

**The “Row about the Great Diamond”:
The Presentation of the *Cullinan Diamond* to the British Crown,
1907**

*Bill Guest**

Introduction

The presentation in 1907 of the *Cullinan Diamond* to King Edward VII has traditionally been regarded as a tangible expression of the conciliation policy upon which the Boer leaders Botha and Smuts embarked following the victory earlier that year of their party, the *Vereeniging Het Volk*, in the Transvaal elections.¹ In urging acceptance of the gift, the British High Commissioner and Governor of the Transvaal, Lord Selborne, expressed the conviction that it was “intended by General Botha as an unmistakable sign both to the irreconcilable Dutch in South Africa and to foreign Nations that he and his friends have accepted incorporation into Your Majesty’s dominions and the British flag once and for ever.” Sir Keith Hancock has argued further that the policy of conciliation which underlay the gift was driven not merely by sentiment, but also by political realism. Liberal sympathizers in Britain, voted back into office in the elections of December 1905, needed to be assured that the post-war Boer leadership could be relied upon. At home, the strength of the “British” vote in the Colony, more specifically along the Witwatersrand and even

* W.R. (Bill) Guest is a Professor Emeritus and Senior Research Associate in the School of Anthropology, Gender and Historical Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Pietermaritzburg) where he lectured in History from 1967 to 2005. He has published a number of books and articles, primarily on nineteenth and twentieth century KwaZulu-Natal, his most recent being a history of the Natal Museum in celebration of its centenary.

1. For details of *Het Volk*’s conciliation policy, see W.R. Engelenburg, *General Louis Botha* (J.L. Van Schaik Limited, Pretoria, 1929), pp 115-116, 128, 131, 161-165; G.B. Pyrah, *Imperial Policy and South Africa, 1902-1910* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1955), pp 164-170; L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa 1902-1920* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1961), pp 32-34; N.G. Garson, “‘Het Volk’: The Botha-Smuts Party in the Transvaal, 1904-11”, *The Historical Journal*, 9, 1, 1966, pp 101-115; A.A. Mawby, “The political behaviour of the British population of the Transvaal, 1902-1907.” DPhil thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1969, pp 247, 408-409; J. Meintjies, *General Louis Botha* (Cassell, London, 1970), pp 130-131, 133, 136-137, 146, 152-154; Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders, *South Africa, A Modern History* (MacMillan Press Ltd., Basingstoke and London, 2000), pp 247-248.

in Smuts' own constituency, necessitated accommodation. Hancock went on to point out that, in successfully steering the proposal of the gift through the Transvaal Legislature, Smuts coincidentally "won a notable debating victory over his inept opponents", the Progressive Party, though it was "only a trivial and ephemeral incident" in the broader scheme of things.² The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that, while the presentation to the British Crown was indeed a magnanimous gesture of conciliation, the parliamentary debate which preceded it also served a very effective party-political purpose in that it shrewdly impaled *Het Volk's* Progressive opposition on the horns of an embarrassing dilemma.

The party-political situation

The Transvaal Progressive Association had been established in November 1904 under the leadership of Sir George Farrar and Sir Percy Fitzpatrick. It was dedicated to ensuring that, following Britain's victory in the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), white English-speakers would assume indefinite control of the new Colony. The Association soon attracted a diverse membership through branches established throughout the Witwatersrand and in Pretoria, but because its leading members were either mining capitalists or associated with the mining industry, they were readily labelled as the "capitalist party" by their political opponents. Moreover, their avowed objective of a British-controlled Transvaal and, ultimately, a "British South Africa" exposed them to the accusation that, in contrast to *Het Volk's* conciliatory policy, they were perpetuating Anglo-Boer hostility.

