

### 3. The Making of a Myth: General Smuts and the Miners of South Wales

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The visit of General Smuts to South Wales in October 1917 is widely referenced in many biographies, and histories of his exploits, with the intention of illustrating his powers of persuasion and immense popularity in Great Britain during his time in the Imperial War Cabinet. The references are, however, factually incorrect and misleading, based upon apocryphal accounts, which often suffer from a good deal of poetic license, only loosely based upon the available evidence. One may call it an emblematic myth, shrouded in mystery and almost impervious to contrary evidence. In this chapter, I will first give a brief account of the caricature that is invariably presented, albeit in differing degrees of detail. I will then give the broader context against which Smuts's visit to South Wales has to be placed and try to give an assessment of the respects in which it may be claimed that the visit was a success.

In essence, the mythical story begins by pointing out General Smuts's remarkable negotiating skills, evidence of which was his resolution of a strike by policemen in London, in early 1917, and, with George Nicolle Barnes, a fellow member of the Imperial War Cabinet and Leader of the Labour Party, he settled a strike of 5 000 munition engineers in Coventry (Crafford, 1943:129). In the meantime, trouble was brewing in the South Wales coalfields, fomented by organised anti-war miners, 'trouble mongers' and pacifist agitators (Smuts, 1952:202). The striking miners were in no mood for compromise and threatened to jeopardise the war effort (Crafford, 1943:129). The strike would diminish even further the one-week coal reserve of the navy, endangering

its capacity to keep the fleet at sea; preventing reinforcements from being shipped to France; and putting food supplies at risk (Armstrong, 1937:293). David Lloyd George, the Prime Minister, who himself hailed from Wales, immediately despatched Smuts to the valleys of South Wales to placate the miners (Barbour, 2019:362). Smuts to the rescue as the 'only sure mediator' (Joseph, 1970:124).

Before setting off from Cardiff to Tonypany where he was to address the striking miners, he received the keys to the city, and an honorary degree from Cardiff University. The motorcade wound its way up the Rhondda Valley, through the hostile 'striking mob' (Katz, 2022:227). Armstrong indulges in a good deal of imaginative detail when he describes the miners as a seething angry mob, wearing grey cloth caps, expecting a black South African, and instead finding themselves faced by a diminutive white-faced general (Armstrong, 1937:294).

Remembering that Lloyd George had told him the Welsh were a nation of singers, Smuts entreated his audience to demonstrate their vocal prowess. At first, rather surprised by the request, there was silence, then a lone voice, 'a ruddy faced miner' in the crowd (Joseph, 1970:124) began singing *Land of My Fathers* (Katz, 2022:227), the Welsh national anthem: 'then with deep fervour the rest of the throng joined in' (Steyn, 2015:87). Smuts had reduced them to emotional quivering wrecks (Armstrong, 1937:295). Smuts had performed a miracle, and the striking miners were back at work the next day (Katz, 2022:227). Crafford and Smuts's son embellish this by suggesting that when General Smuts attended a Cabinet meeting the following day his colleagues were amazed and asked him how he had done it, to which Smuts replied that it was news to him that the miners were back in work, and after pausing added, 'The *Land of My Fathers* saved us' (Crafford, 1943:130; Smuts, 1952:203).

Some of the facts are true; most of them are not, and the account sheds no light whatsoever on why Smuts was in South Wales; what the nature of the dispute was, to which his intervention was thought to be the answer. Indeed, wasn't it a

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risk to send him to Tonypanyd at all, the site only seven years earlier of a 'Red Revolution' of rioting miners who sacked and looted the town (Evans & Maddox, 1992). They were subdued by police and the military at the behest of Winston Churchill, who had sent nearly 1 000 Metropolitan Police, and several regiments of infantry in the winter of 1910 to Pontypridd, Tonypanyd and Aberdare (Evans & Maddox, 1992:40-46). Smuts's reputation for the way he had treated striking South African gold miners in 1906 to 1907 and the notorious deportation of labour leaders in 1914 caused a furore, even in the conservative press, but especially in the more radical parts of Wales, such as Merthyr, an Independent Labour Party stronghold, with its own widely read newspaper, *The Pioneer*.

The name of General Smuts gained elevated national notoriety in Britain, when his solution to the gold mine strikes, and labour disputes of 1913 was to call out the army and to deport to Great Britain nine of the labour leaders, who were British citizens,<sup>1</sup> not by judicial procedures, which Smuts stated categorically would not succeed, but by acting *ultra vires*. After the fact in early February 1914, Smuts, the Minister of Defence, introduced into the Union Parliament, the 'Indemnity and Undesirables Special Deportation Bill' (Smuts, 1914:3). In his speech, which he published under the title of *The Syndicalist Conspiracy in South Africa: A Scathing Indictment* (1914), he justified the deportation of what he believed to be seditious, treasonable revolutionaries and 'dynamitists' who threatened the stability, safety and existence of South Africa. Because there had been no powers of authority currently in force to enable the Government to deport the troublemakers, nor was there any criminal law, other than high treason which was enacted in the seventeenth century, Smuts decided to take matters into his own hands. To indict them for what they had really done, Smuts exclaimed, 'you would never get a conviction' (Smuts, 1914:29). The Government has no alternative but 'to take the law into its own hands, and to deal

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1 The deportees were J.T. Bain, A. Crawford, W. Livingston, D. McKerral, G. Mason, W.H. Morgan, H.J. Poutsma, R.B. Waterston and A. Watson.

with the situation under Martial Law as though it had this power and to look to Parliament to condone the action it had taken' (Smuts, 1914:28).

Although the Union Parliament legitimated his actions, Smuts provoked a huge backlash because of his high-handed disregard for the law. The South African Labour Party, formed in 1910, distanced itself from Generals Smuts and Botha, and in the Transvaal Provincial Council's general election of March 1914, Labour won a decisive victory at the expense of Smuts's Unionist Party (Crafford, 1943:94). F.E.T. Krause, elected to the Union House of Assembly in 1910, and confidant of Smuts and Botha, was in no doubt where to attribute blame for the defeat. The determining cause, he thought, was the deportation of men from South Africa without trial (Hancock & van der Poel, 1966: vol III, 168).

