



CHAPTER 4

THE IMPACT OF THE MINERAL REVOLUTION, 1870-1936

In concluding chapter three the opinion was given that the development of a particular Black perception of South African history was directly linked to the writer's current situation. By their references to the early phases of colonization through to the Great Trek and its aftermath a foundation was laid for the next phase of Black history. It would be far-fetched to suggest that the events preceding the discovery of diamonds were deliberately planned in anticipation of the revelation of wealth that followed on the chance discovery of diamonds in 1867. It would, however, be correct to say, in the view of the works consulted, that with the development of the diamond and gold fields, a far more deliberate policy in regard to the indigenous peoples was followed. Irrespective of the ultimate views of the individual authors all sought significance in the motives, aims and consequences of the policies that flowed from the first mineral finds.

It might be expected that those writers who wrote at the time that the mineral revolution gained momentum, would be the most vociferous in the condemnation of the upheaval in their lives. And yet, as will become apparent, they were not. It was left to the post-World War II generation to vent their anger over their condition in particularly virulent terms. In part this can be ascribed to the fact that the contemporary writer was stating his views in the realization that this was virtually the only way of publicly expressing his opinion. They saw, with hindsight, what they regarded as the ultimate dehumanization of Blacks to be the result of the policies followed by White authorities after the discovery of minerals.

Unlike the early phases of colonization, the period which followed on the mineral discoveries is generally seen as a time when a "native policy" was implemented that had specific objectives in mind. These aims were not merely to regulate relations between colonized and colonist or



to satisfy the prejudices or needs of the latter. Increasingly the formulation and implementation of "native policy" was seen as being at the behest of vested interests, and then more specifically of the mining magnates.

In looking back on the mineral revolution a modern author perceives it to have changed every facet of South African society. And, in particular, to have made the intentions of British imperialism starkly apparent to both African and Afrikaner.¹ It is interesting that Magubane should bracket Black and Boer together in this context. Early writers generally tended to apportion much of the blame for the South African malaise to the Afrikaner and his antecedents. Magubane instead sees imperialism and the capitalist interests it represented as the motive force behind the post-mineral discovery developments. And he is, in this regard, representative of a mainstream in Black historiography. The evolution of this perception and its implications must now be considered.

A consistent feature of the spectrum of sources consulted is that all attribute a major significance to the initial discovery of diamonds in the Hopetown district and the development of the Kimberley diamond-fields. Even if early writers might be hesitant in discerning a motive behind the changes that were wrought by the discoveries they do resonate with their successors in that fundamental changes took place. These changes were reflected in the material, social, political, cultural and physical spheres of society. These changes were most acutely felt by the Blacks on whose land the minerals were discovered. In the context of this chapter "Blacks" has been used to denote the Griqua as well, as their territory, Griqualand West, was to become the focal point of the early disputes surrounding ore-bearing land. In addition the dispute and its handling were seen as the forebears of later disputes and their resolution.

¹ BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, pp. 102-103.



An important outflow of the mineral discoveries was the evolution of migrant labour. That is why, as discussed in preceding chapters, so many writers laid such emphasis on the question of dispossession. The refinement of the argument linking dispossession and labour coercion becomes increasingly apparent over the decades. It is perhaps understandable that early writers should not be as concerned about the question of the mineral finds and their ramifications. They were after all not as adversely affected as their successors and did not feel the brunt of legislative measures used to confirm the situation created by the diamondfields, goldfields and industrialization. Nor could they see the relationship between the minerals and broader historical developments in South Africa, such as the South African War between 1899-1902 and the unification of South Africa in 1910.

Initially there is little to suggest that Blacks saw their role in the mineral discoveries as other than wage earners. The wage-earning potential of the diamondfields at Kimberley was welcomed as it gave the labourer the chance to earn enough to buy those goods that the traders introduced amongst the Blacks in the hinterland of the diamondfields. In the early stages of labour recruitment competition was strong enough to ensure fair wages. Thus to have been a worker at Kimberley was considered an elevation of social status measured in material terms, as the migrant earned enough to gain a measure of wealth.² It was not yet seen that the mineral finds quickened British interest in the interior leading to the expropriation of both Boer and Griqua.³ Until the 1860s Britain had been content to contain the Afrikaners and pacify the African chiefdoms of the interior. After the diamond finds she had to open the way for finance capital.⁴ Subsequently the capital gener-

² N Mokgatle, The Autobiography of an Unknown South African, pp. 44-45 and p. 36.

³ WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 36.

⁴ WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 40.



ated by the diamond and later the gold mines provided, to quote Magubane, a "poisonous nourishment" that nurtured the South African economy into the "deformed monster that it is today."⁵ This comment must be seen in the light of Magubane's view that society evolves from the economic relations at its base. If the economic system is distorted then it must follow that the social system and social relations are also malformed. Thus to him apartheid is not so much a socio-political order but an economic one that is modelled on the production relationships that developed on the mines.⁶

A similar materialist stance is taken by Modisane who is otherwise far more concerned with the human condition. Modisane can see the irony in Blacks "scratching into the bowels of the earth for gold which is the symbol of South Africa's white prosperity, and the fundamental greed that oppresses them."⁷

Many of the early writers realized that the mineral discoveries caused major socio-economic, political and cultural changes. These writers, however, did not always suggest that there was a correlation between the changes mentioned. A central issue is that of the evolution of migrant labour. Virtually all the writers are agreed that the evolution of this system was a major cause of change. Most writers are also agreed that coercive measures were applied to force the migrant into the labour market.

A most significant development in this regard was the Cape Colony's Glen Grey Act of 1894. Molema concedes that there was a coercive labour element in this Act. The clause requiring able-bodied young men to per-

⁵ BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 103.

⁶ BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 117.