This worked to the advantage of the Transvaal Responsible Government Association, founded in December 1904 by Johannesburg-based professional men under the leadership of the prominent attorney E.P. Solomon. Unlike the Progressives, who had sought to delay self-government for the Transvaal until English-speaking control was ensured, their goal of immediate responsible government had led them into a pact with *Het Volk* in April 1905. The latter had been established in May 1904

2. Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereafter BLO): Selborne Papers, Ms 54, Lord Selborne – Lord Knollys (Royal Secretary), 20 August 1907 (copy); Colonial Office Confidential Print (hereafter CO): 879/94, 866, p 309, Lord Selborne – Lord Elgin, 26 August 1907; CO: 879/106, 874, pp 152-153, Lord Selborne – Lord Elgin, 26 August 1907 (telegram); W.K. Hancock, *Smuts The Sanguine Years 1870-1919* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962), pp 204, 233-235. See also: Garson, "'Het Volk': The Botha-Smuts Party", pp 130; F. Lehane, "Conciliation and the Cullinan Diamond." BA Honours, University of Natal, 1976, preface – pp 23-24.

with the intention of recovering the Transvaal's independence under Afrikaner control as soon as possible. Well-organised and disciplined by the wartime leaders Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, the party projected an anti-capitalist image that appealed to the Boer community, which was still rurally based. It also attracted support from the Transvaal Labour Party, founded in November 1904, and other white workers' organisations which were only too willing to ally themselves with *Het Volk* and the Responsibles, now called the Transvaal National Association, in the 1907 general election.³

In forming *Het Volk*, Botha and Smuts had also sought to reconcile post-war differences among all Afrikaners, whether they had resisted, surrendered to, or fought for the British. Following its electoral triumph in February 1907, *Het Volk's* conciliatory policy was extended in various ways to reconcile the Boer and British populations of the Transvaal. In the process, the political fragmentation of the latter sector was entrenched. As the parliamentary "row about the Great Diamond" was to demonstrate, the prospect of the Progressives ever assuming control of the Transvaal at the head of a coalition of English-speaking parties seemed more remote than ever.⁴

The Cullinan Diamond

The "Great Diamond" in question had been found on 26 January 1905 in the Premier Diamond Mine near Pretoria by an unnamed black labourer. An almost flawless 3 025,75 carat gem, it was the largest diamond ever discovered with dimensions of approximately ten by six by five centimetres – thirty-six times larger than the stone which had triggered the 1869 stampede to Griqualand West. The *Cullinan Diamond* as it soon came to be known, in honour of the Premier Diamond Mining Company's chairman Thomas Major Cullinan, was placed on private display at the Standard Bank in Johannesburg. There it was examined by Doctor

3. Garson, "'Het Volk': The Botha-Smuts Party", pp 117, 120-130; A. Duminy and B. Guest, *Interfering in Politics: A Biography of Sir Percy FitzPatrick* (Lowry Publishers, Johannesburg, 1987), pp 115, 119-121, 126, 143-144; Davenport & Saunders, *South Africa, A Modern History*, pp 245-250.
4. Thompson, *Unification of South Africa*, pp 32-34; Garson, "'Het Volk': The Botha-Smuts Party", pp 116-117; Duminy & Guest, *Interfering in Politics*, pp 149-152, 154-159; L. Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (Radix, Sandton, 1990), pp 145-147; National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown (hereafter NELM): FitzPatrick Papers, A/L 4, P. FitzPatrick – N. FitzPatrick, 20 August 1907, quoted in W.R. Guest, "The Political Career of Sir Percy FitzPatrick, 1907-1920." DPhil thesis, University of Natal (Durban), 1980, p 146.

G.A.F. Molengraaff, consulting geologist to the Johannesburg mining-house H. Eckstein and Company, and former state geologist of the pre-war Transvaal Republic. His opinion, subsequently substantiated by other experts, was that the stone constituted the smaller part of what had been an even larger diamond, broken along its cleavage planes by natural process. This gave rise to numerous legends concerning the whereabouts of the other pieces and attracted further attention to the *Cullinan Diamond* itself.⁵

