

AMERICAN POLICY CONCERNING THE ANGLO-BOER WAR (1899-1902)

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the prelude to the war in South Africa the United States of America tried to stay neutral. As the war approached it became clear that the American government's unofficial support was with England although officially they still announced neutrality. As the war in South Africa continued beyond the duration that everybody believed it would, a number of incidents occurred that made the Boers to believe that the USA were violating their official neutrality and that they were beginning to support England actively. This led to efforts by the Boers to get America to stop supporting England and also to get the USA actively involved in bringing the war to an end.

2. BEFORE THE WAR

The two Boer republics and the USA exchanged diplomatic recognition as early as 1870.² In 1872 the Orange Free State decided to open a consulate in Philadelphia which was moved to New York in 1886. The same year an American, Charles D Pierce, was appointed as consulate-general for the Free State in New York. The ZAR, however, did not appoint a direct representative in the USA but rather left it to their consul in Europe to take responsibility for the USA as well. The USA, during the early years, was represented in the two Boer republics by their consul in Cape Town, Willard Edgecomb.³

¹ Department of History, University of the North.

² Read Clements T Keto, *American Involvement in South Africa, 1870-1915* (Ph.D Georgetown University, 1972), pp. 81-2; Transvaal Archives, SS 129 Foreign Affairs, R 1689/70: Hamilton Fish—President ZAR, Washington, 19 November 1870.

³ JH Ferguson, *American diplomacy and the Boer War* (Philadelphia, 1939), p. 2; PJ van Loben Sels, *De Boeren-beweging in Amerika* (Amsterdam, 1902), pp. 3-4; TJ Noer, *The United States and South Africa, 1870-1914* (Kent, Ohio, 1978), p. 15.

The discovery of gold in the Transvaal led to the coming of many Americans (amongst the influx of foreigners) to South Africa. By 1896 there were already approximately 2 500 Americans in the Transvaal.⁴ This also stimulated trade between the two countries mainly because the USA was most successful in manufacturing machines and appliances for gold mining.⁵

The influence the Uitlanders had on the future of the Boer republics is well known. Suffice it to say that the Americans amongst them were often on the forefront in the pressure exerted on the Boer government for the franchise, etc. Most prominent amongst these Americans was John Hays Hammond who was also one of the leaders in the Reform Committee. His role in the notorious Jameson Raid and also his influence on the American government played an important role in creating an anti-Boer feeling in certain circles in the USA.⁶

In the early 1890s America decided to open agencies in Johannesburg, Kimberley and Bloemfontein and as late as July 1898 a consulate in Pretoria.⁷

In the 1890s a number of incidents concerning American citizens working in the ZAR occurred which played a role in deteriorating the relationship between the USA and the Boer republics. The one that left a very bad taste was the treatment of a black American: John Ross was arrested for an alleged transgression and flogged without trial. Ross called on his consul for support who reported the incident to Washington. Although the ZAR government was prepared to meet the 10 000 American dollar claim, it left a very bad impression in Washington about the way black people were treated in the Transvaal.⁸ Commando service was another thorny issue which had a negative influence on the relationship between the ZAR and the USA.⁹

In the meantime the process of rapprochement between the USA and England was taking place especially since their differences regarding the Venezuela boundary dispute had been solved in 1896. This was the beginning of a period "of

⁴ The Star, 4 January 1896.

⁵ E de Waal, *The part played by the Americans on the Witwatersrand during the period 1886-1899* (Unp. M.A. thesis, Unisa, 1971), p. 166.

⁶ For more information read De Waal, *The part played....*

⁷ For more information read Louis Changuion, *Arbitrasie of Bemiddeling? Die rol van die VSA in die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902* (Unp. D.Litt. et Phil. dissertation, Unisa, 1982).

⁸ Changuion, pp. 24-6.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-8 and 54-66.

exceptionally good relations amongst the moneyed and titled Anglo-Saxon aristocracy on both sides of the Atlantic".¹⁰

The fact that England was the only country which did not take sides against the USA in the Spanish-American War (1898) further stimulated the rapprochement process. This resulted in the expression: "So the period of *twisting the lion's tail* (the Venezuela-boundary dispute) was followed by one of *patting the eagle's head* (the Spanish-American War)".¹¹ Another author puts it like this: "The diplomatic rapprochement of 1895-1905 was accompanied by a rising wave of sentimental and theoretical Anglo-Saxonism that engulfed the intellectual and political elite of America."¹² These sentiments reaffirmed the beliefs of authors such as Charles Dilke, Robert Seeley and Anthony Froude.