⁷ B Modisane, Blame Me On History, p. 283.



form three months labour was a source of much resentment, but Molema also saw the Act as an outstanding example of British paternalism,⁸ of which he was a devout admirer. He did not see, as Ngubo did, that by levering labour out of the reserves the Glen Grey Act was violating "the familial and community nature of the African economic system."⁹ Nor did Molema concede, as Mbeki alleged, that the Act aimed at the destruction of the power of the Xhosa chiefs and the integration of their subjects into the mining and industrial economy.¹⁰ By preventing access to land and restricting ownership a landless class developed which had to sell its labour in the industrial and agricultural centres.¹¹ Perhaps the need for labour coercion is in part to be explained by the self-justifying myth of the "lazy Kafir", even though it is abundantly clear that without Black labour the economy would have collapsed.¹² Excluding the variations in the final conclusions of the writers it is clear that minerals "gave a new complexion to almost every feature of South African life" and "brought into silent relief the intentions of British imperialism vis à vis the Afrikaner and the Africans."¹³ A change in values and systems took place that left Blacks feeling that they were at the mercy of some amorphous and remorseless entity that totally dominated their lives.¹⁴

The question arises as to what the intentions of British imperialism

⁸ SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 257 and p. 240.

⁹ A Ngubo, "The Development of African Political Protest in South Africa, 1882-1910: An Analytical Approach", p. 44.

¹⁰ G Mbeki, South Africa The Peasants' Revolt, p. 33.

¹¹ A Ngubo, "The Development of African Political Protest in South Africa, 1882-1910: An Analytical Approach", p. 45.

¹² SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, pp. 244-245.

¹³ BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, pp. 102-103.

¹⁴ E Mphahlele, Father Come Home, p. 58.



were? The most prominent manifestation of British imperialism was the South African War of 1899-1902. Over the decades the perceptions on what caused the war have changed. There is a correlation between the writer's political convictions and aims and the causes that he/she attributes to the South African War. Similarly there is a consistency between the political climate in which the writer functioned and the perceptions he/she formulates in regard to the war.

Initially it was believed that Britain had gone to war to protect the rights of British subjects in the Transvaal. By implication the South African War was also fought on behalf of Blacks because they were allowed to fight on the British side to redress suffering inflicted on them by the Boers.¹⁵ Magubane, in contrast to the preceding views, questions British motives and contends that Britain refrained from using Blacks on her side.¹⁶ Britain was indeed reluctant to see arms pass into Black hands. Early writers might have had some initial confidence in Britain's motives for launching a war against the Republics. But even Molema and Plaatje, who had a virtually blind belief in Britain and the principles of trusteeship, were ultimately to express some doubt about Britain's intentions for precipitating the war. Many Blacks had fondly believed that war had overtaken the country in their interests, but postwar developments showed that Britain had acted for self-protection.¹⁷ A similar view is expressed by Matsetela when he argues that because of the potential wealth of the Republics they might achieve true independence. As independent states they might invite external intervention. Thus Britain had to act to prevent this development.¹⁸

15 SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, pp. 242-243 and p. 290.

16 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 51

17 SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, pp. 290-292.

18 T Matsetela, "Uprootal and its Effects", in M Mutloatse (ed), Umhlaba Wethu..., pp. 29-30.



Plaatje was even more outspoken. According to him Blacks had paid the ultimate price to see the banner of freedom unfurled, but all they had seen was the flag of Union waving in the winds of political change that swept over the subcontinent after peace was concluded.¹⁹ Peace and unification left a bitter taste in the mouths of Black participants. Instead of enjoying the fruits of victory, they became serfs in their homeland, overseen by an imperial government that was deaf to their entreaties.²⁰

Manipulation by vested capitalist interests is seen as the cause by modern writers. Some believed that the war broke out at the behest of Rhodes who wished to dispossess the Boers of what they had obtained through "fraud and subterfuge".²¹ In addition the war was launched to replace a "feudalistic slavery" with a "more benefitting [sic] wage labour". The intention was to increase British settlement. While the new settlers would be "anti-fascist" they would be "pro-imperialist".²² By extension the latter also implied pro-capitalist. In the same vein the Boer republics were seen as an obstacle to a national labour recruitment policy which finance capital needed to exploit the mineral resources.²³

Even if there is divergence on the causes most writers devote some time to the role Blacks played in the war itself. They approach the war from two positions. Firstly there is the question of motives for Black participation. Secondly there is the question of whether the expectations

19 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 125.

20 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 292.

21 A Nzo, "Our Anti-Imperialist Commitment". An article by Alfred Nzo, Secretary-General of the ANC, in Sechaba, February 1970, quoted in ANC, ANC Speaks..., p. 77.

22 D Dube, The Rise of Azania..., pp. 36-37.

23 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 54.



of participation were met.

Some Blacks entered the war on the British side because they believed in the justness of the war. They believed that they could, in the aftermath of the engagement, confidently leave their cause in the hands of the imperial power "in its anxiety to do the best for all classes."²⁴ Participation, it was believed, had "its moral and material value".²⁵ In retrospect Msimang claimed that Blacks "were made to understand and sincerely believed that the war was being fought for their liberation from Boer domination" and many "lost their lives in the belief that they were making sacrifices for their liberation."²⁶

Plaatje records a sermon held by Mr Lefenya during the siege of Mafikeng. What Plaatje considers notable is that the preacher reminds the congregation that its God is also the God of the adversary. Therefore Britain has no exclusive right to call in divine aid or sanction. The moral grounds are to be found in that neither Britain nor her allies had raised a finger against the Republics, while the latter had been guilty of all manner of depredations against the Blacks and their stock. Subsequently he quotes an entire letter from Col Baden-Powell to General Snyman which, inter alia, states that Blacks are becoming increasingly incensed at the Boer attacks on their people and their herds.²⁷ Nevertheless Blacks were confronted by the "uncanny white man's mode of reasoning" which argued that the war "was a white man's business". Nevertheless a chief, like Lentswe of the Bakgatla, would say that Blacks were part of the British empire, and were thus obliged

24 "Questions Affecting the Natives and Coloured People Resident in British South Africa." Statement by the Executive of the South African Native Congress, 1903[?], quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 18.

