deal of harm" by stirring up feelings, i.e. causing the rebellion. Once this was done, he neglected his duty and did not do what he could to put out the fire.⁸² Duncan wrote to Lady Selborne that De Wet was livid with Hertzog who should have looked after the political matters of the rebellion, "but has kept his own skin out of danger and let the others embark on a hopeless struggle".⁸³

The agitation against Hertzog reached fever pitch in the House of Assembly. In a melodramatic speech, W. Quinn lambasted Hertzog:

I would like to shoot the member for Smithfield [Hertzog], but he will never be shot; he's quite safe, he works in the dark ... You can't shoot men in the dark ... a man

72. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.46, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 23 November 1914.

73. *The Friend*, 6 November 1914.

74. *The Cape Times* as quoted in *The Friend*, 16 October 1914.

75. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 158, speech by M. Kentridge.

76. Debates, 10 March 1915, column 251, speech by J.X. Merriman.

77. Debates, 17 March 1915, column 442, speech by D. Harris.

78. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.40, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 14 October 1914.

79. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 163, speech by E.H. Walton.

80. Debates; 8 March 1915, column 163, speech by E.H. Walton; 8 March 1915, column 192, speech by H. Burton and 11 March 1915, column 278, speech by W. Rockey.

81. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 188, speech by H. Burton.

82. Debates, 21 April 1915, columns 1399-1400, speech by J.X. Merriman.

83. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.49, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 22 December 1914.

who sits at home in safety and allows his dupes to be shot and then speaks in this House – why it is a waste of time to talk about him.⁸⁴

Hertzog's silence on this matter was incomprehensible to English speakers. Why did he not dissociate himself openly from the rebellion and thereby also distance himself from any German intrigue or an attempted coup d'état?⁸⁵ H.A. Oliver lamented the fact that "[t]here was a time when the honorary member of Smithfield could go about the country making speeches, and yet when he might have averted a serious disaster and saved much loss of life, he remained silent".⁸⁶

Some held the view that if Hertzog had simply released a statement that he did not support the rebellion, there would not even have been one. Irrespective of whether the government was right or wrong in its decisions on entering the war on Britain's behalf, he could have condemned the rebellion as an unlawful action.⁸⁷ For the editor of *The Star*, "Hertzog preferred an uncomfortable position on the fence rather than strengthening the hands of the Government in a time of national crisis".⁸⁸

By not speaking out and taking action acting against the rebels, Hertzog not only missed a golden opportunity to prevent the rebellion but he also created the impression that he was in cahoots with them. Duncan expected that Hertzog would condemn Maritz's actions but he did no such thing.⁸⁹ In a letter a week later to Lady Selborne, he expressed his frustration thus: "Hertzog as usual is issuing oracular statements which no one understands and offers his services to the Govt. 'to avoid the shedding of blood' but does not say in which capacity and does not disown the rebels."⁹⁰

The Friend's argument was that Article 4 of the National Party's programme clearly stated that it recognised its commitment to the British Empire. After all, during the 1913–1914 mine workers' strike it had clearly stated that it was the duty of every citizen to support the government to maintain law and order. If this was indeed Hertzog's point of view, then surely it should also have applied to the rebellion.

There seems to be a wide difference in principle between the Gen. Hertzog of January last and the General Hertzog of nine months later. We prefer the Hertzog of January. The one of the present day has incurred a very heavy moral responsibility by remaining silent upon what nine months earlier he rightly declared to be a first essential of all true governments.⁹¹

Clearly English speakers did not understand the political underpinnings of these events: the First World War changed the South African political landscape which meant a shift in loyalties and priorities. Nevertheless, Hertzog's lack of action to limit or even curtail the actions of the rebels, gave rise to hatred amongst the English speakers against him.

84. Debates, 5 March 1915, column 146, speech by J.W. Quinn.

85. Debates, 17 March 1915, column 459, speech by P.A. Silurn.

86. Debates, 10 March 1915, column 270 speech by H.A. Olivier. Also see Debates, 15 March 1915, column 353, speech by T. Watt.

87. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 163, speech by E.H. Walton; 8 March 1915, column 192, speech by H. Burton and 10 March 1915, column 240, speech by W.B. Madeley.

88. *The Star*, 20 October 1914.

89. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.40, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 14 October 1914.

90. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.43, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 4 November 1914.

91. *The Friend*, 7 January 1915.

Likewise, English-speaking South Africans were baffled by the silence of the revered ex-president of the Orange Free State, M.T. Steyn. After all, he was still very influential among Afrikaners, yet did not openly voice his rejection of the rebellion either. According to *The Friend*, Steyn's silence in the rural areas was interpreted as an endorsement of the 1914 Rebellion.⁹² E.H. Walton believed that strong opposition against the rebellion by such an important leader would have led to its coming to naught:

On several occasions De Wet was asked by the burghers, "Where are Hertzog and Steyn?" and in every case the answer given by De Wet was, "Hertzog and Steyn are with us". If these two names had not been used, the burghers would have gone home.⁹³

In similar vein Merriman blamed Steyn that he did not act during the crisis caused by the rebellion as was expected of him.⁹⁴ He thought that "... it would be a moment of true patriotism were you [Steyn] to come forward as the *pater patriae* at this supreme moment."⁹⁵ However, his appeal to use his influence to check the unrest came to naught. It also ended years of correspondence.⁹⁶

Other letters to Steyn requested that he try to convince the rebels to change their minds. The nation was being misled by German henchmen who were convincing them that their leaders supported the rebellion. Only Steyn could change and/or correct this perception, so that the honour and integrity of the country could be upheld.⁹⁷

For Duncan, the actions of the military leaders, the inaction of the political leaders and the gullibility of their followers created fertile ground for the burghers to support the uprising. From a clearly preconceived and prejudiced angle he wrote: "The Boer as you know – the backveld one – is very ill informed as to what is going on and very easily led by those whom he has been accustomed to follow."⁹⁸

In stark contrast with the condemnation they heaped on the leaders of the rebellion, English speakers only had praise for Botha and Smuts for their leadership and suppression of the rebellion.⁹⁹ Botha stepped up to the challenge by putting his political career in jeopardy to keep his promise to defend the British flag and thus save South Africa from political anarchy. Moreover, South Africans were indebted to him for his decision to take command of the Union Defence Force, as well as the speed and manner in which he snuffed out the rebellion. The

92. *The Friend*, 27 October 1914.

93. Debates, 8 March 1915, columns 163–164, speech by E.H. Walton.

94. Rose-Innes Papers, no. 533, J.X. Merriman to J. Rose-Innes, 20 October 1914.

95. P.M. Laurence, *The Life of John Xavier Merriman* (Constable, London, 1930) pp 355–356. Also see Smuts Papers, Volume 190, no. 95, J.X. Merriman to Smuts, 29 November 1914.

96. P. Lewsen, *John X Merriman: Paradoxical South African Statesman* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1982), p 368.

97. *The Star*, 15 October 1914, Open letter from Senator W.K. Tucker to ex-president M.T. Steyn. See also Free State Provincial Archive, M.T. Steyn Collection, A 156, M.W. MacKenzie to Steyn, 25 September 1914.

98. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.39, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 6 October 1914.

99. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.46, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 23 November 1914. Also see Lambert, "Britishness, South Africanness and the First World War", p 289.

enthusiastic support was widespread.¹⁰⁰ Some English speakers even thought that his suppression of the rebellion was an act of penance on behalf of his people.¹⁰¹ It was clear that carrying out his duty was more important to him than popularity amongst his people.¹⁰²

Although Botha could have used English speakers to help him suppress the rebellion, he tried to minimise conflict between the two groups by using the commandos to crush the rebels. According to Duncan, this decision was driven by the realisation that it would be too risky to use English-speaking South Africans. It would only have led to further polarisation between the two language groups. This decision had a huge positive impact on the view of English speakers.¹⁰³ The editor of *The Friend* expressed his reaction:

What will have a greater effect upon the disaffected parts of the country than the capture of the leaders, is the appearance everywhere of Government commandos in strong force, and, what is still more convincing, under Dutch-speaking commanders ... These things are better than columns of Parliamentary oratory in disillusioning the misguided men who have taken up arms against the Government.¹⁰⁴

Penalties and sentences

English-speaking South Africans regarded Botha's handling of the 1914 Rebellion with reverence: "... a very great deal depends on Botha. If anything happened to him the future would be very uncertain".¹⁰⁵ This convinced them that he would likewise deal judiciously with the thorny issue of penalties for the rebels. Some English speakers in parliament gave him unlimited powers.¹⁰⁶ *The Star* similarly expressed this sentiment:

General Botha has handled the problem of unexampled delicacy with such consummate skill and tact that we consider it would be churlish in the extreme, even unpatriotic, to say or do anything which might weaken his hand and play into those of the enemy by bickering and carping criticism over non-essentials or side issues.¹⁰⁷

There were two factions among English speakers on the penalties to be meted out to the rebels: the moderates and the extremists. On the one hand, some openly accused the rebels of deceit: they were traitors who intimidated law-abiding citizens and robbed traders and farmers. This larceny on their part came at a huge loss of money and lives and was likely to put back agricultural and industrial development by at least a century.¹⁰⁸ Merriman unequivocally regarded the rebels as thieves who were unashamedly masquerading as patriots:

100. *The Friend*, 11 December 1914; *The Star*, 12 October 1914; and Debates, 11 March 1915, column 305, speech by A. Woolls-Sampson; and 17 March 1915 column 444, speech by H. Wiltshire.

101. Debates, 11 March 1915, column 305, speech by A. Woolls-Sampson.

102. Smuts Papers, Volume 190, no. 93, J.X. Merriman to Smuts, 16 November 1914.

103. Duncan Papers, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 28 October 1914.

104. *The Friend*, 9 December 1914.

105. Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.8.42, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 28 October 1914.

106. Debates, 10 March 1915, column 268, speech by T. Orr; 10 March 1915 column 268, speech by H.A. Oliver and 11 March 1915, speech by A. Woolls-Samson; PM 1/1/476, C.P. Crewe to Botha, 10 December 1914; *The Cape Argus*, 21 December 1914; and *The Friend*, 13 February 1915.

107. *The Star*, 19 January 1915.

108. *The Friend*, 11 December 1914 and 26 February 1915; *Sunday Times*, 20 December 1914. See also Preller Papers, Volume 212, file 144, Letter from A Bailey, undated.

If you want to stop what is called "rebellion"... you will stop them much sooner by making a few salient examples of horse stealers, store-brokers and people of that sort ... There are hundreds of men ... who don't mind being called "rebels". No, they become patriots ... which is the last word for a scoundrel.¹⁰⁹

Likewise, the parliamentarian A. Woolls-Sampson ridiculed the rebels as "needy adventurers" who, as cowards, were quick to plead for mercy, claiming that they were misled.¹¹⁰ Some parliamentarians were forthright in their support for heavy penalties. Soon after the outbreak of the rebellion, English-speaking Natalians demanded the harshest penalty whilst *The South African News* declared that the whole country would support the government in meting out the severest penalties.¹¹¹ In the same vein Sir Percy Fitzpatrick condemned the Labour Party's plea for leniency towards the rebels.¹¹²

In the opinion of some, the penalties to be handed down should not be too lenient for a crime like a rebellion and the death penalty was not too heavy for the rebel officers.¹¹³ For Sir John Geo. Fraser, heavy penalties would act as a deterrent to those who might consider a repeat performance.¹¹⁴ Merriman's view was that light penalties might have a boomerang effect on the loyalists. He wrote to Smuts that the overwhelming majority of citizens were law-abiding and supported Botha's actions – some against their political conviction. Their feelings should therefore be respected: "These are the very bone and sinew of the future and *undue* leniency may discourage and alienate them."¹¹⁵

