

On my first Presidency 1883-1888 - Paul Kruger

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In Chapter IX of his memoirs exiled ZAR president writes of the troubles of the Republic, the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand

CHAPTER IX

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PAUL KRUGER'S FIRST PRESIDENCY: 1883-1888

IN 1882 the Raad, on Joubert's motion, unanimously resolved to elect a State President. Joubert and I were asked to stand. We both accepted, but each of us recommended the other's candidature to the people. In my answer to the invitation to stand, I explicitly stated the principles on which I intended to govern, should I be elected. God's Word should be my rule of conduct in politics and the foundation upon which the state must be established.

The promotion of agriculture; the opening up of fresh resources of the country and their exploitation through the creation of new industries; railway extension towards the sea; restrictions on immigration (I apprehended the least danger from an invasion from Holland), in order to prevent the Boer nationality from being stifled; a friendly attitude towards England and a closer alliance of the South African states; the maintenance of the authority of the Government towards the natives and the friendly treatment of obedient native races in their appointed districts; the furtherance of all efforts which would bring the life of the people under the influence of the Gospel, "and above all," the advancement of instruction for the young: these were the questions which I considered of vital importance to the Republic. I obtained two-thirds of the votes at the election, and was consequently elected State President for the next five years.

About the time when a presidential election was decided on, the Republic became involved in a war with Mapoch in Secucuniland, in the east of the Republic.

Since the restoration of the Republic, Secucuni had been her loyal friend. Mapoch was now sheltering Mampur, Secucuni's murderer and refused to give him up. War consequently became inevitable. It lasted for nine months, and in order to bring it to a successful termination, it at length became necessary to place 4,000 burghers in the field. I myself visited the several commandos during the siege to point out to them the necessity of making every effort to bring the war to a quick and successful conclusion.

With the commandos was a foreigner named Nelmapius, who blew up the caves of the Kaffirs, in which they had entrenched themselves, with dynamite. The war did not come to an end until July 1883. Mapoch gave up Mampur. Mampur was hanged and Mapoch condemned to imprisonment for life. But he was liberated shortly before the commencement of the late war and settled with some of his dependents in the neighbourhood of Pretoria. The Republic gained in importance through this war, for even her enemies had to acknowledge that she was strong enough to enforce law and order and need not throw herself upon the protection of any foreign power, through inherent weakness.

About the same time complications occurred on the south-western border. Two Kaffir chiefs, Moshette and Montsioa, were at war with each other. Later, Mankoroane came to Montsioa's assistance, and Massouw to Moshette's. Mankoroane was always very friendly with the English, and tried to induce volunteers to join him. Massouw and Moshette followed his example, promising

each volunteer three thousand morgen of land. This was, of course, a very tempting offer.

Applicants came not only from the Transvaal but also from the Orange Free State and even from Cape Colony. The Government of the Transvaal issued a proclamation which forbade the burghers to join the Kaffirs. But some of them refused to obey the proclamation, renounced their burgher rights and reported themselves to the Kaffir captains. Later, the Government sent General Joubert to the western frontier to demand once more the return of those burghers who had ignored the proclamation.

The Royal Commission of 1881 had deprived the Republic of the power of direct interference in the quarrels of the Kaffir chiefs. The volunteers firmly refused to return. Meanwhile, the chief Calveyn had also rebelled, in the Marico district, but submitted immediately upon General Joubert's threatening him with a commando. Massouw and Moshette, with the assistance of their volunteers, completely defeated their respective opponents. The volunteers were not all Boers. There were a good many Englishmen amongst them. These men chose the land which had been promised them and, joined by other emigrants, founded the two small republics of Stellaland and Goshenland. The administrator of the first was G. T. van Niekerk and its capital Vryburg.