Even the friends of Smuts in England, including Margaret C. Gillet, the botanist, Emily Hobhouse, who exposed the British concentration camps during the Second Anglo Boer War, and Professor H.J. Wolstenholme, his former tutor of law at Cambridge, questioned his political judgement, pointing out to Smuts the bad press he had provoked in England. Gillet told Smuts that his actions made her feel that his political foundations were a little unstable, while Hobhouse reminded Smuts that he had considerably upset the Labour world, and wondered whether he would be able to bring Ramsey MacDonald, who was visiting South Africa, around to his point of view (Hancock & van der Poel, 1966:164, 174). Wolstenholme told Smuts that he had provided the press with a new sensation and the Labour Party with free publicity. He predicted that the deportees would be received in Britain as heroes and martyrs, and that Smuts's use of force and the suspension of the law may well provoke retaliation from the militants in South Africa (Hancock & van der Poel, 1966:166).

Wolstenholme was right about the British reception of the deportees, and the reaction of the press. The Tory press initially accepted the accounts that came out of South Africa, but when the deportees arrived in London, the press began

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to reflect public sentiment. The *Manchester Daily Citizen* (20 March 1914), for example, reported the results of the Labour victory in the Transvaal Provincial General Election. It advised Smuts that if he wanted to hold back the Labour movement and take a further step down the road to tyranny that he would have to disenfranchise as well as deport the workers. The election was fought on the issue of the deportations, and Labour increased its representation from two to twenty-two elected members. They have succeeded, the report suggested, in killing off those parts of the Indemnity Bill that sought to exclude the Labour leaders permanently. It was now up to the British Government to censure Smuts and Botha and stop washing its hands of responsibility for the personal liberty of British citizens.

*The Clarion* newspaper, founded by the British socialist Robert Blatchford in 1891, protested that Smuts and Botha had committed a crime that struck at the very heart of British liberties. Three of the deportees, it was suggested, had been arrested before the declaration of the General Strike, and before the proclamation of martial law. If such actions were to go unchallenged by the British Government, democracy would be ‘thrown back to the days of Norman Villenage<sup>2</sup> before the reign of King John’ (27 February 1914).

When the nine deportees arrived in Britain, they were feted as heroes of the working class, and invited all over the country to address various affiliates of Labour at fundraising rallies in their support. On 27 February 1914, for example, they were welcomed with rapturous applause at a trade union gathering at the London Opera House, where both Ramsey McDonald, the current leader of the Labour Party, and Keir Hardy, who had led the party from 1906 to 1908, condemned Smuts and Botha for their disgraceful reaction to the legitimate grievances aired by Labour, and for the inhumane treatment of the black people, whose working lives in the gold mines were

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2 This term is first used in the fourteenth century to describe a form of tenure where the tenant is under an obligation to be at his master’s bidding and do anything required. <https://thelawdictionary.org/villenage/>. Accessed 16/12/2022.

less than two years, with white people on average working 4.7 years before succumbing to the dread disease of silicosis. One of the deportees, Mr T.J. Bain, vehemently denied the charge made in the Union Parliament by Smuts, that he was part of a Syndicalist conspiracy, and 'dynamitist'. Towards the end, the suffragettes caused uproar when they interrupted the meeting demanding votes for women (*The Monmouth Guardian and Bargoed and Caerphilly Observer*, 6 March 1914:2.).

On Sunday 1 March, a huge rally, the largest seen in London, was organised in Hyde Park to greet the miners. The demonstrators marched in two enormous processions of imposing dimensions, one setting out from Cricklewood, and arrived in time for the speeches, the tail end of the second from the Embankment arrived after the rally was over. There were nine platforms - one for each of the deportees. The rally condemned the South African Government and called upon the British Government to withhold assent to the Indemnity Bill until the wrongs committed against the South African workers had been righted.

In Wales, Smuts's actions provoked varying degrees of dismay and disbelief. One of the themes that recurred throughout the meetings was how Smuts and Botha profited from the Second Anglo Boer War, and how it was precipitated by international capitalism. Five of the deportees, D. McKerral, W.H. Morgan, T.J. Bain, Archie Crawford<sup>3</sup> and H.J. Poutsma spoke at special gatherings held in their honour in the heartlands of the South Wales coalfield, and industrial belt. Botha's government, and Smuts, its minister of defence, were denigrated and vilified. Smuts was referred to as the Despicable Smuts, and his name became an object of ridicule, referring to the General as appropriately named, Smuts by name, Smuts by nature. Deportees relayed the injustices of South Africa, and the ruthlessness with which Smuts put down demonstrations and strikes by using the militia and armed police. The men met with enthusiastic welcomes at such places

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3 Archie Crawford visited Wales in July, 1914 to speak at two events in Merthyr and a gathering in Carmarthenshire.

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as Aberdare, Aberavon, Troedyrhiw, and Merthyr. At Aberdare on 18 March 1914, a mass meeting was held at the Market Hall. Dr H.J. Poutsma, general secretary of the Railway and Harbour Servants' Association of South Africa, and a medic tending to the wounds of both Boers and British in the Second Anglo Boer War, explained that the war was instigated by a small group of capitalists on the Rand, who sought the support of the British Government to further their ambitions for exploiting the gold mines. Poutsma contended that wars were always instigated by capitalists and he urged those present to refuse if they were called upon to bear arms. The Government of South Africa had sold-out to foreign capitalists on the Rand, who had precipitated the Jameson Raid, and the Second Anglo Boer War, and those men, he claimed, were still manipulating the South African government (*Aberdare Leader* 24 March 1914:5).<sup>4</sup> Keir Hardie, whose parliamentary constituency encompassed Aberdare, told the crowd that he had won his seat in 1900 as a pro-Boer, and reminded the workers that they had no responsibility for the war. Whatever war was fought, you could be certain that it was not for the cause of humanity.