Moreover, there were English speakers who fervently complained that the rebels on trial were seen by some as heroes. This created the assumption that high treason was not a serious offence. Courts should not be transformed into "reception rooms in which foolish people can express admiration of them in a manner offensive to loyal citizens".¹¹⁶

In addition, the leaders should be severely punished to emphasise the seriousness of the crime and to avert a possible repetition. For J.W. Henderson, it was of paramount importance because some black and Indian people were showing an unusual interest in the rebellion.¹¹⁷ Likewise J.M. Taylor, town clerk of Johannesburg, made no bones about it:

I am of opinion that the greatest effort should be made... to run De Wet to earth and make an example of him, so that these faint-hearted mortals can see that Botha and the Government will show no mercy to the rebel leaders.¹¹⁸

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109. Debates, 10 March 1915, column 250, speech by J.X. Merriman.
 110. Debates, 11 March 1915, column 303, speech by A. Woolls-Samson.
 111. *The South African News* as quoted from *The Star*, 13 October 1914.
 112. A.Duminy and B. Guest, *Interfering in Politics. A Biography of Sir Patrick Fitzpatrick* (Lawry Publishers, Johannesburg, 1987), p 211.
 113. Debates, 17 March 1915, column 436–437, speech by C. Henwood; column 438, speech by J.C. MacNeillie.
 114. S.F. Malan, "Die Rol van J. Geo. Fraser in die Vrystaat, 1863–1927", MA thesis, University of the Free State, 1971, p 328; and Debates, 10 March 1915, column 271, speech by H.A. Oliver.
 115. Smuts Papers, Volume 190, no. 96, J.X. Merriman to Smuts, 15 December 1914.
 116. *Sunday Times*, 14 February 1915; Preller Collection, A 787, Vol. 155, file 38. *Pretoria News*, 27 February 1915.
 117. PM 1/1/476, J.W. Henderson to Botha, 10 December 1914.
 118. PM 1/1/476, J.M. Taylor to Botha's acting secretary, 9 November 1914.

Not all English speakers agreed. Newspapers and parliamentarians were adamant that there should be a differentiation between the ordinary rebels and the leaders. The leaders had been guilty of shamelessly misguiding the average citizens and this made their transgression even more objectionable. Therefore they should receive the harshest penalty possible.¹¹⁹ Those leaders with an officers' rank fell into another category. Not only did they want to overthrow the government but they had committed the worst possible offence of any soldier: defying military discipline. They should therefore be tried by a military court.¹²⁰

A case in point was that of Jopie Fourie. He had upheld the cause of the rebellion whilst still a captain in the Union Defence Force. For English speakers this was totally deplorable. Despite the fact that he was carrying rank in the Union Defence Force and thus should have obeyed and honoured the military code, he used the first opportunity to misuse that trust to carry out a treacherous conspiracy.¹²¹ In addition, he rubbed English speakers up the wrong way. During the trial he celebrated his actions, was prepared to pay for the consequences and showed no remorse for what he had done.¹²² In short, they considered Fourie to be guilty and deserving of the death penalty.

Such statements indicate a harsh and emotional condemnation of the rebel leaders from the side of most English-speaking South Africans. The rebels transgressed the laws of the land and they neglected to make use of the correct constitutional ways through which to raise their grievances. Hence it was appropriate that they should carry the consequences of their deeds.