A week after the discovery, it was already being suggested that subscription lists should be opened to enable the inhabitants of Britain's Empire to purchase what was considered to be a fitting gift for their King. Such a gesture would also prevent the almost certain division of an otherwise unsaleable gem into several smaller commercially viable pieces. The pro-British newspaper *The Transvaal Leader* was at the forefront of this proposal, declaring that it would be "a notable gift, worthy alike of giver and recipient – the product of Britain's youngest colony, presented by the British race to its ruler". No immediate decision was taken as to the future of the stone and by April 1905 it was in the hands of the Premier Company's London selling agents, S. Neumann and Company, where it remained until 1907.⁶

The gift proposed

On 14 August 1907, Botha secured the unanimous support of *Het Volk's* party caucus for a motion to be carried through the Legislative Assembly authorizing the Transvaal Government "to acquire the rights" to the *Cullinan Diamond* so that it could be presented to King Edward VII as an expression of the Colony's loyalty. The cost involved was significantly reduced by the fact that government already held a 60 per cent share of the stone in terms of the Transvaal Precious Stones Ordinance (Number 66 of 1903).⁷ On broaching the subject with Farrar, now the member for Boksburg East and still leader of the Progressive Party Opposition, Botha received an initially favourable response. When the Progressive Party Caucus subsequently opposed the suggestion, he appealed to Selborne to exercise his influence on Farrar "so that the gift can be the unanimous act

5. N. Helme, *Thomas Major Cullinan* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, Johannesburg, 1974), pp 73-76; W.H. Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds, Mine Workers and Monopoly Capitalism in Kimberley, 1867-1895* (A.D. Donker Pty Ltd, Craighall, 1987), p 304 (footnote 24).

6. *The Transvaal Leader*, 2 February 1905; Helme, *Cullinan*, pp 76, 81-86.

7. BLO: Selborne Papers, Ms 60 (Private), L. Botha – Lord Selborne, 15 August 1907; *Transvaal Legislative Assembly Debates* 1, columns 2505-2508, 19 August 1907 & *Votes and Proceedings*, 1907, p 382, 19 August 1907; Helme, *Cullinan*, pp 62, 117.

of all parties of the Transvaal".⁸ The High Commissioner promptly obliged. He conceded to Farrar that he had "no business" interfering in the Progressive Party's actions and expressed his "admiration" for its leadership in "circumstances of extraordinary difficulty." He also indicated his concern "lest the action of the party should be misunderstood by those who are most friendly to it and in quarters where neither the party nor I would like its action to be misinterpreted".⁹

In reply, Farrar now insisted that the proposed gift was "quite inopportune in the present state of the Country". As he explained:

... with British officials being continually retrenched, with the practical abandonment of the SAC¹⁰ in sight, with petitions to the Gov[ernment] being signed asking for repatriation by men, who had hoped to make this country their Home, to other Colonies such a proposal coming at the present time must be regarded with great disfavour.

Farrar went on to emphasise "the distasteful position" in which "the British section of the Community" now found itself "through being forced to oppose the motion" after having "fought for the maintenance of His Majesty's Government in this country" – a reference to its staunch loyalism throughout the post-war period. He also expressed disappointment that, as the King had been specifically mentioned in connection with the proposal, Selborne had not seen fit to convince Botha as to "how undesirable it was to introduce such a subject into the House ... without the support of the opposition". In that event, the Progressives "should then have been saved the most painful position we are now placed in".¹¹

The Progressives outmanoeuvred

The dilemma in which the Progressives found themselves was even more evident the following day when Botha's proposal was moved and

-
8. BLO: Selborne Papers, Ms 60 (Private), L. Botha – Lord Selborne, 15 August 1907; University of Cape Town Library, Cape Town (hereafter UCTL): Patrick Duncan Papers, (BC294), D 4.1.3, Lady Selborne – P. Duncan, 24 October 1907; NELM: FitzPatrick Papers, B/A13, F. Chaplin – P. FitzPatrick, 28 December 1929.
 9. BLO: Selborne Papers, Ms 62 (Private), Lord Selborne – G. Farrar, 15 August 1907 (copy).
 10. A reference to the South African Constabulary. See Davenport & Saunders, *South Africa, A Modern History*, p 236.
 11. BLO: Selborne Papers, Ms 62 (Private), G. Farrar – Lord Selborne, 15 August 1907 and 18 August 1907.