25 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 275.

26 HS Msimang, H Selby Msimang Looks Back, p. 4.

27 JL Comaroff (ed), The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje. An African at Mafeking, p. 11 and pp. 33-35.



to fight.²⁸

The vast majority of Blacks remained loyal to Britain throughout the war although it is conceded that there were times when loyalty wavered. Black leaders travelled the country at their own expense to dissuade those who might seek to exploit the situation to regain their independence.²⁹

On the other hand there was also the eminent and respected voice of JT Jabavu that cautioned against both the war and Black participation. Ngcongco ascribes this call to Jabavu's involvement with men like Sauer and Merriman with their Afrikaner Bond connections. But Jabavu also demurred from personal conviction. He was against military solutions to diplomatic problems in addition to being a pacifist at heart. Unlike his immediate successors he was able to discern a motive for the South African War that underlay the ostensible reasons. Ultimately Jabavu's newspaper Imvo Zabantsundu was silenced under martial law regulations. In conclusion Ngcongco says that Jabavu paid dearly in material and personal terms for what he perceived to be a principled stand.³⁰ Warwick comes very much to the same conclusion but adds that there was considerable fear amongst Whites that Blacks would seize the opportunity offered by the war to regain independence.³¹

Apart from the loyalist sentiment Black motives for participation were also practical. While Plaatje maintains that Lentswe was moved by a sense of imperial identity, Mohlamme feels that Lentswe was also moti-

28 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 276.

29 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 245.

30 LD Ngcongco, "Jabavu and the Anglo-Boer War", in Kleio, Vol II, #2, October 1970, 6-18.

31 P Warwick, "Black People and the War", in P Warwick (ed), The South African War. The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902, pp. 190-191.



vated by revenge and the need to protect his people's herds.³² Similarly Blacks in Natal hoped to get increased land allocations in Transvaal territory after a British victory.³³ Other Blacks were persuaded to join British ranks through financial inducements.³⁴

The fact that a number of Blacks joined Britain's war effort does not imply that they totally avoided enlisting with the Boers. The enlistment was in some cases carried out under duress and was thus also counterproductive, as some chiefs reacted by allying themselves with Britain.³⁵ The invidious position of Blacks in the South African War is apparent in the development of schisms amongst the Basotho. The divisions arose over who the likely victor of the conflict would be.³⁶ It could therefore be concluded that Blacks' reasons for participation are also to be found in a concern over the postwar situation. When it came to evaluating their role in support of the victor they did not want to be found wanting. Therefore self-interest was also a consideration. An indication of what would befall those who opted for the wrong side was already evident during the war when Britain encouraged pro-British Blacks to attack pro-Boer elements.³⁷ Divisions amongst Blacks over the participation issue continued into the postwar period. Members of

32 JS Mohlamme, "Black People in the Boer Republics During and in the Aftermath of the South African War of 1899-1902", p.34

33 "Statement #32, Kumalo, John", in C de B Webb and JB Wright (eds and translators), The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples, Volume 1, p. 259.

34 JS Mohlamme, "Black People in the Boer Republics During and in the Aftermath of the South African War of 1899-1902", p. 99.

35 JS Mohlamme, "Black People in the Boer Republics During and in the Aftermath of the South African War of 1899-1902", p. 99.

36 JS Mohlamme, "Black People in the Boer Republics During and in the Aftermath of the South African War of 1899-1902", pp. 70-72.

37 JS Mohlamme, "Black People in the Boer Republics During and in the Aftermath of the South African War of 1899-1902", p. 149.



the same tribe were given differentiated treatment in the settlement, depending on where their allegiance had lain.³⁸ Overall Mohlamme concludes that most Blacks had done enough to expect a better deal from the British after the war.³⁹

It was only in the postwar period that the harsh reality of British intentions became apparent. The belief in a benevolent colonial power taking up the cudgels on their behalf, and thus meriting support, soon disintegrated. In retrospect the South African War was aimed at "African labour, African land, and the gold that had been found in the country's bowels."⁴⁰ It is understandable that Plaatje expressed dismay at the lack of appreciation shown by the Boers towards Blacks who had supported their families while they were on campaigns. Particularly when this support was given while the commandos were fighting to ensure that the status quo for Blacks was maintained.⁴¹ Blacks suffered harshly at the hands of the Boers at the end of the war as a result of their support for the British.⁴² Perhaps Matthews's views were shaped by what was seen as a deliberate policy on the part of the British to rehabilitate the Boers on their farms. Some of these farms had been successfully taken over by Blacks during the war. To evict these squatters, Warwick says, ex-commandos were re-armed and allowed to use force to evict the new inhabitants of the farms. The struggle for the control of the stock that had come into African hands during the course of the war for

38 JS Mohlamme, "Black People in the Boer Republics During and in the Aftermath of the South African War of 1899-1902", p. 122.

39 JS Mohlamme, "Black People in the Boer Republics During and in the Aftermath of the South African War of 1899-1902", pp. 160-161.

40 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 47-48.

41 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 147.

42 ZK Matthews, Freedom For My People..., p. 5.



a variety of reasons was also a source of much acrimony.⁴³

The question arises as to how the vanquished came to flout the principles for which the victors allegedly went to war? How was it possible for the Boers (who had suffered such galling losses that they continued an "anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist struggle in South Africa"⁴⁴) to achieve such power that they could still implement the policies that war was supposed to eliminate? It was soon apparent that the Republican "Grondwet" would be the basis for future legislation.⁴⁵

To modern commentators this is no major conundrum. British imperialism had achieved its economic aims in victory and could now leave the country to the political stewardship of the Boers and other Whites. The new political masters of the country could be relied upon to act as the agents of "the most ruthless deprivation of the land of our people."⁴⁶ Thus it is not surprising that Britain should have neglected to exploit the opportunities for giving Blacks a new deal between 1902 and 1910. Instead Britain "rationalized human hatred and entrenched it in the constitution."⁴⁷ The war had been fought to unite Boer and Briton to ensure that Blacks received no say in government.⁴⁸

43 P Warwick, Black People and the South African War, pp. 164-166.

44 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., pp. 43-45.