Yet there were other voices too. C.P. Crewe supported Botha's "forgive and forget" policy in not demanding a summary penalty. He warned that such action could easily be interpreted as hatred against Afrikaans speakers.¹²³ He also held the view that although justice should take its course, especially for those who murdered and were traitors, the penalties should be lenient.¹²⁴ Thomas Smartt, the leader of the opposition, in an interview with *The Star*, supported this viewpoint, saying: "Leaders, likewise members of Parliament who took the oath to be faithful and bear true allegiance to the King richly deserve punishment, but I have no sympathy with the demand for giving the hangman plenty of work."¹²⁵

From the parliamentary debate on the 1014 Rebellion it can be inferred that some of the English-speaking parliamentarians were generally in favour of the "forgive and forget" policy.¹²⁶ By and large they felt that to secure harmony

119. *The Friend*, 13 February 1915; *The Star*, 10 December 1914; *Sunday Times*, 20 December 1914; Preller Papers, Volume 212, file 144, Letter from A Bailey, undated; Smuts Papers, Volume 190, no. 97, J.X. Merriman to Smuts, 23 December 1914; PM 1/1/476, C.P. Crewe to Botha, 10 December 1914; Debates, 5 March 1915, column 144, speech by J.W. Quinn; 8 March 1915, column 165, speech by E.H. Walton; 17 March 1915, column 441, speech by D. Harris; and 17 March 1915, column 462, speech by P.A. Silburn.

120. *The Friend*, 22 December 1914 and *The Cape Argus*, 21 December 1914.

121. *The Star*, 21 December 1914; and Debates, 8 March 1915, column 1, speech by E.H. Walton; and 10 March 1915, column 270, speech by H.A. Oliver.

122. *The Cape Argus*, 21 December 1914; and Debates, 8 March 1915, column 163, speech by E.H. Walton.

123. Smuts Papers, Volume 190, no. 41, C.P. Crewe to Smuts, 22 December 1914.

124. PM 1/1/476, C.P. Crewe to Botha, 10 December 1914.

125. *The Star*, 13 February 1915. Also see the Preller Papers, A787, Volume 191, file 94, *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 January 1915.

126. Duncan also shared this view. See Duncan Papers, BC 294, D.5.9.9, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 5 March 1915.

between the two language groups, revenge and indiscriminate severity would be imprudent. It could even worsen the volatile situation rather than mend it.¹²⁷ Sir David Harris granted that “leniency was not always effective... but he thought it should be tried as a healing factor.”¹²⁸ E.H. Walton captured the general feeling among the parliamentarians thus: “On behalf of the future peace in South Africa”, and as an English-speaking South African, he was not prepared “to urge in this House for harsher measures than the Government were prepared to propose”. Whatever his own personal feelings, he was “quite prepared to accept the proposals of the Government”.¹²⁹

Botha’s “forgive and forget” policy also meant differentiation between the rebels. English speakers were pleased that the penalties for ordinary rebels were light whilst the leaders would receive comparatively heavy penalties. They argued that the ordinary rebels were misguided by their leaders and joined the rebellion more out of ignorance and due to intimidation. In the words of C.P. Crewe, “the rank and file are more sinned against than sinning”.¹³⁰ Disloyalty towards the British connection or hatred against the Botha government was not necessarily a factor.¹³¹ A. Bailey agreed:

For the rank and file this much [can be said], that many of them were ignorant and were so grossly deceived that they honestly regarded the rebellion as a political demonstration against the Botha government rather than an attempt to break away from the Empire.¹³²

However, not everybody shared this view. H. Rockey was of the opinion that not all rebels who joined the rebellion were ignorant. Ninety percent of them knew that what they were doing was illegal and that they could be shot for it. Ignorance was therefore not a reason to let them go scot-free.¹³³

Some English-language newspapers interpreted the “forgive and forget” policy as weakness on the part of the government. According to the *Transvaal Leader* there was a fear that treason was to be condoned. The paper continued:

... loyalty was left to be not only its own reward, but the only recompense to people who have stood at the graveside of their friends and to men who have seen a life’s industry brought to ruin by a horde of filibusterers and wastrels.¹³⁴

Likewise, the *Pretoria News* highlighted the fact that English speakers had already made enormous sacrifices, shoved aside their political and party differences, dropped their grievances towards Afrikaans speakers and loyally supported the government and now “they acquiesced quite cheerfully in the amazing proposal that the rebellion should be forgotten and the rebels forgiven”.¹³⁵