At the top of the Rhondda Valley, only eighteen miles by road from Tonypany, where Smuts spoke in 1917, was the heavily industrialised town of Merthyr Tydfil, with a population of 83 000, by far the largest in Wales, and a stronghold of the Independent Labour Party (ILP). It was the parliamentary seat of Kier Hardy, an opponent of the Second Anglo Boer War and founder of the Labour Party. He was its first leader from 1906 to 1908. Regular political meetings were held in Merthyr's largest venue, the Olympia Skating Rink (Eirug, 2018:82). Two of the South African deportees were invited to speak to a meeting of 3 000 people in Merthyr in April 1914. The meeting was reported in the local and national press. *The Pioneer*, owned by 800 Merthyr subscribers, with a circulation of 10 000 served to voice the political militancy of the ILP, which Hardie himself symbolised, and to support the rank and file of the South Wales Miners' Federation

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4 Recent research has corroborated much of what Poutsma claimed. See van Onselen (2017).

whose members Smuts wished to persuade to vote against strike action in 1917. Dr Poutsma once again raised the issue of the Second Anglo Boer War, accusing both generals Smuts and Botha of profiting from it. While they opportunistically purchased lands and built grand houses on it, the poor Boer returning from the concentration camps overseas lost everything and were forced to work in the mines of the Rand in inhumane conditions.

Keir Hardy spoke briefly and reminded the audience that some of them, as patriots, would have been opposed to him in the election of 1900 when he stood as a pro-Boer, when he was accused of being a friend of every country but his own. Events had proved him right, and testified to what a terrible crime the Second Anglo Boer War was against Great Britain, against its honour, and as the current events showed against liberty. He begged the deportees to tell the workers of South Africa that the people of Merthyr were pledged to stand by them, and that if the British Government failed to act in future, as it did now, the workers of Merthyr had the power to strike with their South African comrades, 'and will tell the authorities here and there that Labour is no longer a down-trodden class, but the rising power in the world' (*Pioneer*, 2 May 1914).

By the time of Smuts's visit to South Wales, he had become a celebrated war hero because of the reported success of his campaigns in West and East Africa, and because of his prominence in the Imperial War Cabinet. In February 1916, for example, a widely syndicated photograph of Smuts, in formal top hat and tails, was published. It was announced that he is the first Boer to command a British Army outside South Africa (*Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 11 February 1916). Acceptance of such news may have been facilitated four months earlier when, following an attempt on his life in Johannesburg', a correspondent wrote that General Smuts was 'entirely English in sentiment, and a typical Cambridge man of the English Bar' (*East Anglian Daily Times*, 6 October 1915). In an article titled *General Smuts is Needed Here*, Winston Churchill wrote that Lloyd George should take full advantage of Smuts's experience and remarkable qualities, as demonstrated in East Africa,



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and by the inspiring speeches he made around the country (Smuts, 1917b), by inviting him to join the Imperial War Cabinet (*Sunday Pictorial*, 22 April 1917). The suggestion was acted upon, and justified by Andrew Bonar Law, leader of the Conservative Party, and member of the coalition government, by arguing that the inclusion of Smuts strengthened the Imperial War Cabinet, adding that Smuts is 'in many ways the strongest personality and the most representative man of all' (*Sussex Daily News*, Wednesday, 20 June 1917). There was little dissension, except concern that Smuts may be allowed to influence domestic policy, which was swiftly allayed by Bonar Law in the House of Commons, in suggesting that Smuts himself had laid it down as a condition of his service that he would not intervene on questions of domestic policy (*Daily News*, London, 26 June 1917).

The Welsh language press praised Smuts for being one of the most skilful Field Marshalls in the war (*Seren Cymru*, 28 September 1917), whose prestige had rapidly grown, especially in the minds of those west of Offa's Dyke (*Y Brython*, 11 October 1917). He was the main protagonist, along with Lloyd George, of aerial defence and offence, and instrumental in the 1917 merger of the Army and Navy air services into The Royal Air Force (Dobbs, 1915:63). The *Leicester Evening Mail* went as far as to suggest that when the history of the war is written with candour it will become evident that Britain owes more to General Smuts in the last six months than to any other person in the Administration (8 October 1917). In syndicated articles, his visit to South Wales was widely reported. The *Newcastle Journal* and the *Shields Daily News*, for example, reported a week before the visit that he would receive a particularly warm welcome in South Wales as a representative of the 'great fighting leaders' of the Second Anglo Boer War, which made him 'specially attractive' to the miners (23 October 1917). Pro-Boer sentiment had been strong in the South Wales Valleys. The report remarked that his tireless efforts for the success of the Allies over Germany was of particular significance and the thousands of workers 'keenly interested in the general's fame will be able to hear his address'. A Welsh radical newspaper

supporting liberal and socialist viewpoints cautioned against putting too much faith in the jingoistic press, pointing out that during the Second Anglo Boer War when Smuts was the State Attorney for the Transvaal, the papers portrayed him as having a great many faults and no virtues. Was it the same man, it asked, who is now in the Imperial War Cabinet and whose excellences as a soldier and statesman are celebrated? The paper asked rhetorically: 'Was he a different man seventeen years ago?' (*Y Genedl*, 2 October 1917).

What was the problem to which Smuts was the answer? There was a widespread belief that a concerted effort was being made by pacifists of the 'MacDonald, Snowden and Fenner Brockway type'<sup>5</sup> to gain the support of the masses of South Wales miners in an attempt to bring the war to a halt by paralysing the coal mining industry.

The ILP was blamed for much of the intrigue and held responsible for packing local miners' lodges with 'young energetic men' whose extreme views influenced policy far in excess of their numerical numbers in the South Wales Miners' Federation (*The Mail*, 29 October 1917). There was undoubtedly a close correlation between anti-war activity and a strong presence of the Independent Labour Party, which opposed war on moral grounds. It did not officially declare its opposition to the war until 1916, but had, nevertheless, refused to take part in recruitment campaigns (Eirug, 2018:48-51). The South Wales Miners' Federation held several meetings in late 1915

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5 Philip Snowden (1864-1937) was an Independent Labour Party spokesman on foreign affairs and prominent campaigner against the war. He was not a pacifist but was against conscription and for an early negotiated peace. He championed the cause of conscientious objectors, particularly in the South Wales industrial town of Port Talbot where the No Conscription Fellowship was particularly strong (Adams, 2016:179-81). Archibald Fenner Brockway (1888-1988) was an Independent Labour Party politician and anti-war activist. He instigated the No Conscription Fellowship in 1914 and was imprisoned for his refusal to be conscripted after his application for conscientious objection was denied.