discussed in the Legislative Assembly.¹² In introducing his motion, Botha explained that, in its existing form, the *Cullinan Diamond* was far too large to sell and too unique to allow to be dissected. It would, he declared, be a "graceful act" after "the unfortunate history of the past" to present the stone in its entirety to the Crown and thereby rouse the inhabitants of the Transvaal "to higher ideals than pocket patriotism". Botha rejected suggestions that his Government might have "a certain object" (embarrassing the Opposition) in making such a gift and argued that "as a part of Greater Britain" the Transvaal would always retain "an important share of it".

Farrar immediately opposed the proposal, explaining to the House how his party had already pleaded with the Government for a delay "in the hope that the time would come when such a motion as this would secure the unanimous support of the country". He argued that, "owing to the financial position of the Colony and the acute depression which consequently exists," such a gift, "however fitting under happier circumstances," could "only be described as inopportune and unjustifiable".¹³ O.J. Whiteside reflected the opinion of the three Labour Party members of the Assembly in supporting the motion and attributing the prevailing unfavourable economic climate to the capitalist mining interests which the Progressives represented.

Thus far the discussion had taken a predictable course, until H.L. Lindsay, a Johannesburg attorney who was the Progressive member for Troyeville, flatly contradicted his leader by declaring his delight that such a proposal had emanated from the Government benches. He went on to insist that no member of the Opposition should oppose the motion so as to ensure that "the last act" of the new Transvaal Parliament's first session would be of a "high-minded and honourable nature ... symbolizing the fact that we are bound together and that hereinafter none but God will separate us".¹⁴

In contrast to the party indiscipline of the Opposition, two former Anglo-Boer War generals in succession towed *Het Volk's* conciliatory line by supporting Botha's motion. C.F. Beyers declared that the intended gift "will be a symbol, not only for the Transvaal but for the whole of South Africa, of loyalty" proffered by subjects, many of whom "were, but a short time ago, enemies of His Majesty". J.H. de la Rey, held in high esteem by party back-benchers, must have reassured those who were less enthusiastic about such a gesture when he moderated his support for the proposal by

12. See *Transvaal Legislative Assembly Debates* 1, columns 2505–2520, 19 August 1907.

13. *Transvaal Legislative Assembly Debates* 1, columns 2509–2510.

14. *Transvaal Legislative Assembly Debates* 1, columns 2512–2513.

conceding that he could “profess no such sentiments of loyalty ... for they will have to come gradually”.¹⁵

J.C. Smuts could not resist taking full advantage of the Opposition’s obvious discomfort. As Colonial Secretary, Minister of Education and prime strategist in Botha’s cabinet, he was almost certainly primarily responsible for recognising the political advantages to be gained, at home and abroad, from presenting the “Great Diamond” to the Crown. Echoing Botha’s earlier assurance that Government was not attempting to achieve “a certain object” in making this proposal, Smuts raised laughter by denying that this was “another instance of *slimness* [cleverness]”. The opportunity to allude to his own *Slim Jannie* reputation, was too good to pass over. Smuts drove his advantage home:

We say that great things have been done for this country, and great things have been done to retrieve the irreparable wrongs of the past. His Majesty’s government has given us millions and millions to help us to restore the damages of war. They have absolved us from the thirty million war debt which the Hon. members opposite were willing to pay and they are even now helping us with a five million loan.