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127. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 157, speech by T. Boydell; 10 March 1915, column 249 speech by J.X. Merriman; 10 March 1915, column 266, speech by W.H. Andrews; 10 March 1915, column 274, speech by T. Maginess; 11 March 1915, column 313, speech by H.L. Currey; and 17 March 1915, column 445, speech by H. Wiltshire.
128. Debates, 17 March 1915, column 441–442, speech by D. Harris.
129. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 165, speech by E.H. Walton.
130. PM 1/1/476, Crewe to Botha, 10 December 1914.
131. *The Star*, 10 December 1914.
132. *Sunday Times*, 20 December 1914; and Preller Papers, A787, Volume 212, file 144, Letter from A Bailey, undated.
133. Debates, 11 March 1915, column 279, speech by W. Rockey.
134. Preller Papers, A 787, Volume 190, file 94, *Transvaal Leader*, 11 December 1914.
135. Preller papers, A 787, Volume 155, file 38, *Pretoria News*, 27 February 1915.

Newspapers such as *The Star* and *The Cape Argus* were not as extreme, following a middle-of-the-road approach. These newspapers believed that Botha and Smuts, whilst lenient would ensure that rebellion and anarchy were not regarded as insignificant offences.¹³⁶

Once more, English-speaking South Africans had enormous appreciation for Botha and Smuts. They did not budge despite calls for clemency. This successfully appeased any concern English speakers might have had that the government was not serious about the matter.¹³⁷ Hence, they were extremely indignant when some Afrikaans speakers were audacious enough to claim that the responsible government ministers were murderers.¹³⁸

Nevertheless, English South Africans also realised that this must have been a very difficult and sad task for Botha and Smuts. Patrick Duncan wrote:

The government has now faced the supreme test in putting down the rebellion in trying by Court Martial and shooting Fourie ... it must have been a hard wrench for the government to confirm this sentence, knowing as they did how long the memory of the Dutch is about these things.¹³⁹

Conclusion

The 1914 Rebellion confirmed that the strong allegiance which English-speaking South Africans had to both the Union and the British Empire was unproblematic and an inherent characteristic of their evolving identity as British South Africans. Hence it was incomprehensible to them that the rebels could not and did not want to subscribe to their unreserved loyalty but instead decided to launch a rebellion against the government. For them this was unquestionably high treason. John Lambert aptly captured their strong support for the government: "Then, during World War I, the SAP's commitment to the war and its resolute handling of an Afrikaner Rebellion impressed English-speaking South Africans [who] ... threw their full support behind the government's war effort."¹⁴⁰

However, although they were united in their condemnation of the rebellion, there was division among English-speaking South Africans regarding the penalties handed down to the rebels. Those who supported lenient sentences were convinced that the ordinary Afrikaner citizen was sheepishly led to believe that a rebellion could restore their former position. However, most of them agreed on the penalties meted out to the leaders of the uprising.

The 1914 Rebellion challenged the belief upper-class English-speakers had in the stability and sustainability of the newly formed Union. For this reason, they tried to come to a genuine understanding of the causes of the rebellion in order to make sense of the events. The parliamentarian, H. Burton was even of the opinion that the rebellion and its consequences strengthened the resolve of (white) South

136. *The Star*, 21 December 1914; and *The Cape Argus*, 21 December 1914.

137. *The Star*, 21 December 1914; Smuts Papers, Volume 190, no. 41, C.P. Crewe to Smuts, 22 December 1914; Smuts Papers, Volume 190, no. 97, J.X. Merriman to Smuts, 23 December 1914; and PM 1/1/476, J.X. Merriman to Botha, 26 December 1914.

138. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 163, speech by E.H. Walton; and 10 March 1915, column 270, speech by H.A. Oliver.