45 AB Xuma, "Bridging the Gap Between White and Black in South Africa." Address by Dr AB Xuma at the Conference of European and Bantu Christian Student Associations at Fort Hare, June 27 - July 3, 1930, [Extracts], quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 220.

46 A Nzo, "Our Anti-Imperialist Commitment". An article by Alfred Nzo, Secretary-General of the ANC, in Sechaba, February 1970, quoted in ANC, ANC Speaks..., p. 78 and JK Ngubane, Ushaba: The Hurtle to Blood River, p. 282.

47 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 48.

48 AWG Champion, "Repetition and Indication of Years", in M Swanson (ed), The Views of Mahlathi..., pp. 67-68.



Similarly the Afrikaner was deluding himself if he believed that the conflagration was a war of national liberation, as it was a war of White integration.⁴⁹

To an extent it might be argued that the views expressed in the preceding paragraph had the benefit of the perspective of time. The passage of time and developments during this period appear to give substance to their perceptions. But this is not to suggest the early writers did not also realize that there was a contradiction between stated aims and final result. Where they differ is, to some extent, in the reasons behind the gap between the ideal and reality.

Molema and Plaatje show the divergence between promise and realization. A consistent aim in Plaatje's work, Native Life in South Africa. Before and Since the Great War and the Boer Rebellion, is to demonstrate Black loyalty which he felt should be properly rewarded: A loyalty based on the love of the principles that Britain was believed to espouse. In contrast he shows the Boers to be perfidious, if not treacherous. Against this background he repeatedly expresses his consternation at Britain's continued connivance with Boer policy. Implicit in Plaatje's argument is that as soon as Britain realizes her betrayal of her loyal subjects, the Blacks, she will repeal the unjust legislation, such as the Natives' Land Act of 1913, a law that was passed in her name. As examples of Boer betrayal of British ideals he cites the Great Trek, the South African War and the 1914 Rebellion. All three examples he sees as part of a continuous pattern of betrayal, which is a point that he continually refers to in Native Life in South Africa.... It must be remembered that this book was written as part of a propaganda campaign of the South African Native National Congress against the Natives' Land Act and was published in London to appeal to the British public.

As early as 1903 there is an indication that Blacks had come to realize

⁴⁹ WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 45.



that instead of the war supplanting Republican government with that of the British the reverse had happened.⁵⁰ It appears that the straws of discontent and disillusionment were already blowing in the wind at this stage. Confirmation of the deceit that Blacks were to experience in later years would account for the completely different perceptions expressed by modern writers. If the war had not satisfied Black expectations then the probability existed that it was fought for entirely different reasons. Thus one finds that, as indicated above, the modern writers argue that the war was conducted under the aegis of capitalist interests.

The disquiet expressed by the South African Native Congress would gain further momentum with the appointment of the Lagden Commission that produced the Native Affairs Commission Report of 1905. Plaatje was alarmed that the Report should have been ignored by successive legislatures, and believes that the Report was shelved because it advocated a franchise similar to that advocated for the Maoris in New Zealand.⁵¹ Plaatje did not see the Lagden Report in the same light that Ngubo did in later years. The latter maintains that the recommendations aimed at maintaining White political supremacy and, as a result, colonialism.⁵² Magubane also contradicts Plaatje in that he contends that the Lagden Report was used and became the basis for territorial segregation.⁵³ Thus the Lagden Commission Report was not the benign document that Plaatje believed it to be.

50 "Questions affecting the Natives and Coloured People Resident in British South Africa," Statement by the Executive of the South African Native Congress, 1903 [?], quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 21.

51 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 237.

52 A Ngubo, "The Development of African Political Protest in South Africa, 1882-1910: An Analytical Approach", pp. 53-54 and pp. 119-120.

53 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 80.



If there was some doubt about British intentions in the seven years immediately after the war, then events from 1909 confirmed the hint of betrayal.

In some respects Molema presaged later perceptions in that he evaluates unification as surrendering to the Boer mentality that echoed the Middle Ages and "a feeling of some oblique "divine mission" to exploit the Bantu."⁵⁴ Unification was merely part of a relentless historical pattern that saw the triumph of a "gross, brute spirit."⁵⁵ The spirit that Plaatje refers to is the racial prejudice of the Boers. He feels embittered that the vanquished, who had supposedly suffered defeat because of their policies, should be presented with the gift of Union. This magnanimity not only allowed them to continue their much maligned racial policies, but also to extend them to the Cape and Natal.⁵⁶

Union was seen as a fusion of White interests dedicated to "white supremacy which was to rest on the pillars of black serfdom."⁵⁷ Equally important was that Africans had come to see that Union meant that Whites had opted for permanent settlement based on the hegemony of political institutions.⁵⁸ Political debates amongst Whites made it clear to even the most superficial observer that the future of Blacks in the new dispensation was to be bleak.⁵⁹ The worst fears were confirmed when Britain abdicated her responsibilities towards and her protection of Blacks "by some unexplained contingency and ever-to-be-regretted mischance".⁶⁰ If Union had been the child of the chance confluence of

54 SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 247.

55 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. xii.

56 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 391.

57 E Mphahlele, The African Image, pp. 202-203.

58 E Mphahlele, The African Image, p. 51.

59 SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 244.

60 SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 245.



circumstances then what were the consequences?