One person who, more than anyone else, played a role to confirm American-British relations was John Hay. He became American Secretary of State in September 1898, in the Republican administration of President William McKinley, after serving his country as ambassador in London for two years - two years that turned him into a convinced anglophile.

This is also the period in history when England began to rely more and more on the stability of the American dollar. Money began to play a decisive role in the relations between the two nations to such an extent that as George Bernard Shaw saw it in 1898: "When Mr Carnegie rattled his millions in his pockets all England became one rapacious cringe".¹³

When the war in the ZAR erupted in October 1899 the USA was represented in South Africa by three consuls: James Stowe, as consul-general in Cape Town, was the senior diplomat. Under him were Stanley Hollis as consul in Lourenco Marques and Charles Macrum as consul in Pretoria. Stowe was openly pro-British and Macrum and Hollis pro-Boer.

With the commencement of hostilities the USA, for the first time in its history, despite its official policy of non-intervention and neutrality, found itself, at least in sympathy, on the side of a monarchy opposing a republic, and "the fact that

¹⁰ De Waal, p. 212.

¹¹ Thomas A Bailey, *A diplomatic history of the American people* (New York, 1940), p. 491.

¹² CR Marchand, *The American peace movement and social reform, 1898-1918* (Princeton, 1972), p. 31.

¹³ Rayne Kruger, *Good-bye Dolly Gray* (London, 1967), p. 20.

it was a British monarchy made this all the more remarkable, as it represented a complete reversal of America's attitude towards her former rulers".¹⁴

The already developing racial prejudices in the South African politics also played a role in helping the American government to make up its mind about which side they should favour, if not support, in the struggle in South Africa.¹⁵

In spite of the increasing British favouritism by the American government it soon became apparent that the majority of the American people were in sympathy with the Boers. In a democratic system such as that of the USA, the pro-Boers believed that it might be possible to persuade the government to change its mind about the war in South Africa.

3. DURING THE OPENING STAGES OF THE WAR: EARLY REQUESTS FOR INTERVENTION

It was Dr WJ Leyds' task as envoy extraordinary of the ZAR in Europe (also responsible for the USA) to announce after 11 October that a state of war existed in South Africa. Such a message was also related to the USA on 19 October.¹⁶ The American government decided not to issue a formal declaration of neutrality.¹⁷ The Secretary of State, John Hay, explained this as natural procedure since England did not issue an official declaration of war, and he added that the London Convention of 1884 (after the Transvaal War, 1879-1881) cancelled America's 1870 recognition of the sovereignty of the ZAR.¹⁸ They could therefore assume an unofficial neutral stance.

In the few weeks before the outbreak of hostilities there was a serious effort by the Boer republics to get the USA to intervene. Interesting to note, however, is that there was a difference of opinion whether America should be asked to mediate or to arbitrate. Surely it would have been asking too much to expect the USA to arbitrate - in other words for the USA to decide who was right and who was wrong in this dispute (thus to adjudicate). Mediation, in other words to act as a go-

¹⁴ De Waal, p. 131.

¹⁵ See also Changuion, p. 94.

¹⁶ Dr WJ Leyds: *Eenige correspondentie 1899-1900*, 2nd collection, I/1, No. 9, Leyds-American envoy, Brussel, 19 October 1899, (Den Haag, 1930), p. 60.

¹⁷ USA National Archives, R.G. 84 Records of Foreign Service Posts, A 679 (Microfilm M 696): Adee-Stowe, 18 November 1899.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, RG 59 Domestic Letters, Dept. of State MSS, 21: Hay-Smith, 20 June 1900: Ferguson, p. 2.

between, could have worked. Leadership amongst the Boers on this issue was unfortunately lacking and the opportunity slipped by.¹⁹ Maybe the Boers should already then have based their call for arbitration on the Hague Convention that was being concluded at the very same time. Of these early (half-hearted?) efforts to get the USA to intervene nothing materialised.

Although it soon proved that the majority of the American people were in sympathy with the Boers, it was mostly the Irish Americans who were prepared to stick out their necks to oppose the government in this respect. Not even the strongest opposition party, the Democrats, stood stronger for the Boers than did the Irish in America. But then again the Irish were in any case opposing the British in principle, irrespective of who they were fighting.