Of the second Rooigrond was the capital and Gey van Pittius the administrator. Both republics, however, were in a constant ferment and continually quarreling, and had even to fight against the afore-mentioned Kaffir chiefs. One party in the republics desired incorporation with Cape Colony, while the other applied to the South African Republic. Cape Colony sent Cecil Rhodes north to settle things. The Transvaal sent General Joubert, who was at the same time "Commissioner for the Western Border," for the same purpose. The latter informed the Rooigronders that the Government of the Transvaal could do nothing for them, as the London Convention we were now in 1884 had excluded them from the sphere of influence of the Republic.

Joubert was obliged to make this statement, because the British agent in Pretoria had accused the Government of the Transvaal of secret dealings with the Rooigronders, and the Republic might otherwise have become involved in difficulties with England. Shortly afterwards, Pastor du Toit, the Director of Education, succeeded General Joubert as Commissioner of the Western Border.

At the same time, a letter from Montsioa was published in which the latter asked to be allowed to become a subject of the South African Republic, in order to obtain protection, as he was "almost exterminated." A proclamation was now issued, subject to the conditions of the convention of 1884, which gave the Republic the right to enter into contracts with the Kaffir chiefs in the east and west of the Republic, on the condition that such contracts were approved of by England. This proclamation placed the chiefs Moshette and Montsioa, with their subjects and their rights, under the protection of the South African Republic, in order to put an end to further bloodshed.

The decree closed with these words:

This proclamation is issued provisionally, subject to the conditions and having regard to article 4 of the London Convention.[1]

[1 Du Toit had meantime hoisted the flag of the Republic over the "proclaimed" territory. This act gave rise to lively disputes at the time.

But, as soon as Kruger heard of it, he called du Toit's attention to this, and asked him how he came to do it. Du Toit answered that he had not hoisted the flag as a sign that he was taking possession, but only to attract attention to the proclamation, and that he had hauled it down since.

The proclamation was not, as has since been stated, the result of an intrigue or of an unreflected act, but of a resolution which President Kruger to this day defends as lawful. - **Note by the Editor of the German Edition.**

These words left open the door to an eventual recall of the proclamation, and showed, at the same time, that the Government had applied to the British Government for their consent to the annexation. The British Government, however, had not the least intention of granting this, but sent Sir Charles Warren with a strong force to South Africa to put a stop to the disturbances on the western border, and Sir Hercules Robinson telegraphed to Pretoria that the Republic must recall their proclamation, as England had already declared the said districts to be under her sphere of influence. Thereupon the Republic recalled the proclamation, not being aware at the time that England was Montsioa's suzerain. I went with Dr. Leyds, the State Attorney, to the western frontier in order personally to enforce law and order, and warned the inhabitants of Goshenland to keep the peace.

Shortly after, a meeting took place at Fourteen Streams between Warren, Rhodes and myself. This conference had no result except an agreement that each side should nominate commissioners to mark off the frontier line as fixed by the convention, and that President Brand of the Orange Free State should arbitrate in case of disagreements. Rhodes pretended to be on my side in the business. On the other hand, he tried to abuse Joubert, until I pointed out to him that he was attacking an absent man.

The Commissioners now finally fixed the western frontier. I myself had proposed to settle the business once and for all, by ordering the mounted commando, together with the police and a few burghers who had accompanied me, to ride round the frontier. The ground marked by the horses' hoofs would make a capital " frontier line." Warren, however, refused his consent to this proposal, giving as excuse his fears lest it might lead to a hand-to-hand fight between his force and the burghers.

I have anticipated the events of nearly two years, for the above incidents occurred after my return from my third journey to England. This journey was the result of a resolution of the Volksraad of 1883, which had decided to send a deputation to England to endeavour to have the convention of 1881 replaced by one more in harmony with the wishes of the people.

The attempt to settle the western frontier question satisfactorily was necessarily bound up with it.

The deputation consisted of myself, General Smit and Dr. du Toit, at that time Director of Education.

Dr. Jorissen preceded the deputation, and had sent home a report from England to the effect that she was willing to receive us and to enter into a discussion on matters submitted to her.