It appears that events after Union tend to favour the views of those writers who discerned a deliberate policy behind the South African War and its aftermath until 1910. This policy was not to let the benevolent sun of imperialism shine on all the inhabitants of the country. The war was seen as a necessary prelude to Union, which in turn was a prerequisite to the "proper" coordination of labour and legal confirmation of the practices and customs, including those of land distribution, that had developed since the beginning of the nineteenth century. By 1920 the Rev Mahabane stated that the exclusion was not providential. He cites a letter from Lord Kitchener to answer Boer concerns on the African franchise. Kitchener is quoted as saying that Africans would not be granted the vote in the new colonies until responsible government had been attained in them. And, more significantly in this context, the vote "will be so limited as to ensure the just predominance of the white race." This letter was written during the negotiations leading up to the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging at the end of the South African War in 1902.⁶¹

Every writer who is concerned with the first few decades of the twentieth century not only reflects on the South African War and unification, but also on subsequent events. Even if the perceptions surrounding causes, objectives and consequences of the war and unification differ, some substantiation for these viewpoints has to be offered. Virtually all of the writers take the Natives Land Act of 1913 as the beginning point of the confirmation of their perception. Those writers who believed that Britain had gone to war for altruistic motives, and then betrayed her principles to allow unification, see this belief confirmed in British reaction to the Natives' Land Act. Those writers who perceived of the

⁶¹ "The Colour Bar", Presidential Address. Delivered by the Rev Z R Mahabane at the Cape Province Native Congress, Queenstown, May 1920, quoted in GM Carter and SW Johns III (eds), The Good Fight..., pp. 2-3.



South African War as being based on a "hidden agenda" to satisfy capitalist interests also point to the Land Act to justify their contention.

Previously Molema had found some qualified justification for dispossession, but on the issue of the Natives' Land Act he had no hesitation in condemning it. In this instance Molema does not only foreshadow later perceptions, but forms a viewpoint that pre-empts those of his successors. He considers three options for labour coercion: The first was press ganging which had been rejected by Britain because she would not countenance this practise in the Portuguese colonies. A second alternative was to levy such high taxes as to force Blacks to enter the labour market. In this way they would earn enough to meet their state-imposed obligations. This was rejected on the grounds of its being economic slavery. The last option was to limit the land available for African occupation, thus forcing Africans to enter into the labour market to earn a living. The Natives' Land Act met the last objective.⁶² The only curious aspect of Molema's view is, that, while he considers the second option a form of economic slavery, he does not see the Natives' Land Act in this light. In the context of this reference he does not see the limitation on the means of subsistence, that is land, as a means of economically based labour coercion. At the same time he states that the migrant worker is reluctant to enter into a labour contract for longer than three to six months, as this will take them away from their pastoral and agricultural commitments in the rural areas.⁶³ However it should be remembered that the rural areas and the reserves were not yet exposed to the smothering pressures resulting from population growth and forced removals.

With the benefit of hindsight Msimang says that the Natives' Land Act originated from the South African War. He says that the success of

⁶² SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, pp. 256-257.

⁶³ SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 256.



Black farmers on abandoned White farms was such as to cause alarm amongst White politicians, particularly in the light of the poor-White problem. Circumstances thus allowed Gen Hertzog to raise the spectre of the "Black Peril". So successful was Hertzog, who had been excluded from Botha's new cabinet in 1912, that he was able to panic Louis Botha into passing the Land Act. It is further claimed that the Minister of Native Affairs, JW Sauer, died as a result of his remorse over the Act. Nevertheless it was inexplicable to Msimang how a professedly Christian people could enact such an inhuman Act. In the final analysis Msimang believed that the Act "was conceived in fear and without thought of what repercussions it would have on the South African situation, morally, economically and even psychologically."⁶⁴

No doubt the most voluble perceptions of the Natives' Land Act were expressed by ST Plaatje. His work Native Life in South Africa. Before and Since the Great War and the Boer Rebellion, which is one of many to his credit, was primarily aimed at persuading Britain to intervene in Union legislation and rescind the Natives' Land Act. The whole thrust of his work is that the Act was an abomination borne of the Boer mentality. That is why he was anxious to trace Boer history and show it to be steeped in racial prejudice. At the same time he had to demonstrate that the British were the antithesis of the Boers and their values. This contrast was essential if he was to persuade the British that they were surrendering their benevolent colonial principles by countenancing legislation such as the Natives' Land Act. It is against this background that he created his perceptions of the Land Act.

Early writers see a variety of motives for the passage of the Natives' Land Act. Plaatje appears bemused by the viewpoint of an Afrikaner policeman in the Orange Free State who states that Blacks were getting their just desserts for aiding Britain in the South African War. Said policeman did not answer Plaatje's query as to why, if his view was cor-

64 HS Msimang, H Selby Msimang Looks Back, pp. 5-7.



rect, Blacks in the Cape and Natal should also suffer under the Act.⁶⁵ This report seems to confirm the comment of Matthews that was cited previously.⁶⁶

The obligatory sale of crops forced the Black into selling his labour and reduced him to "serfdom" and a "veritable bondman."⁶⁷ The Act would also be seen as a means to limit African bargaining power in two important areas. The first in that Black participation in land allocation decisions was denied. The second which, significantly, is seen to arise from the first was to limit the ability of Blacks to sell their labour on a market determined by the natural forces of supply and demand. The forced eviction from the farms, and the need to obtain domicile on farms was seen as a distortion of market forces.⁶⁸ While stopping short of genocide, the Act aimed to enslave Blacks and committed them to perpetual bondage in the agricultural sector or to a "sunless life in the unwholesome mines".⁶⁹

The coercion of agricultural labour was seen to function through the limitation of available land. Those tenant farmers who could no longer practise their livelihood and could not get land in the reserves were obliged to enter into an annual three month labour contract with the farmer on whose land they were domiciled.⁷⁰ Thus from the earliest

65 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., pp. 85-86.

66 See footnote #42 above.

67 SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 249 and DDT Jabavu, "Native Unrest: its Cause and Cure", in DDT Jabavu, The Black Problem..., p. 5.