The single factor which made it almost impossible for the Boers to get American support in their struggle against England, was the American Secretary of State at the time, John Hay. Hay, as previously mentioned, was a staunch anglophile and at more than one occasion he made it known that as long as he was in charge of Foreign Affairs the USA would do nothing "contrary to (his) conviction that the one indispensable feature of (their) foreign policy should be a friendly understanding with England".²⁰ His biographer described him as an "Anglo-Saxon, cultural, racist snob".²¹ He was "not an underdog man",... not a protester, or a crusader, or a friend of lost causes. He wasn't given to sentimentality and not conspicuously a humanitarian. He had a great regard for wealth and power such as the British Empire exemplified.²² "With respect to the Boer War Hay's Anglo-Saxonism clearly outranked other considerations - there were too few concrete American interests involved to muddy Hay's perceptions."²³ When the American consul in Pretoria, Charles Macrum, expressed himself openly in sympathy with the Boers, Hay promptly replaced him with his own son, Adelbert Hay.

The USA government saw the predicament of England in South Africa as a chance to solve a few longstanding disputes with Britain in their favour. The first such difference they had was in the Samoa islands in the South Pacific where since the 1870s the USA, England and Germany had been at loggerheads about who owned these islands. When the war in South Africa erupted, England was prepared to withdraw and left it to the USA and Germany to divide the islands amongst

¹⁹ Read Ferguson, p. 137.

²⁰ William R Thayer, *Life and letters of John Hay II* (Boston, 1915), p. 221.

²¹ Kenton J Clymer, *John Hay, the gentleman as diplomat*, (Michigan, 1975), p. 90.

²² Tyler Dennett: *John Hay, from poetry to politics* (New York, 1933), p. 241.

²³ Clymer, p. 157.

them. England of course did so believing that the USA would then stay out of the war in South Africa. One American newspaper announced this change of events thus: "All hail and victory brave Boers. You have fought for us and have won us Samoa."²⁴

Not only did the government and pro-British organisations in the USA express themselves against America becoming involved on the Boer side, but even members of the opposition realised that it would be very difficult for the USA to rationalise any action against England. William Jennings Bryan, the leader of the Democratic Party, who had much sympathy for the Boers, once said that the USA could hardly go against Britain for what they were doing in South Africa if they (the USA) were doing virtually the same thing in the Philippines. "Our refusal to recognise the rights of the Filipinos to self-government will embarrass us if we express sympathy with those in other lands who are struggling to follow the doctrines set forth in the Declaration of Independence ... Suppose we send our sympathy to the Boers? In an hour England would send back 'What about the Filipinos?'"²⁵

In December 1899 Montagu White, who up to the outbreak of war was the consul-general for the ZAR in London, was sent to the USA as Dr Leyds' personal envoy without diplomatic status.²⁶ His duties were to take charge of the pro-Boer activities in the USA and to see what could be done in the way of inducing the US government to act as mediator when a favourable opportunity occurred.²⁷

Montagu White made a point of not getting involved with partisan politics and to stay on a friendly footing with the Republican government of the day. He soon came to the conclusion that although the majority in Senate (made up of 50 Republicans, 26 Democrats and 10 others) were sympathetic towards the Boers they would not easily be persuaded to stick out their necks for the Boer cause. It was not much different in the House of Representatives.²⁸

²⁴ Martin Sweig: *Origins of the Boer War*, (Georgetown University, M.A. thesis 1957), p. 243 citing from *The New York Times*, 19 November 1899.

²⁵ *New York World*, 5 October 1899.

²⁶ AM Davey, "Montagu White" in De Kock (ed.), *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek*, I. pp. 915, 916.

²⁷ Transvaal Archives. A 439 Montagu White acquisition, Microfilm M 1107: White-Reitz, 16 January 1900.

²⁸ Congress Records, 56th Congress, 1st session, 29 May 1900, pp. 4800, 4831, 5783, 6190.

White's perception of the opposition Democrat's attitude regarding the war is best summarised in a letter he wrote to Dr Leyds in February 1900: "The Democrats have been warmly espousing the cause of the Boers but, from what I have seen, I think most of the professional politicians on their side have simply done so as a party move. The last thing they want the Republican party to do is to mediate, for that would take away the essence of their attacks."²⁹

The pro-Boers in the USA also tried to persuade the American government to stop what they believed to be acts that supported the British side. Their main complaint was raised against the fact that the government allowed the British army to buy horses and mules in the USA. Efforts to stop this and the buying of weapons and ammunition became the main activity of the pro-Boers throughout the duration of the war.³⁰

In March 1900 the two presidents of the Boer republics met and decided to send a telegram to Lord Salisbury expressing the desire that the two opposing parties should agree on arbitration by a third party.³¹ The USA was mentioned as the ideal arbitrator and such a request was therefore related to Washington.³² The USA hereupon approached the British Minister of Foreign Affairs relating the request that they had received from the Boer republics.³³ The answer from the British government was brief: "Her Majesty's government cannot accept the intervention of any other power."³⁴ This was, however, regarded by the USA as an official request for arbitration.