Smuts completed the rout by decrying the stance which the Progressives had adopted at a time when Government was attempting “to unite the races [Boer and Briton] and to work together”. He concluded, amidst more laughter, that Lindsay had “largely atoned for the error of his leader. He alone, faithful amongst the faithless ... has expressed the feeling which I am certain is at the bottom of many a heart on the other side of the House ... but there they sit, in silence”.¹⁶

The jibe was too much for Fitzpatrick, now the Progressive member for Pretoria South Central. He had demonstrated his fiery ability as a platform speaker in the responsible government elections earlier that year when he secured his seat by defeating Sir Richard Solomon, prominent member of the Transvaal National Association, the British party set up in opposition to the Progressives. Selborne, among others, had hoped that Solomon would lead a “non-racial” (Boer and British) coalition into office, but his political demise had helped to tip the balance in favour of *Het Volk*. Fitzpatrick was to deploy his aptitude for electioneering yet again when, in September 1910, he defeated Prime Minister designate Louis Botha in Pretoria East during the first Union elections.¹⁷

15. *Transvaal Legislative Assembly Debates* 1, columns 2514-2515.

16. *Transvaal Legislative Assembly Debates* 1, columns 2516-2517.

17. Guest, “FitzPatrick, 1907-1920”, pp 83-99, 276-313; Duminy & Guest, *Interfering in Politics*, pp 140-147, 183-190.

Fighting Fitz had however experienced difficulty performing within the more sedate confines of the House and was decidedly subdued in a debate to which he had not intended to contribute. He insisted that Smuts had misinterpreted the Opposition's silence and that, having been asked to consider the motion "in a temperate manner," the Progressives had anticipated that their own motives in opposing the proposal would be given "fair and temperate consideration". He repeated Farrar's reasons, pointing out that Botha had been fully informed of the Opposition's position prior to raising the matter in the House. Fitzpatrick also indicated that the Progressives objected to the manner in which the monarch had been made "the subject of a debate" as well as to the "aspersion" which had now been cast on them at the conclusion of a parliamentary session which had otherwise been characterised by "a narrowing of the feeling of racialism" between Boer and Briton. He accepted the Government's "integrity and honesty of purpose" appealing for reciprocity from his opponents, even though they might consider the Progressives to have made "a mistake".¹⁸

Fitzpatrick's uncharacteristic performance was, as Lady Selborne privately described it, "very halfhearted ... his manner as it were apologetic",¹⁹ but it was symptomatic of the embarrassing corner into which Botha's motion had driven the Progressives. Selborne personally favoured the proposed gift and was convinced that they had indeed blundered.²⁰ In his view this was a genuine gesture of goodwill towards the British Crown which would ultimately "have more far reaching effects than even its originator suspects". Selborne's words were prophetic, for the impact went beyond reassuring Liberal sympathizers in Britain and humiliating political opponents in the Transvaal. Hancock has argued that such acts of conciliation fuelled future dissent among some of Botha's erstwhile political allies.²¹

Notwithstanding the Progressives' opposition the Transvaal Legislative Assembly resolved decisively in favour of making the gift, by 42 votes to 19, with the support of *Het Volk*, the National and Labour

18. *Transvaal Legislative Assembly Debates* 1, columns 2518-2520, 19 August 1907.
19. UCTL: Patrick Duncan Papers, (BC 294) D 4.1.3, Lady Selborne – P. Duncan, 24 October 1907.
20. BLO: Selborne Papers, Ms 70 (Private and Personal), Lord Selborne – W. Churchill, 22 August 1907 (telegram); UCTL: Patrick Duncan Papers, (BC 294) D 4.1.1, Lady Selborne – P. Duncan, 22 August 1907.
21. BLO: Selborne Papers, Ms 54, Lord Selborne – Lord Knollys (Royal Secretary), 20 August 1907 (copy); CO: 879/94, 866, p 309, Lord Selborne – Lord Elgin, 26 August 1907; CO: 879/106, 874, pp 152-153, Lord Selborne – Lord Elgin, 26 August 1907 (telegram); Hancock, *Smuts 1870-1919*, p 235.