68 "Resolution against the Natives Land Act, 1913 and the Report of the Natives Land Commission", by the South African Native National Congress, October 2, 1916, quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 87.

69 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 159.

70 "Petition to King George V, from the South African Native National Congress, July 20", 1914, [Published in The Cape Argus], quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 129.



perceptions of the Act it is clear that the Act was widely interpreted as a measure of labour coercion. Nevertheless early writers were of the opinion that in essence the law was formulated and promulgated in response to Afrikaner political concerns and racial prejudice, which feared that Cape liberalism would be enforced in the northern provinces.⁷¹

Plaatje is at his most scathing when he highlights what he perceives to be Boer double standards. He finds it incomprehensible that a parliamentarian, Grobler, who was also a prime mover behind the Act, should quote the Bible to show that the Boers should not invade German South West Africa. Grobler refers to Deuteronomy 19:14, which he claims is a divine injunction on the Boers not to move the beacons of others. "But strange to say, the religious scruples of these pious objectors never revolted against removing the landmarks of their native neighbours and appropriating, not only their land and their labour, but even the persons of these neighbours."⁷² In a similar vein the Dutch Reformed Church is warned that one day it would be called to account for its endorsement of the Act, by failing to object to it.⁷³ The DRC through its own discriminatory practises might be creating the impression amongst the Boers that the church sanctioned the application of the Act.⁷⁴ In Plaatje's view the Act was a heresy that penalized even the livestock of Blacks on account of their owners' pigmentation.⁷⁵ In keeping with Plaatje's contrasting themes of loyalty and disloyalty he comments that it must be a source of satisfaction to Grobler that,

71 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 25.

72 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 390.

73 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 151.

74 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 148.

75 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., pp. 95-96.



while he languished in jail for participating in the 1914 Rebellion, his loyal Black countrymen were being persecuted in terms of law that he had rebelled to maintain.⁷⁶

A broader vision is that the Act merely legalized a situation that had pertained since the last war for African independence had been lost.⁷⁷ The latter perception does not make it clear who was behind the legislation, unlike Plaatje's view which is adamant that the parentage of the Act is to be found in the racial attitudes of the Boers.

In contrast to the previous perception of Plaatje Magubane supports the inclinations of A Lerumo (pseudonym of Michael Harmel, "member of the Central Committee of the South African Communist Party and first editor of The African Communist").⁷⁸ Lerumo contends that the Natives Land Act was a double-edged sword. On the one hand it halted class formation amongst the Afrikaner. On the other hand the deal that Smuts had struck with imperialism and capitalism led to the collapse of the "semi-patriarchal, self-contained economy of Boer agriculture." In this way the successful farmer gained the ascendancy which satisfied the needs of the developing mining and industrial centres.⁷⁹ It also protected the burgeoning White commercial farming sector from competition by Blacks and met the labour demands of the former.⁸⁰

The coercion of labour to the urban areas through the Natives' Land Act did not go unnoticed even among the earlier writers. The Act was criti-

76 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 393 and p. 433.

77 G Mbeki, South Africa The Peasants' Revolt, p. 68.

78 A Lerumo (M Harmel), Fifty Fighting Years. The Communist Party of South Africa, 1921-1971, p. vi.

79 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 121.

80 ANC, Sechaba, October 1980, pp. 24-25.

cized for creating an unprotected class of labourers on White farms. The second generation under this legislation did not have the patience of the first generation, and fled to the urban areas.⁸¹ The loss of land, stock and the poverty occasioned by the Land Act forced an urban migration.⁸² In a variety of ways Blacks came to concur with the view that the Act had closed "all doors to freedom and independence" and forced them into "bondage".⁸³

Ngubo argues that the disillusionment in White intentions in the aftermath of the South African War, Union and the Natives' Land Act gave rise to a "sustained Zionism".⁸⁴ This comment is significant for several reasons. Firstly it connects with the perception that the Act was the portent of worse to come.⁸⁵ Secondly it shows a close linkage between Christianity and politics, which is a recurrent theme amongst all of the authors and spokespersons. Frequently the portrayal of historical events attempts to show that the lot of Blacks is a violation of Christian principles. By extension the failure to rescind the legislation is in effect the sacrifice of the same Christian ethic. Thirdly the Zionist movements were also a rejection of missionary tutelage. On the one hand this rejection suggested a criticism of the established Christian churches for failing to comply with what the Zionists per-

81 AWG Champion, et al, Evidence Given Before Penal and Prison Reform Commission, 6 July 1946, p. 3.

82 AB Xuma, "Bridging the Gap Between White and Black in South Africa." Address by Dr. A. B. Xuma at the Conference of European and Bantu Christian Student Associations at Fort Hare, June 27 - July 3, 1930, [Extracts], quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 221.

83 SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 249.

84 A Ngubo, "The Development of African Political Protest in South Africa, 1882-1910: An Analytical Approach", p. 60.

85 "Petition to King George V, from the South African Native National Congress, July 20", 1914, [Published in The Cape Argus], quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 129.

ceived to be the tenets of Christian faith. On the other hand this declaration of independence also implied a move towards freedom in political action. At the time of the Land Act this assertion of independent political action was not yet part of the mainstream of Black politics, but the indications were already present. This latter remark must be tempered with the view of Beinart who contends that the millennial movements in fact had a very strong political content that, in effect, the re-application of Christianity was also an assertion of political independence. ⁸⁶

(It is not the intention to outline the evolution of Black political thought. Nevertheless it is relevant to briefly outline a development of this nature because of the influence it would have on the growth of Black historical perceptions.)

Increasingly events of the past would be brought into relationship with the present, to demonstrate that the present was consonant with the past, and not just an aberration. Instead the present was and is seen as confirmation of what had preceded. Equally important was to project the past and present into the future, based on the paradigm of the past. Through this projection a cataclysmic future was foreseen unless fundamental changes were brought about and heed given to Black demands for redress of their grievances.