The 56th American Congress had lengthy discussions on the war in South Africa during the whole of the first session of 1900. The speech by the member of New York in the House of Representatives, William Sulzer, summarised the situation: "The committee on Foreign Affairs, this Republican Congress and this pro-English Administration of William McKinley will do nothing for the Boers, and secretly sympathised with Great Britain."³⁵ A number of motions and resolutions served in both houses and though it proved that the majority of the

²⁹ Leyds: *Correspondentie*, 2nd collection, 1/2, 441, White-Leyds, 22 February 1900, pp. 437-8.

³⁰ Read Henry S Wilson, "The United States and the War" in Warwick & Spies, *The South African War*, p. 318.

³¹ LE van Niekerk: *Dr. WJ Leyds as gesant van ZAR.*, (D.Phil., UOVS, 1972), p. 573.

³² Transvaal Archives. RG. 59 Consular Despatches, Pretoria, , Microfilm T. 660,2: A Hay-David Hill, 10 March 1900, 11 March 1900.

³³ *John Hay Papers*, Microfilm 3,3: John Hay-Henry White, 10 March 1900.

³⁴ Leyds: *Correspondentie*, 2nd collection, II, appendix QQ, VII, p. 185.

³⁵ William Sulzer: *The South African Republic*, Speech in the House of Representatives, 27 March 1900, p. 8.

people were sympathetic towards the Boers it still did nothing to get the government to intervene.

4. THE BOER DEPUTATION: OFFICIAL REQUESTS FOR INTERVENTION?

In March 1900 the Boer republics decided to send a deputation overseas to try to organise intervention - mediation if possible. The three man deputation, under the leadership of Abraham Fischer, arrived in the USA on 15 May 1900 after an unsuccessful tour through Europe where they achieved nothing. Even before their arrival in America John Hay made it clear that they should not expect anything from the American government and that "they would not be received officially but merely as private gentlemen".³⁶

Although the deputation was received with overwhelming enthusiasm and hospitality by the people in the USA, the government turned a cold shoulder to them and made it very clear that there was no possibility for intervention.³⁷

The Boer deputation also had a technical problem to solve: should they present their credentials (letters of credence) to the government or not? If they did so it would mean that as officially accredited visitors their movements would have been hampered and they would not have been able to address people and make propaganda for the Boer cause of their own free will. When Hay was first approached by their spokesman to ask for an interview he made it clear that the deputation should first present their credentials.³⁸ The fact that they did not do so made it very easy for Hay to turn them down. In the brief interview they had with him it was clear that Hay had already prepared an answer. As Fischer later said: "It was a bit discouraging to see our answer lying on the table as we entered and before we had had opportunity to open our mouths."³⁹

The deputation also realised that if they did present their credentials it could also have created the opportunity for the American government not to recognise it since by then (end of May) the British had already taken Bloemfontein and annexed the Free State. Such a disparagement would have been an insult to them and would also have set an example for other nations.

³⁶ Leyds: *Correspondentie*, 3rd collection, I,62, White-Leyds, 12 May 1900 (The Hague 1931), p. 176.

³⁷ *Washington Post*, 22 May 1900.

³⁸ Clymer, p. 163.

³⁹ John Hay Papers, Gen. Cor.20: W Wellman--John Hay, n.d.

John Hay himself believed that the deputation intentionally did not present their credentials. In a letter to McKinley he wrote: "From beginning to end they made no reference to credentials... It is now plain that the reason why they did not was that they intended to make an anti-administration campaign through the country, a proceeding which they would have been debarred from taking if they had presented regular diplomatic credentials."⁴⁰

One would have expected Hay to allow them a second interview. He could then have asked for credentials and by doing so he would have thwarted their intention to tour the country to make propaganda.

The credentials issue was also the reason why they were not granted an opportunity to address the American Senate. Senator Allen of Nebraska tabled a resolution asking Senate to grant the deputation such an opportunity just as they did for the Irish nationalist John Stewart Parnell and the Hungarian rebel leader Louis Kossuth. After a whole day's discussion it was voted down because the deputation had no official status.⁴¹

On 22 May the deputation was, as a sort of courtesy measure, introduced to President McKinley, but on the expressed understanding that no official matters would be discussed. The *Washington Post* reported that "the call, it is understood, will be entirely unofficial in character, as the envoys have not yet presented to the officials here the credentials with which they are accredited".⁴²

All that was left for the deputation to do was to tour the country and to try to get the people to put pressure on their government to intervene in the war. Judged from the enthusiasm with which they were received whenever they addressed people, the tour, that lasted till the end of June, was a great success. By then, however, the Americans had a presidential election on hand which soon pushed the Boer issue to the side and in the end nothing materialised out of the effort. They left the USA and went back to Europe without becoming seriously involved in partisan politics even though many believed that they were brought to the USA to help the Democratic Party in their presidential campaign. Even though they did not personally become much involved, the opposition Democrats did use their cause in

⁴⁰ William McKinley Papers MSS: Hay-McKinley, 27 June 1900.