Parties, as well as one Progressive (H.L. Lindsay.) The subsequent debate in the Legislative Council (Upper House) added nothing to what had already been said in the Assembly. A motion opposing the proposed purchase of the Diamond “at the expense of the Public Exchequer” and advocating its acquisition by means of voluntary subscription (as originally suggested when it was discovered) was narrowly defeated by seven votes to five, with all members other than A.G. Robertson voting on ethnic/linguistic lines. Selborne offered the King the assurance that:

... the Progressive minority took the action they did solely from a sense of duty, a mistaken sense ... but nevertheless a genuine sense of duty. They spoke and voted with heavy hearts, because Your Majesty has nowhere in the whole British dominions a more true and loyal body of subjects than Sir George Farrar, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick and the Progressive members of the Transvaal Parliament!²²

The gift accepted

On the recommendation of the British Cabinet, the King eventually decided to accept the gift but, contrary to Selborne’s suggestion, resolved to make no reference in his statement of acceptance to the well-meaning motives of those who had opposed the idea in the Transvaal Legislature. He indicated only that he accepted the gift “as the expression of loyalty of the whole people of the colony irrespective of party.”²³ On 9 November 1907 the “great and unique diamond” was presented to the King on the occasion of his birthday, having already been accepted with the assurance that it would “be kept and preserved among the historic jewels, which form the heirlooms of the Crown.”²⁴

The task of cutting the stone was subsequently entrusted to Joseph Asscher of Amsterdam, who excised two bad flaws from it in the course of producing nine major gems, 96 small brilliants and over nine carats of polished fragments. Only the largest two of the nine major stones were added to the Crown Jewels. The pear-shaped 530,20 carat

22. BLO: Selborne Papers, Ms 54, Lord Selborne – Lord Knollys (Royal Secretary), 20 August 1907 (copy); CO: 879/94, 866, p 309, Lord Selborne – Lord Elgin, 26 August 1907; CO: 879/106, 874, pp 152-153, Lord Selborne – Lord Elgin, 26 August 1907 (telegram); Lehane, “Conciliation”, pp 38-39.
23. BLO: Selborne Papers, Ms 54 & 70 (Private and Personal), Lord Knollys – Lord Selborne, 20 September 1907 & Lord Elgin – Lord Selborne, 5 November 1907 (telegram - copy); CO: 879/106, 874, p 168, Lord Elgin – Lord Selborne, 10 October 1907 (telegram - secret).
24. CO: 879/106, 874, p 170, Deputy Governor, Transvaal (Sir Henry Hildyard) – Lord Elgin, 19 October 1907 (telegram); CO: 879/106, 874, p 173, Lord Elgin – Lord Selborne, 9 November 1907 (telegram).

Great Star of Africa, the largest cut diamond in the world, was set in the Imperial Sceptre and the 317,40 carat *Lesser Star of Africa*, the next largest cut diamond, became part of the Imperial State Crown. The remaining seven major stones were given to Asscher in payment of his fee, but King Edward VII bought one for his Queen, Alexandra, and the other six were purchased and presented in 1910 to Queen Mary on behalf of the people of South Africa.²⁵

The subsequent fate of the *Cullinan Diamond* was doubtless of some consolation to those loyal British subjects in the Transvaal who had opposed its presentation to the Crown. In 1909, when Farrar and Fitzpatrick went to London as Transvaal representatives, along with those of the other South African colonies, to present the South Africa Act to the Imperial Parliament for approval, they were invited to lunch at Buckingham Palace. At the behest of Queen Alexandra, the Crown Jewels were brought from the Tower so that they could admire the final setting of the two largest portions of the "Great Diamond". No mention was made of their role in the "row" which had preceded the gift.²⁶

The Progressives defeated

The fact remained that it had been impossible for the Progressives to approve the proposal after persistently attempting to highlight the Colony's post-war state of economic depression and financial hardship at every opportunity during the course of the session. In a letter written to his son a day after the diamond debate, Fitzpatrick appeared to have a much more comprehensive idea of the Progressives' stance on the issue than had been suggested by his impromptu speech in the House:

The Progressives voted against the gift because (1) people are starving and we can't afford to give away £150,000 (2) because it ought to be done by public subscription if done at all and not given by the Boers at the expense of the taxpayers (3) because several of the members on the other side make money out of the affair through the Premier Co (4) because it is an indecent bribe offered to English public opinion the very day the 5 million loan is being debated in the House of Commons and (5) because they have done it as a party move and tried to coerce us by the use of the King's name.²⁷

25. Helme, *Cullinan*, pp 86-89; Lehane, "Conciliation", pp 2-3.

26. NELM: FitzPatrick Papers, A/L 4, P. FitzPatrick – N. FitzPatrick, 20 August 1907; A.P. Cartwright, *The First South African The Life and Times of Sir Percy FitzPatrick* (Purnell & Sons, Cape Town, 1971), pp 176-177; Engelenburg, *Louis Botha*, p 164.

27. NELM: FitzPatrick Papers, A/L 4, P. FitzPatrick – N. FitzPatrick, 20 August 1907.

Fitzpatrick's third point apparently referred to certain of the Government's political allies in the Transvaal National Association rather than to *Het Volk* members. Thomas Cullinan, chairman of the Premier Diamond Mining Company, was a founding Vice-President of the Association and represented Pretoria North-West in the Legislative Assembly. He was friendly with Botha and Smuts and related by marriage to E.P. Solomon, the Association's founding president who was the member for Fordsburg and served as Botha's Minister of Public Works. Edmund Brayshaw, another prominent member of the National Association, was also a director of Premier Diamond Mining. Fitzpatrick may have been aware of other personal connections with that Company. His own close associate and friend, the stockbroker Andrew Mackie Niven, was yet another director and shareholder, which might explain why the Progressives did not make capital out of these personal connections when the matter was debated in the House.²⁸

It is quite possible that Botha and Smuts anticipated the Progressives' opposition to the diamond proposal, at least in part, on the strength of these connections with the Company as well as a long-standing feud between it and the Chamber of Mines. In any event, Botha's argument that the gift involved "no cash transaction, nobody will suffer by it and the payment can be arranged to extend over a long period", offered them no escape from the charge of inconsistency which almost certainly would have followed their approval of his motion in view of the stance which they had adopted throughout the parliamentary session.²⁹

It was difficult to disprove Smuts' assurance that the gift was not "another instance of *slimness*" on his part.³⁰ For the Progressives it constituted an unhappy finale to their first parliamentary session as a party by confronting them with a policy crisis to which there was, seemingly, no face-saving solution. As the mining-magnate and founder of Wernher-Beit and Company, Julius Wernher, pointed out, it had been "a wonderful move ... forcing a protest to come from the *British* section which of course has to pay [through taxation]".³¹ It substantiated

28. Helme, *Cullinan*, pp 43-45, 152-153, 164-165.

29. *Transvaal Legislative Assembly Debates* 1, column 2507, 19 August 1907; BLO: Selborne Papers, Ms 60 (Private), L.Botha – Lord Selborne, 15 August 1907. For the background to the dispute between the Premier Diamond Mining Company and the Chamber of Mines, see: D.J.N. Denoon, "'Capitalist Influence' and the Transvaal Government during the Crown Colony Period, 1900-1906", *The Historical Journal*, 11, 2, 1968, pp 318-320.

30. *Transvaal Legislative Assembly Debates* 1, column 2517, 19 August 1907.

31. NELM: FitzPatrick Papers, B/A 4, J. Wernher – P. FitzPatrick, 22 August 1907.

Wernher's deepening appreciation of *Het Volk's* political acumen and his already firm conviction that the mining industry should seek to reach a closer accommodation with Botha's Government by disengaging from its previously close contacts with, and financial support of, the Progressive Opposition. In his opinion it was now "possible to work with brother Boer, & to make him see things from a different point of view", for the Boers had recovered "a full sense of security" and were "after all ... a kindly people". In his view, the Progressives had gone "too far" in their "distrust" of Botha's Government, which had "shown a good deal of moderation" considering "the whole past" and "the absolute power" which it had acquired in the Transvaal.³²

However "trivial and ephemeral" the "row about the Great Diamond"³³ might have been, the defeat of the Progressives could not have been more complete.