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and early 1916 at which it was resolved to oppose compulsory conscription due to be introduced in the Military Service Act of January 1916. James Winstone, its president, denounced the Act as gross folly which would endanger national unity. Opposition to conscription was so volatile that it was feared that the country's coalfields would grind to a halt, and that a General Election was imminent. On 12 January 1917 the South Wales Miners' Federation voted to 'down-tools' unless the Military Service Act was withdrawn. Its Executive was unanimous in its opposition, warning that conscription was the thin edge of the wedge to be used against the working classes. Only when the Asquith government made the concession that necessary industrial workers, including miners, would be exempt from conscription, did the South Wales Miners' Federation withdraw its threat of strike action, while continuing its opposition to conscription (Dobbs, 2015:68-9).

Anti-war activity was greatest in places such as Merthyr and Briton Ferry, where ILP membership was highest. Other bodies, such as The National Council for Conscription; the No-Conscription Fellowship; and Unofficial Reform Committee gained representation on the Council of the South Wales Miners' Federation and exercised influence on its decision to oppose conscription in the mines and to hold a ballot on the issue, contrary to the policy of the National Federation of Mine Workers.

South Wales, it was suggested, had been a 'storm-centre' of 'Pacifists intrigues' (*The Scotsman*, 6 November 1917). It was reported that 'the extremists have for the moment gained the upper hand' (*The Mail*, 19 October 1917). On 20 July 1917, for example, the South Wales Miners' Federation Council resolved to put on the agenda of a special conference on 2 August a resolution that the opinion of the organised labour movement of Great Britain should be conveyed to the 'labour movements of the belligerent Powers' to join with the British working class to take such action to compel their respective Governments to adopt a peace settlement (South Wales Miners' Federation Minutes, 1917).

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The immediate fear was that pacifists might exercise a disproportionate influence on the impending vote by South Wales miners to 'down-tools' over the Government's Combing-Out Policy. At least 50 000 miners voluntarily enlisted in the early days of the war, and in order to safeguard production further recruitment was forbidden. When the Military Service Act of 1916 was passed it made all male citizens aged between 18 and 41, with certain exceptions, eligible for conscription until the end of the War. The mining industry was 'starred', giving exemption to indispensable workers. By 1917, however, there was an urgent need for further recruitment.

The issue of the 'Combing-Out' of miners for military service had been rumbling on for about nine months. The proposal was first put to a deputation of the Executive Committee of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain by Sir George Cave, Secretary of State for the Home Department on 1 February 1917. He explained that there was an urgent need for men to be enlisted from the non-essential and essential industries to counter a concerted enemy attack 'requiring defending ourselves by every means possible'. The most important class of miners to be called upon would be those who had entered the mines after 14 August 1915. He proposed that the Government needed about 20 000 men, from the one million men currently working in the mines, about half of whom were of military age (MFGB Minutes, 1917). The eventual proposal was 21 000 men, of which, 4 575 would come from the 200 000 South Wales miners. The Miners' Federation of Great Britain (MFGB) agreed on 21 April 1917 that enlistment of miners should first begin with men who had left other trades to work in the mines after the outbreak of war (*The Mail*, 29 October 1917). A conference of South Wales miners' delegates endorsed the decision (South Wales Miners' Minutes, 8 May 1917). The issue was considered again by MFGB in the summer of 1917, and it was resolved to assist the Government by agreeing that in addition to those joining the mines after the war began, 'Combing-Out' should be extended to unmarried Class A men from the age of 18 to 41.

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The Special Conference of the SWMF of 1 and 2 August, at which the resolution to compel government to seek peace was passed, the anti-war lobby overwhelmingly rejected, by 236 votes to 25, the recommendation of the MFGB to accept the Government's 'Combing-Out' policy. It was then agreed to hold a ballot to determine whether miners would support strike action if the government imposed the policy. After considerable procrastination a Conference of South Wales miners' delegates rejected the decision to extend the 'Combing-Out' policy and resolved 'That we take no part in assisting in the recruitment of colliery workers for the army' (South Wales Miners' Minutes, Special Conference, 8 October 1917). The conference directed that a ballot vote be taken asking if the miners were in favour of 'down-tools' if the Government proceeded with its 'Combing-Out' scheme. It was resolved a few days later, to hold the ballot on 1 and 2 November. The decision to go ahead with the ballot was reaffirmed on the same day that Smuts arrived in Cardiff, 29 October, despite the receipt of the results of communications from district lodges and mass meetings of miners to cancel or postpone the ballot. The campaign was acrimonious with the pro-government press portraying the contest as one between unpatriotic German-loving pacifist shirkers who were physical and moral cowards on the one side, and principled, patriotic supporters of the war on the other (*Western Mail*, 9 October 1917).

Concern about pacifist and anti-war sentiment in South Wales was sufficiently strong to bring it to the attention of the Imperial War Cabinet at its meeting of 18 October 1917. Sir Edward Carson, Minister without Portfolio and leader of the Irish Unionist Party, reported that Sir George Riddell, a newspaper proprietor and confidant of Lloyd George, had indicated that the situation in the South Wales Coalfield was very serious because of the organised resistance to the 'Combing-Out' policy of the government. The mines were one of the last remaining big pools for recruitment, and of paramount importance to the government. The Imperial War Cabinet was informed that some patriotic leaders in South

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Wales, doing their best to resist syndicalist and pacifist influences, had requested that General Smuts address a War Aims meeting. Smuts was willing to address a meeting, initially scheduled at Mountain Ash, at an early date (National Archives, War Cabinet Minutes, 18 October 1917: CAB 23/4/26)

The National War Aims Committee was established as a parliamentary cross-party propaganda organisation in July of 1917, at the instigation of Prime Minister Lloyd George, around the time of Smuts's arrival in Britain. Its inception was in response to a widespread belief that pacifist propaganda was being fomented in a number of industrial towns throughout Britain, by a very small group of agitators (Monger, 2014). The Government, in its view, had a role to play in 'steadyding and stiffening, if necessary, the morale of the workers at home' (*HC Deb 13 November 1917 vol 99 cc285-347 285*). For the remainder of the war the National War Aims Committee held thousands of meetings, distributed over one hundred million publications, of which Smuts's speech at Tonypany, in an expanded version, was one. The publications of the Committee delivered a wide-ranging patriotic message, responsive to the changing environment of the war (Monger, 2014:1).