⁴¹ Congress Records, 56th Congress, 1st session, pp. 5735, 5783-6.

⁴² *Washington Post*, 22 May 1900.

their fight against the Republicans and for obvious reasons used the fact that the government had turned them down in their campaign to win support.

After the departure of the deputation President McKinley received a letter from them in which they, *inter alia*, explained that the only reason why they never presented their credentials was because Hay did not make it possible for them to do so. They thought the meeting they had with him was just to get acquainted and would be one of several and not the only one. McKinley referred the letter to John Hay for comments. Hay reacted with indignation: "The note is disingenuous, not to say untruthful. They try to put us in the attitude of refusing their credentials when they never have presented any, nor up to this moment informed us that they had any...They take this occasion before sailing to pretend that something we did prevented their presenting the credentials they now say they have."⁴³

The *New York Times* referred to the visit of the deputation as a pathetic effort: "In so far as it was an appeal for intervention, it was hopeless from the first, and became more hopeless with every item of war news that came from their homes during their sojourn here."⁴⁴

5. NEW HOPE FOR INTERVENTION: PRESIDENT KRUGER

The Boers were hoping for a Democratic victory, and believed that if William Jennings Bryan would become president, he would be prepared to intervene, but the Republicans, with McKinley re-elected as president and Theodore Roosevelt as vice, had a resounding victory. The war in South Africa probably had no effect whatsoever on the elections and as one analyst puts it: "Asked which side (in South Africa) they favored, a majority of Americans would have supported the Boers, but passion was lacking."⁴⁵ Therefore, it seems that when they had to cast their vote they did so for the party that stood for imperialism which was the "in-thing" at the time. Own interests weighed heavier than sympathy for the brave Boers.

After the elections there was a drastic decline of pro-Boer activities in the USA. For the last two months of 1900 and the first eight months of 1901 very little happened to support the Boers. Also in Congress, except for a few rather inferior pro-Boer speeches in the House of Representatives, nothing much happened.

⁴³ John Hay Papers, Letterbooks 2: Hay-McKinley, 27 June 1900 (?).

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, 26 June 1900.

⁴⁵ Bradford Perkins: *The great rapprochement* (London, 1969), p. 92.

At one stage during this dull period it was seriously considered by the Boer leaders to send President Kruger, who was still in Europe, to the USA. Montagu White, amongst others, realised that such a visit could, however, do damage if President Kruger was not officially received as a statesman and also if he was used by the anti-government factions.⁴⁶ John Hay, for the same reasons, wrote to the American ambassador in Holland telling him to do his best to prevent such an undertaking.⁴⁷

Those who saw such a visit as the only hope left for the Boer cause, went ahead in planning it. It would be the trump card. Even Dr Leyds began to support the idea and Montagu White was therefore instructed to make the necessary arrangements in the USA.⁴⁸

In April 1901 White wrote to Leyds suggesting that the proposed visit be postponed until December to coincide with the reconstitution of the American Congress which was in recess till then.⁴⁹ The Boer leaders in Europe agreed to this proposal.⁵⁰

On 6 September 1901 an incident occurred that not only affected the history of the USA but also had an influence on the strategy of the pro-Boer campaign: President McKinley was shot while attending an exhibition in Buffalo and died eight days later. According to the constitution the vice-president, Theodore Roosevelt, was immediately sworn in as president.

6. ROOSEVELT AND NEW EFFORTS TO GET INTERVENTION

Roosevelt's inauguration gave new hope to the Boers. It was well known that Roosevelt had much sympathy for the Boers and actually admired them. This hope was clearly expressed by Montagu White in a letter: "Though we all deplore the shocking tragedy at Buffalo, there is no use disguising the fact that we had nothing to expect from the administration of Mr McKinley, who, whatever his private sentiments may have been was entirely influenced by Mr John Hay in all that concerns the South African War. With the change of Presidents, there is a

⁴⁶ Leyds: *Correspondentie*, 4th collection 1/1, 41; White-Leyds, 28 November 1900, (The Hague, 1934), p. 24.