The sense of grievance and betrayal that manifested itself over events culminating in the Natives Land Act of 1913 became even more pronounced subsequently. The feeling that the injustices of the past would recede gave way to the feeling that the current developments were to be expected in the light of what had preceded. Despite this change in and increasing unanimity of perceptions a major distinction remains between the reactions and prescriptions of early and modern writers based on

⁸⁶ W Beinart, "Amafelandawonye [the Die-Hards]", in W Beinart and C Bundy (eds), Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa..., pp. 253-254.



their perceptions.

Initially participation in World War I was argued to be consistent with the idea that, for instance in the case of the Basotho, they could not stand by while their king's, the British monarch's, house was ablaze.⁸⁷ This was an indication of the acceptance of British suzerainty. Implicit in this was that the monarchy also had an obligation to the people over which it held sway. At the same time those differences that existed between Black and White should be held in abeyance until the war was over. By easing the pressure on the British government over "reactionary legislation and unpopular one-sided laws", a total commitment was given to achieving the aims of the war. With peace settled, Britain should strive to apply the principles in the Union that she was believed to have fought to protect. In many respects the arguments surrounding participation in World War I paralleled those given in favour of support for Britain in the South African War. Britain's "love for the free institutions" should be applied to allow Blacks "a voice in the affairs of the country" and provide protection for the "aboriginal national institutions".⁸⁸ In contrast to these professions of loyalty and expectations it was held that the Afrikaners hoped for a German victory.

A German success would allow for the extension of German colonial rule to the Union. German rule would be akin to the Boer rule in the previously independent Orange Free State. Thus the Afrikaner would be allowed to rule without the threat of legal intervention.⁸⁹ And while Blacks had declared a moratorium on protests against laws such as the Natives' Land Act the government was selective in the suspension of its

87 SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 63.

88 "Petition to King George V, from the South African Native National Congress, December 16, 1918", quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 141.

89 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 306.



activities. It suspended the investigations of the Beaumont Commission, which was to investigate land allocations for Blacks. This suspension was not matched by a halt in the application of the Natives' Land Act itself.⁹⁰

Even though Blacks were prepared to give unstintingly of their services these were rejected. Blacks were relegated to a noncombatant status and this "prohibition surely carries the conviction that the native complaint against the South African constitution is something more than a mere sentimental grievance."⁹¹ In other words Britain was nullifying the reasons for Black support. By accepting Black commitment to the war effort Britain would have had to accept satisfying Black expectations of support and the arguments that underlay them. Plaatje contends that the anomaly of Black taxpayers being denied the vote compared to tax-evading, noncombatant and rebellious Whites had been avoided by denying Blacks combatant status.⁹² In some instances Blacks felt so aggrieved about being denied "the dignity of bearing arms" that they refused to enter non-combatant service.⁹³ Grundlingh explains the non-combatants' decision in another way. He believes that some chose not to enlist as an act of protest. Thus they were fighting their own war by not fighting. In dealing with those that enlisted Grundlingh shows that they were not always driven by ideological considerations. Some men who "took the shilling" were virtually press ganged into enlisting. Yet others saw service as a form of adventure, while there were those who saw enlistment as an escape hatch from the long arm of the law. By enrolling under pseudonyms the latter managed to hide their nominal identity and physical presence from the law. Some fled from financial

90 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 246.

91 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 399

92 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 308.

93 ZK Matthews, Freedom For My People..., p. 60.

exigencies.⁹⁴

The motives for participation or non-participation might have varied but a greater uniformity of perceptions on the impact on and the consequences of the war for the broader society emerges after the war. Britain was seen to abandon the principles that she was held to maintain in surrendering to "the Afrikaner Party of Generals Botha and Smuts."⁹⁵

The parting of the ways between Black and Briton and the hardening of condemnation of the Boer by Blacks that had shown itself between 1899 and 1913 became more pronounced after the war of 1914-1918. Blacks who returned from the campaigns overseas came back with a dedication to Black solidarity. Unfortunately this unity was founded on the unhealthy basis of "anti-white sentiment."⁹⁶ In addition Blacks who had served overseas came to realize that beyond the frontiers of South Africa racial discrimination did not exist.⁹⁷

Until the Great War there appears to be a note of fatalism and resignation to their lot amongst Blacks. They had fought for and lost their heritage. They appeared to have become reconciled to their fate. Britain's ultimate success in the South African War over the Boers' attempts to retain their independence had been an adequate demonstration that armed resistance was futile. Therefore the only alternative was to offer their lives for their 'colonial protector', in the belief that Britain would reciprocate by redressing previous sacrifices. The desper-

94 AM Grundlingh, Fighting Their Own War..., pp. 167-171 and pp. 57-79.

95 "To the Native Conference at Queenstown." Address by Meshach Pellem, President Bantu Union, February 26, 1919 [Extracts], quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, pp. 101-102.

96 DDT Jabavu, "Native Unrest: its Cause and Cure", in DDT Jabavu, The Black Problem..., p. 17.

97 ZK Matthews, Freedom For My People..., pp. 60-61.



ate cry of "Abatwana bam, Abatwana bam" ("Oh, my children, my children") of one going down on the "Mendi" gave Blacks "reason to believe that his cry was a testimony of hope that the man had fought a good fight for a good cause and better things awaited their children."⁹⁸

While the voices of those who had served in the war was being rejected, "the appeals of the chattels who render service" to keep disgorging the wealth of the Witwatersrand gold mines that maintained "the credit of the Empire" were also falling on deaf ears.⁹⁹ A South African Native National Congress deputation that had gone to Paris to exploit the perceived sense of obligation that Britain was supposed to have, found General Hertzog at Versailles lobbying for the restoration of a Boer republic, while "Africans were looking for access to their homeland."¹⁰⁰ Black expectations of Wilson's programme for the self-determination for all nations flickered briefly. Blacks were, however, soon made to realize that they were not considered a nation, but a tribe, and thus precluded from the application of Wilson's Fourteen Points to them.¹⁰¹ The world powers were deluding themselves if they believed that Blacks were content to submit to White tutelage in South Africa. Indeed it was a "few swashbucklers like our statesman soldier, Smuts", who remained under this delusion.¹⁰²

98 CMC Ndamse, "The New Day", in S Biko(ed), Black Viewpoint, pp. 39-40 and AB Xuma, "An Address at the Mendi Memorial Celebration, Bantu Sports Grounds, Johannesburg", February 23, 1941, quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 2, p. 163.