Dr. du Toit had been the editor of the Patriot at Paarl, Cape Colony, and had warmly defended the Afrikaner interest during the war. Shortly after the declaration of peace, he came to the South African Republic and was appointed Director of Education. The same sitting which agreed to the dispatch of a deputation to England deprived Dr. Jorissen of his position as State Attorney through the instrumentality of Chief Justice Kotze, with du Toit's assistance. His dismissal made room for du Toit as a member of the deputation. It was not only a discourteous proceeding, but, in the highest sense, unjust, taking into consideration the important services which Dr. Jorissen had rendered his country.

I protested in vain. It was contended against me that the secretary of such legation must have special qualifications which Dr. Jorissen did not possess.

Our commission started on its journey to England in August 1883, travelled by Kimberley, Paarl, and Cape Town, meeting everywhere with a hearty reception, and landed at its destination on the 28th of September. The lengthy negotiations with Lord Derby, the Colonial Secretary of that day, commenced at once. We were soon informed that the British Government was prepared to grant us the same independence, as regarded internal politics, as that enjoyed by the Orange Free State. This concession was not obtained by us in return for any concession nor by means of any diplomacy on our part. We regarded it as a question of right.

We pointed out that, on the ground of the Convention of 1852, the Republic had a right to her independence, which had been unjustly taken from her and which had not been restored to her in 1881 in the way in which we had been virtually promised that it would be. Besides this point, modifications regarding the western frontier were discussed, and our deputation succeeded in securing for the Republic a considerable tract of land to which we laid claim and which had been unjustly taken from us in 1881.

During the negotiations Sir Hercules Robinson and I had the misfortune to come into collision. I was pointing out and insisting that certain farms, among others Polfontein and Rietfontein, should come within the boundaries of the Republic, especially as they had formerly belonged to us. When I made this statement, Sir Hercules Robinson, who was present at the negotiations, whispered to Lord Derby:

"It's a lie."

I jumped up, quite prepared to fall upon Sir Hercules. Lord Derby and the other gentlemen present interfered, and Lord Derby said:

"Gentlemen, you are not going to fight?"

I answered that Sir Hercules had insulted me, and that I did not intend to put up with it. I accepted his apology, however, and his assurance that "no offence was meant."

Despite this incident, Sir Hercules and I afterwards became very good friends and remained so until his death. He was the only High Commissioner with whom I exchanged private and confidential letters. He was an honorable man and a gentleman in the best sense of the word.

The Convention of 1884 was shortly afterwards signed and the Republic regained her complete independence. There was, however, one article which curtailed her rights, namely, the well-known article 4.

But the hateful suzerainty was repealed. The assertion made by Mr. Chamberlain at a later date that the British suzerainty was still in force is false, as will be proved.

After the Convention of 27 February 1884 had been signed, the deputation started for the Continent, hoping to raise a loan, especially in Holland, for the construction of a railway to Delagoa Bay. We were received on every hand with the greatest heartiness and enthusiasm. Banquets were given in our honor and all seemed glad to make the personal acquaintance of their kinsmen from South Africa; but the principal thing, namely, the money to build the railway, we failed to obtain. Our deputation went from Holland, by Brussels, Paris, and Madrid, to Lisbon.

We were received most cordially on our road by the French President and the King of Spain. The Portuguese declared themselves ready to build the Delagoa Railway, or at least to commence without delay that part of the line which would run through Portuguese territory. We could not arrange for Portugal to take over the whole line, so that it might all be under one management. After our return to Holland, we granted the concession to build on Transvaal territory to a few private persons, who laid the foundation of the future Netherlands South African Railway Company. From there we returned through Germany, where we were most cordially received by Bismarck and the Emperor William I,[1]to South Africa.

[1 It was on this occasion that Prince Bismarck stumbled on the stairs of the Royal Palace in Berlin, and the Emperor William jestingly said: "Prince, you are growing old." Bismarck replied: "Yes, Majesty, that's usually the case, that the horse grows old before his rider." The story of Kruger's stay with a large landed proprietor, of which many versions exist in Germany, is an invention. President Kruger states that he paid no such visit. - Note by the Editor of the German Edition.]