⁴⁷ John Hay Papers, Microfilm 4, 3: Hay-Newsel, 3 December 1900.

⁴⁸ Leyds: *Correspondentie*, 4th collection, 1/1, 170, 201.

⁴⁹ Ferguson, pp. 204-5.

⁵⁰ Leyds: *Correspondentie*, 4th collection, 1/1, 236, Leyds-White, 28 May 1901, p. 242.

possibility of a change of policy and therefore there is a decided chance that something may be done.⁵¹

Roosevelt, contrary to McKinley and to the chagrin of John Hay, took charge of Foreign Affairs. Hay even seriously considered to resign. Still not much had changed concerning the Anglo-Boer War. Although Roosevelt said that he believed that it would be better for the world (including the USA) if England ruled in South Africa he did not approve of the way in which the British conducted the war.⁵²

But Roosevelt was a shrewd politician. One of his priorities was to settle the longstanding dispute between the USA and England about the building of the isthmian canal in their favour. Under circumstances it was no surprise when England finally agreed to cancel the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850 which stipulated that England and the USA would build and control such an envisaged canal through Panama, to link the Pacific with the Caribbean, together. The new agreement, signed by John Hay and the British ambassador, Lord Pauncefote, gave the USA full and sole control. Britain had to sacrifice this important waterway to keep the USA on her side regarding the war in South Africa.⁵³

With the presidential elections out of the way, the opposition parties lost most of their interest in the Boer cause. The result was that the whole pro-Boer movement in the USA seemed to have shifted from being focused on trying to get the anti-government factions to put pressure on the government to intervene to a more positive approach of not being involved in partisan politics and trying themselves to persuade the government to intervene.

This was also the time when Dr Leyds and the Fischer deputation, while still in Europe, launched an unsuccessful application for arbitration to the Court of Arbitration in The Hague. The Court, however, considered the matter as beyond their jurisdiction.⁵⁴ Leyds and the deputation decided to appeal and wrote letters to the USA and Russia for support in their appeal. Both countries, however, turned the request down. Roosevelt's letter of 29 January 1902 stated that, as a co-signer of The Hague Convention, the USA had to abide with their answer.⁵⁵ This was a

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Appendix 1 (A) to No. 465, White-P van Vlissingen, 10 October 1901, p. 424.

⁵² Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Microfilm 2, 324: Roosevelt-Henry White, 23 November 1900.

⁵³ Bailey, p. 533; Lionel Gelber, *The rise of Anglo-American friendship* (Hamden, Conn., 1966), pp. 48-50.

⁵⁴ Leyds: *Correspondentie*, 4th collection, 1/2, 491, Leyds-De Bruijn, 22 November 1901.

⁵⁵ Transvaal Archives. L.A. 92, Dr Leyds Archives, G.Z.R. 1241/02: Memorandum Dept. of State, 29 January 1902.

severe setback for the Boers because it actually implied that all future efforts for intervention could be nullified by the example set by The Hague.

In the meantime the American consul in Pretoria, William Gordon, who succeeded Adelbert Hay, in a letter that he wrote to John Hay tried to persuade his government to appeal to England to stop the concentration camp policy in South Africa. John Hay gave Gordon a serious reprimand: "It is extremely difficult to answer such a letter without exposing one's self to the charge of Anglo-Mania or utter heartlessness. The Boer women and children are in the Concentration Camps simply because their husbands and brothers want them there, and as to the war with all its hideous incidents and barbarities, it will stop the instant Botha and De Wet wish it to stop: and, in any case, there is no reason why the government of the United States should take it upon itself to stop the war in which it has less concern than any nation in the world...I am afraid this letter will be of no use to you except to help fill your waste basket."⁵⁶

President Roosevelt seems to have agreed with Hay about this request although he did give instructions to Hay to make the necessary arrangements for the money, that was collected in the USA for the women and children in the concentration camps, to be sent to them.⁵⁷

Although the American market was open to both belligerents it was only England who could make use of it, also in floating loans. Throughout the war securities of the English government were floated in the USA - the largest floatation was made in April 1901 when fifty million American dollars of consols were put forth and heavily over-subscribed.⁵⁸

Enormous sums of money were made available to England during the war, guaranteed mainly by the American financier J Pierpont Morgan. In total roughly one quarter of the British war debts were financed by the USA.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ John Hay Papers, Microfilm 4,4: Hay-Lodge, 19 February 1902.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Spes. Cor. 11: Cortelyou-Hay, 7 April 1902.