Abstract

The gift of the *Cullinan Diamond* to the British Crown is remembered as a manifestation of a conciliatory policy which the Botha-Smuts Ministry embarked upon following *Het Volk's* victory in the February 1907 Transvaal elections. This was indeed a magnanimous gesture and a source of reassurance both to Liberal sympathizers in Britain and to many "British" voters in the Transvaal. It however also served a party-political purpose in that it confronted the Progressive Opposition with an embarrassing choice. Support of the proposal would have contradicted their consistent criticism of the Government in connection with the Transvaal's weak financial and economic condition. Their eventual opposition to the gift appeared to reject the hand of conciliation and the generous gesture of loyalty to a Crown to which they had always claimed devotion. The parliamentary debate which preceded the presentation of the *Cullinan Diamond* marked a singular victory for *Het Volk* and weakened the Progressive Opposition's standing with its mining-house financial backers.

-
32. NELM: FitzPatrick Papers, B/A 4, J. Wernher – P. FitzPatrick, 29 November 1907 & 12 December 1907; H. Eckstein & Company Archives in Barlow Rand Archives, Johannesburg: Volume 144, J. Wernher – L. Phillips, 21 November 1907, 11 & 27 December 1907; Guest, "FitzPatrick", pp 133-135, 153-154, 168-169.
33. NELM: FitzPatrick Papers, A/L 4, P. FitzPatrick – N. FitzPatrick, 20 August 1907; Hancock, *Smuts 1870-1919*, p 235.

Opsomming

Die twis oor die “Groot Diamant”: Die aanbied van die *Cullinan-diamant* aan die Britse Kroon, 1907

Die skenking van die *Cullinan-diamant* aan die Britse Kroon word onthou as die vergestaltung van die versoenende beleid wat die Botha-Smuts Ministerie na Het Volk se oorwinning in die Transvaalse verkiesing van Februarie 1907 gevolg het. Dit was inderdaad ’n ruimhartige gebaar en ’n bron van gerusstelling vir beide die Liberaalgesindes in Brittanje en die vele “Britse” stemgeregtigdes in die Transvaal. Dit het egter ook ’n party-politiese doel gedien, aangesien dit die Progressiewe opposisie met ’n moeilike keuse gelaat het. Indien hulle die voorstel sou ondersteun, sou dit beteken dat hulle hulle aanhoudende kritiek van die regering rakende die Transvaal se swak finansiële en ekonomiese posisie sou moes weerspreek. Hulle uiteindelijke teenstand teen die skenking het die indruk geskep dat hulle die hand van versoening en die groothartige gebaar van lojaliteit aan die Britse troon, aan wie hulle deurgaans toewyding verklaar het, verwerp. Die parlementêre debat wat die skenking van *Cullinan-diamant* voorafgegaan het, het op ’n sonderlinge oorwinning vir Het Volk uitgeloop en die Progressiewe opposisie se posisie by hulle finansiële ondersteuners in die mynhuise verswak.

Key words

British Crown; C.F. Beyers; conciliation; *Cullinan Diamond*; Earl of Selborne; Edward VII; G.H. Farrar; H.L. Lindsay; *Het Volk*; J.A. de la Rey; J.C. Smuts; J.C. Wernher; J.P. Fitzpatrick; L. Botha; Premier Mine; Pretoria; Progressives; Transvaal Labour Party; Transvaal Legislative Assembly; Transvaal National Association.

Sleutelwoorde

Britse troon; C.F. Beyers; *Cullinan-diamant*; Edward VII; G.H. Farrar; die Graaf van Selborne; H.L. Lindsay; Het Volk; J.A. de la Rey; J.C. Smuts; J.C. Wernher; J.P. Fitzpatrick; L. Botha; Premiermyn; Pretoria; Progressiewes; Transvaalse Arbeidersparty; Transvaalse *National Association*; Transvaalse Volksraad; versoening.