The National War Aims Committee had clearly defined objectives. First, to resist influences of an insidious and unpatriotic character. Second, to appraise the country of the War Aims of the British Empire and its Allies. And, third, to give support to the government in prosecuting the war (*HC Deb 13 November 1917 vol 99 cc285-347 285*). The National War Aims Committee was responsible for producing domestic propaganda, parallel with C.F.G. Masterman's 'War Propaganda Bureau' with its headquarters in Wellington House. The War Propaganda Bureau was responsible for most external propaganda.<sup>6</sup>

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6 Masterman had known Smuts at Cambridge and was responsible for commissioning and donating his portrait to the National Portrait Gallery. The artist was Francis Dodd, one of Masterman's wartime artists at the Bureau.

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Smuts was extensively used in 1917 as a key speaker for the National War Aims Committee, at whose invitation he spoke at numerous events around the country, and quite frequently had the freedom of the city honour bestowed upon him at the same time. For example, at Derby, Leicester, Sheffield, Glasgow and Cardiff during October and November alone. Smuts had been invited to speak at Tonypany by the representatives of the National War Aims Committee in the Rhonda Valley (*The Mail*, 29 October 1917).

Despite Smuts's reputation as a strike-breaker, and scourge of the South African Labour movement, he was considered to have qualities that would appeal to patriotic sentiment. As a former enemy, turned immense Imperial exponent of the virtues of the Empire; the only representative of the Empire inside the War Cabinet with privileged access to knowledge; and an accomplished soldier who could empathise with those on the front line of combat, Smuts constituted a credible all-rounder with considerable skills of oratory.

An immense amount of groundwork was laid to ensure the success of the General's visit, and to gloss over the negative impression of the enduring image in the South Wales valleys of his South African anti-Labour policies and his use of troops against the miners. To reinforce the propaganda of Smuts as 'the Man of the Moment' following his conquest of German East Africa in 1917 (*The Graphic*, 12 May 1917), 250 000 copies of General Smuts's speeches were distributed; placards with his portrait placed in shop windows; and articles detailing his wartime exploits in seven journals, some of which were illustrated. For example, the editors of Cardiff daily newspapers wrote editorials, and around the Rhondda Valley the visit was advertised on hoardings.

Contemporaneous accounts of Smuts's visit to South Wales in 1917 are a considerable corrective to the emblematic account of the magnificent Smuts with which I opened this chapter, and which form the mythology endlessly repeated in books about Smuts.

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The visit of General Smuts was organised with extreme precision. Little was left to chance. He had a tight schedule, arriving in Cardiff at 12:30, to be greeted by the Lord Mayor, Mr J. Stanfield, and transported to City Hall where a meeting of the Council would present Smuts with the keys to the city, followed by a civic luncheon. In receiving the freedom of the city he emphasised the parallels between Wales and South Africa, both 'small nations', at one time oppressed by the English. At the luncheon, Smuts gave a short speech of thanks emphasising that the threat to Italy was only the latest Autumn downturn, following from the crushing of Serbia in 1915, and Romania in 1916. He urged them not to be downhearted, adding that we are all doing our bit in what is 'probably the greatest drama in human history' (Smuts Papers, A1 Box 301/1, 13). At 3.15 Smuts was to be taken on a tour of Cardiff Docks, followed by a visit to the Mansion House, Richmond Road, the official residence of the Lord Mayor. At 5:15pm Smuts would travel by motor car through Whitchurch, Pontypridd, and Porth before arriving in Tonypany. From Penygraig to Tonypany the motorcade was to be led by two silver bands and the Voluntary Training Corps, as a guard of honour. He was to speak at the Empire, with a capacity of 3 000 people, on the subject of the War Aims, and later address an overflow meeting in Ebenezer Baptist Chapel. In all, he gave four formal speeches, two in Cardiff and two in Tonypany, and a number of impromptu addresses as the motorcade stopped from time to time. After the meetings, Smuts was taken to The Garth, near Taff's Well, the home of Mr and Mrs W.P. Nicholas, who chaired the meeting in the Empire, for supper before returning to Cardiff for the 10:42 pm mail train to London (*Western Mail*, 29 October 1917, and *Rhondda Leader*, 3 November 1917).

It is certainly the case that crowds lined the streets of the Rhonddas from Penycraig to Tonypany, not only for General Smuts, but also for Dr T.J. Macnamara, Secretary to the Admiralty and Right Hon. William Brace, Under Secretary to the Home Office. At Penycraig the motorcade was met by Major Sir John Curtis, Lord Bute, Mr W.P. Nicholas and thousands of spectators. The procession to Tonypany was headed by



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the Tonypandy Hibernian Band, as it wound its way through packed streets to the cheering of a vociferous crowd singing patriotic songs. The Empire theatre, where Smuts, Brace and Macnamara were to speak, had to open its doors early in order to prevent the crowd blocking the street outside. The *Rhondda Leader* described the greeting as a 'rousing reception', and reported Smuts as saying, 'that it has been one of the greatest demonstrations that he had seen in his life' (3 November 1917). Quite a different story from the often-repeated claim that the streets were lined with an angry seething mob of militant miners.

It is true that General Smuts requested to hear the Welsh sing, despite hearing them singing all along the procession, but it was a Welsh hymn for which he asked, not *Land of My Fathers* (*Gwlad fy Nhadau*). The hymn they sang at the Empire before the speeches were delivered, was *O Fryniau Caersalem* (From Caersalem Hills). In the overflow meeting, without request, two hymns were sung, to which Smuts exclaimed that he was reminded of Carlyle's description of the La Marseillaise sounding like a battle cry (Smuts papers, A1 Box 301/1, 15). When Smuts stood up to speak at the first of the two Tonypandy meetings he was given a 'most thrilling, rousing magnificent ovation' (*Rhondda Leader*, 3 November 1917). The three speakers, Brace, Macnamara and Smuts, were again enthusiastically received when they spoke at the overflow meeting at Ebenezer Chapel immediately after.