⁵⁸ *New York Evening Post*, 2 May 1901; Ferguson, p. 48.

⁵⁹ Perkins, p. 95; Stuart Anderson, *Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Diplomatic history, 1978, 2, 3), p. 221.

7. THE REMOUNT ISSUE BROUGHT TO A HEAD

In February 1902 the Boer leaders in Europe decided that two members of the Fischer deputation, ADW Wolmarans and CH Wessels, should return to the USA, mainly to help with the pro-Boer campaign. They travelled incognito to escape the anti-government factions in the USA.⁶⁰

They, together with Montagu White, even managed to get a brief interview on 5 March 1902 with John Hay and a few hours later also with President Roosevelt. The understanding was, however, that they would be regarded as private individuals and not as representatives of a state.⁶¹ The deputation, therefore, did not discuss official matters such as American intervention, but they did appeal to the USA to try to persuade England to stop its concentration camp policy and they also asked that the US government should stop the shipment of horses and mules from New Orleans. Roosevelt took a great interest in what they had to say about the horses and mules issue and therefore asked them for a report on the matter for him to react on.⁶² The deputation was very pleased with the interview they had with Roosevelt.

A week later the deputation was called back to the president's office where he told them that he had had a long discussion with the British ambassador on the matter and that he believed that something would finally be done.⁶³

Before the deputation left for Europe on 20 March their report about the activities at New Orleans was submitted to President Roosevelt.⁶⁴ This report seems to have had the desired effect because Roosevelt immediately instructed the State Department to investigate the whole matter.⁶⁵

The official reports proved that a total of 191 402 horses and mules had been shipped from New Orleans by the British agents to be used in the war in South Africa. In total more horses and mules were bought by England in the USA than in all the other neutral countries put together.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Ferguson, p. 105.

⁶¹ *New York Times*, 6 March 1902.

⁶² Leyds: *Correspondentie*, 4th collection, II, Appendix Aa, pp. 199-202.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-3.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 205-6.

⁶⁵ House of Representatives Doc. No. 649, 57th Congress, 1st session, 1902, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁶ For detail read Commander in Chief, *Proceedings of a court of enquiry on the administration of the Army Remount Department (1902)*; Reports by officers into the working of the Remount

The opposition in Congress now launched attacks on the government arguing that the USA was actually violating the Treaty of Washington of 1871 of which Section 2 article VI stipulated that "(a) neutral government is bound not to permit or suffer either belligerent to make use of its ports or waters as the base of naval operations against the other or for the purpose of renewal or augmentation of military supplies or arms or the recruitment of men".⁶⁷

To support this the well-known Irish-American, Bourke Cockran, also known as the Tammany Hall orator, during March 1902 pointed out to the House of Representatives that according to The Hague Convention of 1899 horses were declared as contraband of war. "Can the United States, under this rule, permit the further maintenance of a British military supply depot on American soil from which thousands of horses are being shipped to South Africa?... Every horse that leaves the coast of the United States for South Africa could be lawfully seized upon the high seas if only the Boers had armed vessels and were capable of making the seizure."⁶⁸

John Hay now also requested the governor of Louisiana, WW Heard, in whose state New Orleans was situated, as well as the attorney-general of the US army, EH Crowder, to report on the matter.⁶⁹

Governor Heard's reply was quite a surprise and an eye-opener to Hay. Heard emphatically stated that the shipping of animals from New Orleans to be used by the British in the war was a violation of America's neutrality. The Boer leaders saw this as a significant breakthrough.⁷⁰ A resolution was also adopted in the House of Representatives demanding a full report by John Hay on the matter.⁷¹ On 4 April the American cabinet spent the whole day discussing Heard's report.⁷² Finally it seemed as if the American government might have been willing to do something.

Department abroad (1902); House of Representatives Doc. No. 13, 57th Congress, 2nd session, II, 1902, pp. 320-3.

⁶⁷ *New York Times*, 20 February 1901, 21 February 1901, 22 February 1901, 1 March 1901.

⁶⁸ Albert S Burlison, *Our pro-British Secretary of State* (Speech in the House of Representatives, 13 March 1902, p. 10).

⁶⁹ House of Representatives, Doc. No. 649, 57th Congress, 1st session, 1902, p. 1: *New York Times*, 3 April 1902.

⁷⁰ Leyds: *Correspondentie*, 4th collection, 1/2, 780, White-Leyds, 18 April 1902.

⁷¹ House of Representatives Doc. No. 568, 57th Congress, 1st session, 1902, p. 1.

⁷² *New York Times*, 4 April 1902, 6 April 1902.