In the next session of the Volksraad, I was able to state that our independence had been obtained that henceforward the Republic took her place as an equal with other independent powers, and that the suzerainty had ceased to exist.

It never occurred to England to contradict this statement. I brought back with me from Holland Dr. W. J. Leyds as State Attorney. The important part which Dr. Leyds was to play in subsequent events is known to all. His name will always remain associated with the history of the Republic.

The Delagoa Railway concession came up for discussion during the session of the Volksraad of 1884.

Petitions protesting against the scheme had meanwhile accumulated. I defended my plan with all my might. I pointed out the importance of possessing a railway of our own. The duties imposed by Cape Colony were excessive and prevented our finding a market there for our products. Besides, I assured the Raad that the expenditure would not necessitate the levying of fresh taxation, and that it would be the very means for the exploitation of the new resources which were about to be opened up and added to those already existing in the country. The Volksraad agreed to the concession.

The election of a new commandant general took place at the same time. General Joubert was almost unanimously re-elected.

The year 1885 witnessed another war on the western frontier. Massouw, whom the Frontier Commission had declared entirely independent, had voluntarily enrolled himself as a vassal of the Transvaal, but now refused to pay his taxes and assumed a very threatening attitude. General Joubert was obliged to march against him with a commando and artillery. The well-known general Piet Cronje stormed Massouw's entrenchments with his accustomed daring and took possession of his town after a short battle, in which the Kaffir chief was killed.

The Boers lost 14 killed and about 30 wounded.

Among the killed was Schweizer, the commandant of the artillery. The losses of the Korannas were very heavy, and the whole tribe broke up.

It was a most unfortunate time for the Republic.

The finances were in a sad condition. The credit with the Standard Bank had become exhausted, and they refused to advance more money. I had enough to do to encourage the burghers during my circular journeys and to impress upon them not to lose courage; for, help, I said, would surely come. It did, but in a very different way from that which I had anticipated. The rich gold-fields of the Witwatersrand were discovered and brought about a complete revolution in the financial aspect of the affairs of the Republic. The history of the Republic entered upon a new phase with this discovery.

Can we possibly look upon it as fortunate? As I have already said, gold and the embittered feelings which were the outcome of the first annexation are the causes of the present misery in South Africa. It will presently be seen that, of the two causes, the gold-fields assumed the greater importance. It is quite certain that, had no gold been found in the Transvaal, there would have been no war.

No matter how great the influx of Englishmen, no matter how varied and manifold their complaints, the British Government would not have lifted a finger in their defence, had it not been tempted by the wealth of the country. The question of the franchise, which in reality caused no hardships to foreigners, was made use of by intriguers to further their plans. The words uttered by the late General Joubert, when a burgher came gleefully to tell him that a new gold-reef had been discovered, were prophetic :

"Instead of rejoicing," he said, "you would do better to weep; for this gold will cause our country to be soaked in blood."

The quartz-reefs of the Witwatersrand, which were discovered in the year 1886, yielded a great wealth of gold, and so it became necessary for the Government to proclaim these districts as public

gold-fields which would in consequence come under the influence of the mining laws. This happened in the middle of the year 1886 with regard to several farms, for example, Turffontein, Doornfontein, and others. Miners, speculators, and adventurers now arrived at the gold-fields from every part of the world.

It does not need to be specially pointed out that among these thousands were many suspicious characters; but, on the other hand, it must also be acknowledged that the bulk of the population of the Witwatersrand consisted of law-abiding people, who looked for no political quarrels, but had come merely with the object of making their fortunes.