139. Duncan Collection, Duncan to Lady Selborne, 22 December 1914.

140. Lambert, "South African British? Or Dominion South Africans?", p. 213.

Africans to unite, and as a result of this, the people of South Africa would be able to endure any crisis.¹⁴¹ However, they did this within the context of a British South Africanism.

The English-speaking politicians and newspaper editors' reaction demonstrated that Afrikaner rebels and English speakers lived in different worlds with different world views based on different pasts. Despite the "reconciliation" efforts of Botha and Smuts the band aid strip called "Union" was not sufficient to cover and heal historical bruises. In the end their ointment, "Britishness", was not appropriate medicine for the wound. Conflict between English and Afrikaans speakers in the 1920s to 1940s confirmed this.

Abstract

Academic writing about white political history has been rather limited since the 1980s. Nevertheless, cognisance should be taken of a growing interest in the issue of the identity of various South African groups during the past two decades. Much attention has been paid to African and Afrikaner identities but identity formation amongst English-speaking South Africans has been somewhat neglected. John Lambert's work on the history of a white English-speaking identity in South Africa is a singular exception.

Mindful of this, the article aims at recovering the history of these ignored observers of the 1914 Rebellion. A major question it addresses is identity formation among English-speaking South Africans within a dual context: that of the British Empire and that of a specific South African setting. Both were shaped by the First World War. English-speakers' reactions to the rebellion were prompted by the decision taken by the South African government to join the Allied war effort, and they should be understood within this context. For white South African English-speaking politicians and newspaper editors, the rebellion was initially inexplicable. The article highlights the efforts of these two very influential groups to gain insight on why some Afrikaners rebelled. Specific attention is paid to their views on the role of the military and political Afrikaner leaders during the rebellion. Lastly, the article considers the views of these opinion makers relating to the sentences and penalties meted out to the rebels.

Keywords: First World War; 1914 Rebellion; English-speaking South Africans; anti-British sentiment; "forgive and forget" policy.

Opsomming

Akademie werk oor blanke politiekegeskiedenis het sedert die 1980's getaan. Desnieteenstaande moet kennis geneem word van die groeiende belangstelling in vraagstukke rondom identiteit. Hierdie ontwikkeling het veral gedurende die afgelope twee dekades plaasgevind. Heelwat aandag is aan identiteitsvorming onder Afrikane en Afrikaners gegee. Gevolglik het die onderwerp sover dit Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners aanbetref het, agterweë gebly. Dit was eintlik net die werk van John Lambert oor die geskiedenis van identiteitsvorming onder Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners, wat werklik aandag hieraan gegee het.

141. Debates, 8 March 1915, column 194, speech by H. Burton.

Met dit in gedagte, ondersoek hierdie artikel aspekte van die geskiedenis van hierdie voorheen geïgnoreerde waarnemers van die 1914 Rebelle. Die artikel spreek spesifiek die volgende vraagstuk aan: wat was die aard van die identiteit van Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners binne 'n dubbele konteks; lojaliteit aan die Britse Ryk enersyds en die spesifieke Suid-Afrikaanse omstandighede andersyds, beide teen die agtergrond van die Eerste Wêreldoorlog. Hul reaksie teenoor die rebelle moet verstaan word binne die konteks van die Suid-Afrikaanse regering se besluit om die Geallieerde oorlogspoging te steun. Die rebelle was vir die Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaanse politici en koerantredakteurs onverklaarbaar. Hierdie artikel lig hierdie twee baie invloedryke groepe se reaksie uit aangesien hulle gepoog het om te verstaan waarom sommige Afrikaners gerebelleer het. Die artikel fokus spesifiek op hul siening van die rol van die militêre en politieke Afrikaner leiers in die rebelle. Ten slotte word die sienings van hierdie Engelssprekendes oor die skuldig bevindinge en opgelegde strawwe van die rebelle ondersoek.

Slutelwoorde: Eerste Wêreldoorlog; 1914 Rebelle; Engelssprekende Suid-Afrikaners; anti-Britse sentiment; “vergewe en vergeet” beleid”.