Montagu White now saw the need for strong action now. This, he thought, was the right time to push for intervention - the US government was in a tight spot. This was also the right time because of the new developments in the Far East. France and Russia were not pleased with England's new alliance with Japan. To England it was of cardinal importance to know whether the USA would support them.⁷³ Montagu White, therefore, wrote a letter to President Roosevelt in which he, again very diplomatically, raised the question of American intervention.⁷⁴

The Boer leaders in Europe decided that Montagu White should have the support of everyone in this renewed and possibly final attempt to get the USA to intervene. Either Leyds himself or President Kruger or both should go to the USA to get an interview with President Roosevelt. After some deliberations it was decided that President Kruger should go also since many organisations in the USA had invited him and were prepared to sponsor such a visit.⁷⁵

Although Montagu White again expressed his concerns, like before, about the possibility that Kruger might not be received as a head of state, he nevertheless responded to Leyds' instructions and on 28 May he wrote to President Roosevelt asking for an interview to discuss the proposed visit by Kruger.⁷⁶

In the meantime the House of Representatives had passed a resolution in which they accepted that horses and mules were indeed contraband of war and that the government should therefore put an end to the shipment of such from New Orleans. The Foreign Affairs Committee of the House also decided that the Boer leaders should be given audience to address Congress - something that had been applied for more than two years ago by the Boers was now finally granted.⁷⁷

On 18 May it was suddenly announced that the British government gave orders to stop the buying of horses and mules in the USA. Was it done to forestall a possible reaction by the USA or was it because England was beginning to make arrangements to stop the war?

Two weeks later, on 2 June, the news that peace was declared on 31 May was received in the USA.

⁷³ Van Niekerk, p. 619.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 618-9.

⁷⁵ Ferguson, p. 220; AG Oberholster (ed.), *Dagboek van HC Bredell* (Pretoria, 1972), p. 75.

⁷⁶ Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Microfilm, 1/27: White-Cortelyou, 28 May 1902.

⁷⁷ Leyds: *Correspondentie*, 4th collection, 1/2, 808, White-Leyds, 7 May 1902, p. 742.

Montagu White was still busy arranging President Kruger's visit when the news was received. He wrote to Roosevelt's secretary: "The announcement of peace this morning (2 June) naturally does away with the necessity of my seeking an interview with the President...I shall hope to call in about a fortnight's time to pay my respects to the President before leaving."⁷⁸

It will therefore never be known if the USA would have intervened - whether Roosevelt would have been willing to arbitrate.

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion it might be said that because they allowed England certain privileges that the Boers could not make use of, and because they were not prepared to heed to the requests by the Boers, the USA contributed to the downfall of the republics. On the other hand it should have been obvious from the start that there was too much at stake for the USA to take the risk of supporting the Boers. In not doing so they managed to secure for themselves valuable acquisitions in Samoa, Panama and the border between Alaska and Canada was determined in their favour.

Still, with the support the Boers had from the people of the USA (according to President Roosevelt himself about 90 % of the population) one would have expected that the government should have succumbed to the pressure and should have answered to the call to intervene. Maybe the answer to this should be found in the fact that the Boer leaders were just not capable and experienced enough to exploit the situation. The handling of the credentials issue showed a lack of knowledge about protocol and international politics. John Hay was simply too clever for them. Yet it seems that the government and Roosevelt himself towards the end were prepared to do something especially when the issue about the buying of horses was brought to the head. This again raises the question why they did not exploit this matter much earlier? If the buying of horses could have been stopped early in the war it might have put England in a difficult predicament. Would they have been able to get horses in such large numbers and so suitable to the South African conditions elsewhere? Would they have been able to continue the war without these animals?

⁷⁸ Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Microfilm, 1, 27: White-Cartelyou, 2 June 1902.

Col. John Y Filmore Blake, the leader of the Irish American Brigade fighting with the Boers, in his controversial and rather exaggerating book, **A west pointer with the Boers**, makes a strong point about the buying of horses and mules by the British in the USA. He states it categorically that the British would not have been able to carry on at a certain stage of the war, when they had a serious remount problem, if it was not for the horses and mules then made available by the USA. He therefore concludes: "Horses, mules and men from the United States of America destroyed the two little republics."⁷⁹

In the final analysis I suppose it is not too far fetched to say that ironically the peace came at the wrong time for the Boers. It came when American intervention seemed very possible. If it came a few weeks later it could have prevented the loss of independence for the republics.

So, in the end British imperialism triumphed over Boer nationalism with the help of American favouritism.

⁷⁹ JYF Blake, *A west pointer with the Boers*, (Boston, 1903), p. viii.