*The Pioneer*, predictably, had a very different view of the General's visit, describing the whole proceedings as a farce. It suggested that only a small number of miners were present, and the best seats were reserved for the select few who arrived at the last minute, while hundreds were left outside, unable to enter. The whole thing made a mockery of the idea that in prosecuting the war all class distinctions were to be put to one side. There were a few interruptions, but had it been an open meeting, it was suggested; the Rhondda miners would have made it clear to General Smuts what they thought of him and his treatment of their fellow workers in South Africa in sending the troops in against the gold miners on the Rand, and

his action in transporting nine labour leaders to London on the *Umgeni* in 1913 (3 November 1917).

### **The Speeches**

Smuts gave four speeches which were all variations on the theme of the importance of small nations, their value and contribution to the war effort, and the threat posed by Germany to them. The war was not one of vengeance, nor for territory, but for the ideals of justice, freedom and equality. It was a war of good against evil, of conscience against the will to power. It was a moral crusade against the outrages against humanity that Germany has perpetrated. We must all stand firm and do our duty. In the main theatre of war the Allies have Germany in a vice, 'and we will hold him there until he disgorges that war map of his...' (Smuts papers, A1 Box 301/1, 13). He appealed to the patriotism of Wales as a nation, and of Welsh people who knew their duty when called upon in time of adversity. He first spoke at the ceremony conferring the Freedom of the City of Cardiff upon him, where he said he was honoured to receive such an accolade from one small people to a member of the smallest people in the British Empire (*The Times*, 30 October 1917). He was the youngest recipient to receive the freedom of the city.

He then spoke at the luncheon in his honour at the City Hall, Cardiff, followed by the major speech at Tonypany delivered to 3 000 people, and repeated with significant variation, in an overflow meeting in Ebenezer Baptist Church, of 2 000. At Tonypany he shared the platform with William Brace, a leading trade unionist and Labour minister, and T.J. Macnamara, financial secretary to the Admiralty.

The struggle of small nations for freedom was one of the central themes of his speeches. In order to demonstrate that he empathised with small nations who struggled against the biggest nation in the world, the English nation. He said that he knew that Wales had always stood firm for its separate existence against the English. The Welsh had stood up for their language, their national traditions and for everything

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that makes a nation's soul (*The Leicester Daily Post*, 30 October 1917). Smuts characterised the Afrikaner resistance in the Second Anglo Boer War as a crusade for the freedom of a small people. We fought to the bitter end, he lamented, until every man, woman and child was either in the field or in concentration camps. Our liberty was lost, he said, but it was soon regained (Smuts, 1917a:1). That war had made the British people realise the fairness and considerable value of small nations, and that is the reason why, in all conscience they have embarked upon this great struggle for small nations. Smuts congratulated the Welsh on making a great contribution to the war, and for giving the country a Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, whose amazing energy constituted the soul of the Allied struggle (*Times*, 30 October 1917). In the speech to the overflow audience, in a more strident tone, he said the Welsh people had fought for almost a thousand years for their country's liberty against England, and occasionally beat her, 'and now when they have swallowed you a Welshman is ruling England (Smuts Papers, A1, box 301/1, 15). When the history of the war came to be written, he said, and due credit apportioned to every nation in the Empire, Wales would rank amongst the very highest (*The Leicester Daily Post*, 30 October 1917).

Speaking at the luncheon, Smuts had contended that the struggle was largely over the fate of mankind. It was not so much about fighting for the Empire, but for civilisation. Germany had crushed Serbia and Romania, and was now embarking upon an onslaught against Italy. Italy, however, need not fear because her Allies would stand by her. The war was fought not for material gain, 'but for the great issues of the ethical, moral and political bases of Western Society' (*The Times*, 30 October 1917). The war would determine whether the future would be built on freedom, or the 'will to power' and the 'will to force'. He was here alluding to the considerable literature by philosophers whose contribution to the war effort was to warn of the German militaristic psyche, to which, it was claimed, Germany's most prominent thinkers, such as Hegel, Nietzsche, and Treitschke, contributed (e.g. Barker, 1914; Dewey, 1914; Santayana, 1916; Muirhead, 1917).

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At Tonypany, Smuts told his audience that the ultimate issues of the war were the principles that the British Empire was built upon: liberty, constitutional government and freedom. In Germany, these principles were regarded as nonsense and citizens regarded as pawns of the state. The war was both moral and spiritual, and not about territories. It was a war between God and the Devil, and the Allies were engaged in a moral crusade, which Germany could not win because it was morally bankrupt, and because 'the invisible forces of the universe and the conscience of mankind' were on the side of the Allies (*The Times*, 30 October 1917).

Smuts appealed to the patriotism of the miners, both at the beginning and the end of his speech. He said that he had been overwhelmed by the warm reception he had received on the journey from Cardiff to Tonypany. Smuts thanked God for what he had seen which was that the heart of Wales beats true. He assured his audience that his visit was not because he thought it necessary to address any great exhortation to the miners, but because he knew that they knew their duty and they would do it (Smuts, 1917a:2). He addressed them not as a representative of the British Government, but as a 'representative of the great Society of Nations that composes the British Empire', whose foundation, he reiterated, was liberty, constitutional government and freedom (Smuts, 1917:4). Smuts's strategy in his speech was to valorise the brave efforts of the soldiers, reminding the audience that he was one himself, in the main theatres of war, and to emphasise the righteousness of the cause. Despite occasional setbacks, and as dark as the night might be, the Allied Nations will never forsake their duty (Smuts, 1917a:12). Smuts maintained that there was no giving in until the world was established on a new basis. This would be a world in which there were no standing armies, in which young men would no longer be sacrificed to war, and all our powers would be devoted to economic development. A better England, Wales and Tonypany could only be achieved by first gaining victory in the war, and as a result, small nations would be allowed to flourish on the basis of equality with large nations.

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In conclusion, he thought it unnecessary to make an appeal to the audience to do their duty, because the mind of Tonypandy was as crystal clear as water to him. All our lives, he said, are of little consequence in the great scheme of things. We cannot take riches or our most heartfelt grievances when we go, but our legacy can be one of which our children are proud. He ended by reiterating that the war was a great moral and spiritual crusade. He exhorted the audience: 'Will you stand firm? Will you last it out? You will not give in, and I will tell you that, as sure as I stand here, victory is assured for the Allied cause and those great principles which we are fighting for' (Smuts, 1917a:14).