Other gold-fields were discovered : those of Krugersdorp in the west, Heidelberg and Nigel in the east and, later, Malmanie and Klerksdorp. The increase in the population and the working of the mines brought increased prosperity in their train. The Boer found a market for his products and the treasury benefited by licenses and other sources of income. The first bewaarplaatsen of the Witwatersrand were sold, or, rather, leased during the same year: that is, the gold district was surveyed and parceled out into fields, claims or stations of 100 by 50 or 50 by 50 feet, and leased for 99 years against the payment of monthly taxes. At the expiration of the 99 years, they returned to the State. The big town of Johannesburg had its origin in this parceling-out of the gold-fields, and in time its trade became the most important of South Africa; consequently both Natal and Cape Colony were anxious to have access to it by rail.

But I refused to listen to this, so long as the Delagoa Railway was unfinished. I feared that the independent trade of the Republic would be injured if other railway connections were opened up with Johannesburg.

That my fears were well-grounded was fully proved, later, in the quarrel concerning the drifts, which very nearly involved the Republic in trouble with England.

In order to assist the new population as much as possible in their difficulties, a new committee was established, known as the " Delvers " or Mining Committee, for the purpose of settling differences among the gold-diggers and negotiating between them and the Government. Cecil Rhodes was for a long time a member of this Delvers Committee.

In 1887, I visited Johannesburg in order to acquaint myself personally with the existing conditions. My reception was a friendly one; but I was presented with an address containing nothing but complaints against the Government. I replied that, in the first place, if grievances existed, they would be a matter for the decision of the Delvers Committee, and I hoped that, in this way, a friendly settlement would be arrived at, and that I should not be compelled to have recourse to force. Much exception has been taken to my attitude, and perhaps I should have been wiser had I shown more consideration for the feelings of the foreigners. But we must not forget the elements of which the population was composed, nor the fact that a population of the same class at Kimberley had caused a rebellion, which obliged the British Government to send a considerable force to hold it in check; nor, lastly, that a former accusation of inherent weakness had cost the Republic dear.

I was determined, therefore, to do all in my power to avoid a renewal of that accusation. In other respects, the complaints of foreigners always met with the friendliest consideration ; for instance, when they complained that the taxation of their bewaarplaatsen was too heavy, it was soon afterwards considerably reduced.

The first conference held with a view to a closer alliance between the Orange Free State and the South African Republic took place in 1887. But it led to nothing, partly because I insisted that the Orange Free State should not permit a railway to be built through her territory which would connect the South African Republic with any of the British colonies in South Africa.

I was opposed to a closer connection with the British South African states so long as the independence of the Transvaal was not guaranteed by the possession of a railway of her own, and I feared that the construction of the only possible self-supporting railway for which the Government

had made itself liable would be delayed, or the railway rendered unproductive if other lines were started in the meantime. The second reason why the conference failed was that I demanded an offensive and defensive alliance in case the independence of either was threatened. President Brand could not see his way to accept this proposal. I need hardly say that the press of Cape Colony was exceedingly indignant with me on account of my attitude with regard to the railway question. But I went my own way, knowing that my first duty concerned the interest of my country.

The incorporation of the "New Republic" with the South African Republic took place during the same year, and it was afterwards formed into the Vryheid district. This republic owed its existence to a quarrel between two Zulu chiefs, Dinizulu, the son of Cetewayo, and Usibepu, who were at war with one another in 1884. Dinizulu had received assistance from a number of Boers, subjects both of the South African Republic and Natal, but without the authority of the Government. Dinizulu defeated Usibepu, and showed his gratitude by giving the Boers who had helped him a piece of land, on which a new republic came into existence.

Lucas Meyer, who, as a member of the Executive Raad, took part in the campaigns of the late war, was elected president of this republic. But, in 1887, it was incorporated with the South African Republic, at the request of the inhabitants, and received the same right as the other four great districts to send four members to the Volksraad of the South African Republic.

The period of five years for which I had been elected President had meanwhile nearly expired, and it became necessary, in 1887, to give notice, through the Volksraad, of the election of a new president to manage the affairs of the country from 1888.

Source: http://www.politicsweb.co.za/politicsweb/view/politicsweb/en/page72308?oid=647079&sn=Marketingweb+detail&pid=90389&utm_source=Po