In contrast, William Brace cajoled the miners. He was far more confrontational in his message, telling the miners that their reputation in the country was at rock bottom, and the feeling against 'down-tools' was far greater than they imagined. He was direct in his approach, reminding the colliers in the audience that as members of a great commonwealth they occupied a privileged position, and with privilege comes responsibility. On the Western Front, he continued, their flesh and blood were laying down their lives to achieve the vision that General Smuts had depicted. Appealing to their conscience, he urged them to allow the soldiers to come back home before taking a ballot, reminding them that if they lived in Germany they would not even be allowed to talk about a ballot (*Pioneer*, 3 November 1917; *Rhondda Leader*, 3 November 1917).

All the reports indicate that the speeches were punctuated with enthusiastic and appreciative cheering, which would seem to indicate that Smuts was preaching to the converted. His appeal to their patriotism did not fall on deaf ears. In fact, in the second of his Tonypandy speeches he admitted that London had misinterpreted the mood of South Wales, and that the rumours of Wales wavering, becoming irritable and changing its mind on the great issues for which we fight, were slanderous. In the seven months he had been in England he had not been heartened more than by 'gallant little

Wales', which 'under the hammer strokes of fate', ring true (Smuts Papers, A1 Box 301/1, 15).

The speeches were nothing if not morale-boosting, which was one of the remits of the National War Aims Committee, and even *The Pioneer* conceded the 'apparent success' of the Tonypany meeting. The *Pioneer* report, not surprisingly, however, was largely negative, and in this respect, was something of an aberration. The speeches, it argued, were vacuous, filled with the usual militaristic platitudes and abstractions. Smuts was denigrated for his hypocrisy and audacity in talking about liberty and freedom, while the memory was still fresh of his use of troops against fellow unfortunate wage-slaves in the goldmines of the Rand in July 1913. The 'moanings and death-cries' of the miners still echoed in the imagination, along with the memory of the transportation of nine Labour leaders to London. Brace's speech was described as sloppy and bombastic, in the knowledge that his audience reflected the views of the right-wing *South Wales Echo* (*Pioneer*, 3 November 1917).

Far more representative of the reports was that of the *Rhondda Leader*, a Liberal / Labour-leaning newspaper, which was positive in its characterisation of the speeches and their reception. It reported the contents of the speeches at length, as did the *London Times* (30 October 1917), and pointed out that the vote of thanks was carried with enthusiasm, followed by the spontaneous breaking-out of singing *For he's a jolly good fellow* (3 November 1917). Brace's speech was described as 'rousing' and containing some 'straight talk', whereas Dr Macnamara began his speech in Welsh, and went on to give an account of the origins of the war and Germany's dream of world power. At both the Empire and Ebenezer Chapel, the speeches were 'received with the utmost enthusiasm', and at the conclusion, the 'visitors were given a hearty send-off' (3 November 1917).

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There is little doubt that Smuts had a rapturous reception at all four engagements in Wales.<sup>7</sup> They had been meticulously orchestrated, and publicised. Did his speeches, along with those of Brace and Macnamara, have the intended effect of persuading the miners to vote against 'down-tools'?

The ballot was held on two consecutive days after the visit, and on those days the miners were unable to work, not because they were on strike, but because the safety officers and firemen were in dispute over a completely different issue; the recognition of their union. Only those pits that had recently been inspected were permitted to work. This allowed the miners time to vote in large numbers. They voted overwhelmingly in favour of rejecting 'down-tools', with some variation across the lodges. Only 23% of those who voted across the coalfield opposed the 'Combing-Out' of miners, whereas 44% opposed it in Merthyr and the adjacent Dowlais (South Wales Miners' Federation Minutes, 1917). The 77% vote in favour would have been greater had not such lodges as Risca, with 2 000 men, refused to vote because they opposed the unpatriotic nature of the ballot in the first place.

The National War Aims Committee saw the result as a considerable success for its propaganda activities in South Wales. The War Cabinet was able to make an assessment on the basis of two sources of opinion-gathering: the weekly reports of the Ministry of Labour, under David Shackleton, the permanent secretary, on the 'Labour Situation', and the fortnightly reports from the Criminal Investigation Department, written by Basil Thomson. While not completely unbiased, neither had an axe to grind against The National War Aims Committee and are more reliable than the Committee's own assessments. It was Shackleton who suggested a NWAC

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7 I have been unable to find any reference to the honorary degree he was awarded in 1917. In the list of honorary degrees in the Smuts House Museum it lists LL.D from University of Wales, 1917, and LL.D Cardiff University, 1921. At that time the University was the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire, a constituent college of the University of Wales.

campaign in South Wales in order to influence the ballot against the policy of 'Combing-Out' in the mines. The report of 31 October suggests that the campaign, with its high-profile speakers, produced 'outstanding results' and succeeded in resisting attempts to organise opposition to Smuts's speech. Tonypandy was identified as fervently pacifist, and the most likely place to have caused trouble. The lack of success of the pacifists, however, indicated to Shackleton that despite their vociferousness they had little influence. The report of 7 November anticipated that an overwhelming majority would vote 'no' in the ballot, and specifically took the negative criticism of the article in the *Pioneer* to be indicative of the ILP's concerns about the effectiveness of the campaign. The report hailed the work of the National War Aims Committee a success in South Wales constituting a very serious defeat for the pacifists, and a great encouragement to the patriots of South Wales. It cautioned, however, that with the eyes of the country on them, 15 000<sup>8</sup> men voted against the 'Comb-Out', and effectively the War. It was imperative, therefore, that such campaigns continue in order to counteract the systematic and vigorous propaganda of the pacifists.

To what extent can we attribute this overwhelming rejection of strike action to Smuts? The press coverage which reported on the results as they were released over a number of days celebrated the patriotism of the South Wales miners, and invariably saw the outcome of the ballot as a resounding defeat for the pacifists, described as a 'rout of the South Wales Extremists' (*Yorkshire Evening Post*, 12 November 1917), and a 'remarkable demonstration of working class patriotism' (*The Times*, 1917).

It was recognised that the popularity of the influence of pacifism may have been exaggerated, and that in holding the ballot the South Wales Miners' Federation had called their bluff and revealed the weakness of their support (*The*

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8 This figure of 15 000 proved to be a serious underestimation by the time the results were officially released. The final figures were 28 903 who voted 'yes', and 98 946 against (South Wales Miners Federation Minutes, 1917).



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*Scotsman*, 6 November 1917). Much of the criticism of the miners before the ballot had wrongly equated the general unrest with anti-war and pacifist sympathies, whereas it was really indicative of the more widespread industrial unrest in the South Wales coalfield and dissatisfaction with the owners (*Scotsman*, 6 November 1917). The politicians and press, it was suggested, had been reckless in their characterisation of Welsh miners as harbouring treasonable feelings (*The Globe*, 8 November 1917). The men themselves, it was suggested, had the greatest percentage of voluntary enlistments in the country (*Westminster Gazette*, 6 November 1917), of whom over 50 000 were miners at the start of the war, and were hugely supportive of their comrades, as the vote had demonstrated. Clement Edwards, a Welsh Liberal MP, wrote to the King indicating that the miners had voted almost solidly in favour of being conscripted themselves, 'instancing the most beautiful demonstration of patriotism yet evinced from any industrial population' (*Scotsman*, 19 November 1917). The King replied that he was sure that it was in no small measure due to the way that Edwards had put the issues to his constituents in the mining area of East Glamorgan.

Smuts's name received next to no mention in the reporting of the ballot. There are a couple of exceptions. Alfred Yeo, the liberal MP for Poplar, and prominent ally of Lloyd George, spoke in the South Wales mining districts in support of the Government's 'Combing-Out' policy. He is reported to have spoken at several large meetings at which he detected no disaffection with the war, and in evidence mentions that General Smuts was given a 'royal welcome' on his recent visit to Wales (*Westminster Gazette*, 6 November 1917). The Welsh language newspaper *Seren Cymru* approved of Smuts's visit, suggesting that the people of Wales needed to be reminded of 'Man's Duties', rather than 'Man's Rights' (2 November 1917). *The Scotsman* made a much stronger claim. It suggested that the ballot had brought out a minority of pacifist intriguers who vigorously attempted to work-up support, which was in the end 'completely swamped in the enthusiasm created by

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General Smuts's visit and his stirring speech' (*The Scotsman*, 6 November 1917).

It may be concluded that Smuts was a useful instrument for promoting the propaganda of the National War Aims Committee, but to suggest that he had more than a marginal influence on the vote would be a considerable exaggeration. He and his fellow speakers at Tonypany were pushing at an open door. The 'Report From The Ministry of Labour on the Labour Situation' for the week-ending 17 October 1917, was concerned about the rise in activities, including public meetings, educational classes and protest meetings, by syndicalists, socialists and pacifists. The ILP was identified as the main protagonist for pacifism, with the aid of the Union of Democratic Control, the Council for Civil Liberties and the Women's Peace Crusade. South Wales was singled out to be particularly fertile ground, and the impending ballot one of the more serious problems. The report suggests that the ballot will fail, because 'the patriotic element, which is commonly stated to be, though not voluble, exceedingly numerous' (CAB 24/29/31). Erring on the side of caution it was suggested that this element should be stimulated and supported by organising a series of public meetings for which the National War Aims Committee should be responsible. Subsequent events, the report for the week ending 31 October maintained, had vindicated the earlier view that the resolution of the Delegates' Conference of 8 October in favour of a ballot did not represent the attitude of the majority of miners. It reports that mass meetings were held throughout the coalfield which passed resolutions protesting against the pacifist policies of the Delegates' Conference. It noted the opposition of the Executive to vote in favour of 'down-tools.' In addition, it claims that the campaign of the National War Aims Committee was outstandingly successful, the most notable meetings being those at Abertillery, 27 October, addressed by Macnamara, who also spoke at Tonypany, and those of Smuts at Cardiff and Tonypany (CAB/24/30/57).

There appears to be no doubt about the impending result prior to Smuts's visit, and the report was confident that 'the

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pacifists party's vociferousness is out of proportion to its influence'. The report continues: 'it may be accepted with the utmost confidence that no strike will follow' (CAB/24/30/57).

Smuts, then, was part of a well-orchestrated campaign, that may have bolstered morale by extolling the virtues of patriotism, but there is no question that the vote would have swayed the other way. There was no strike to end, and there were no negotiations to which Smuts was party, unlike his later intervention to resolve the strike between aeroplane manufacturing workers and employers in Coventry (*Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, Monday 3 December 1917). The strike in the South Wales Coalfields at the time of Smuts's visit was by safety inspectors and firemen for union recognition, in which Smuts had no interest. The ballot for 'down-tools' by the South Wales miners had been instigated by a small minority of radical activists. Vernon Hartshorn, a prominent member of the South Wales Miners' Federation Executive, complained that the ballot had been forced on the miners by 'the pro Kaiser policy of the peace-at-any-price extremists' (*South Wales Daily News*, 24 October 1917). Because it had been procedurally, and constitutionally, recommended, the Executive felt it would be politically unwise, and potentially divisive to submit it to another ballot. Not even the leadership of the Federation was in favour of rejecting 'Combing-Out', even though many were advocates of a negotiated settlement to the war. The recommendation to the miners of the Executive Council of the South Wales Miners' Federation, including the President, James Winstone, and the General Secretary, Tom Richards, was to vote against strike action. Campaigning in Pontypool, the President argued that too much hysteria and prejudice surrounded the issue, and that they should vote against 'down-tools.' He had nothing but contempt for those who had entered the mines in order to avoid military service. His views on the war had not changed, he asserted. He was still in favour of peace by negotiation, but firmly believed that if the miners disregarded his advice there would be anarchy resulting in a disastrous effect on the allies (*The People*, 28 October 1917). The General Secretary urged the miners to show loyalty

and patriotism by doing their duty in a crisis. A vote against 'Combing-Out' would not lead to negotiations, but instead undermine their kith and kin on the battlefields (*Western Mail*, 24 October 1917). In reaffirming that the ballot proceed despite many objections received from miners' lodges urging the vote to be abandoned, the Council urged that the whole of the workforce take part in the ballot and vote 'no' (South Wales Miners' Federation minutes, 29 October 1917; *Western Daily Press*, 30 October 1917).

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