99 ST Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa..., p. 20.

100 A Luthuli, Let My People Go..., p. 83.

101 ZK Matthews, Freedom For My People..., p. 62.

102 "To the Native Conference at Queenstown." Address by Meshach Pellem, President, Bantu Union, February 26, 1919. [Extracts], quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 102.



Instead of Blacks receiving the kudos for commitment, Afrikaner 'loyalty' was rewarded by the passage of the Statute of Westminster through the British parliament in 1931. A significant aspect of the Statute was that it repealed the Colonial Laws Validity Act. The latter law allowed British intervention in a colony's legislative process should its laws be repugnant to British principles. Simultaneously the Statute denied the automatic applicability of British law in her colonies.¹⁰³ The implications of this perception were important because Blacks would now come to realize that there was no gain to be had from appeals to Britain to exercise her powers. Which, in turn, would have great implications for Black perceptions of South African history.

Many writers saw the government's policy and its implementation through legislative measures as confirmation of the trends that they had perceived developing since 1899.

By 1917 General Smuts had indicated what lay ahead for Blacks. Two aspects of Smuts's speech at the Savoy Hotel in London are highlighted as significant. According to Thaele, Smuts "made a speech devoid of all common sense and unbecoming of any Christian" when he said that "the early Christians made a mistake in putting into practice the principles of brotherhood."¹⁰⁴ Smuts's speech was criticized by Molema for its statement of regret that Whites had not yet made "Africa a white man's country".¹⁰⁵ This was taken to be particularly applicable to South Africa. DDT Jabavu saw this speech as representing an enigma to Blacks in South Africa.¹⁰⁶ Jabavu appears to have been the only one who viewed

103 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., pp. 115-116.

104 JS Thaele, "Christianity, Basis of Native Policy?", in Workers' Herald, December 21, 1923, quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 215.

105 SM Molema, The Bantu Past and Present, p. 353.

106 DDT Jabavu, "Native Unrest: its Cause and Cure", in DDT Jabavu, The Black Problem..., p. 7.



the speech as enigmatic, if one considers the earlier perceptions of Smuts's Savoy address and the previous references of Pelem.

The subsequent comment on further legislative measures by Smuts appears to confirm those already stated and suggest that if Smuts expressed regret about his failure to make the Union a "white man's country" then he was soon to act to remedy this omission. Blacks came to see Smuts's legislative programme as the first instalment of redressing previous failures. Making South Africa a White-dominated state was achieved through a number of legislative measures that legalized some of the philosophy underlying the Natives' Land Act. Passage of the latter Act had been achieved through minimal and token negotiation with Blacks. The tendency to discard Black opinion was confirmed by the Native Affairs Act No. 23 of 1920.

The passage of this Act legalized "political segregation...for the right honourable gentleman [Smuts] had said that he could not allow black men to sit in the white man's Parliament."¹⁰⁷ Even if Smuts were given the benefit of the doubt, and the native commissioners appointed in terms of this Act were competent men, what guarantees could be given by Smuts that his successors and their appointees would be equally able?¹⁰⁸ Here again Jabavu was out of step with his contemporaries, who rejected the Act because it was drawn up by a parliament that was exclusively White, and because it only allowed for the appointment of White commissioners.¹⁰⁹ By his own admission

107 "Exclusion of the Bantu." Presidential Address by the Rev Z R Mahabane, to Cape Province Native Convention, May 1921, in GM Carter and SW Johns III (eds), The Good Fight..., p. 16.

108 DDT Jabavu, "The Native Affairs Act. Views of Natives", in DDT Jabavu, The Black Problem..., pp. 22-23.

109 "Testimony of JT Gumede Before the Select Committee on Native Affairs, June 15 and 18, 1917, [Extracts], Published in Minutes of Evidence, Select Committee on Native Affairs [4639]", quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 98.



Smuts, during the second reading of the Native Affairs Bill, agreed that Blacks were losing confidence in Whites, and the proposed law was doing little to restore the lost trust.¹¹⁰ A further breach of confidence was to follow with the Native Urban Areas Act of 1923. The perceptions with regard to the aims and consequences of colonization were starting to crystallize in the perceptions of the legislation that was passed after 1910. The Natives' Land Act introduced formal territorial segregation in the rural areas. The Native Affairs Act laid the foundations of formalized political exclusion. The Native Urban Areas Act would be seen as the extension of the Natives' Land Act to the urban areas.

The Urban Areas Act was seen as part of the "lunatic dilemma" of Whites. Whites wished to employ Black labour in the urban areas, but refused them domicile at the workplace.¹¹¹ The reference to the "lunatic dilemma" is made despite the belief that the law originated in the aftermath of the influenza epidemic of 1918, which prompted the need to create more sanitary conditions in the urban areas.¹¹² Significantly, contemporary terminology is applied to explain another notion of the Act. Mokgatle believes that the Urban Areas Act directly gave rise to municipal hostels and reception depots for single Black male workers, which "are instruments designed purely to put into operation the doctrine of Apartheid."¹¹³

With the passage of time the legislative process leading to the segregation and exclusion of Blacks from full participation in the economy and

110 "Exclusion of the Bantu." Presidential Address by the Rev Z R Mahabane, to Cape Province Native Convention, May 1921, in GM Carter and SW Johns III (eds), The Good Fight..., p. 16.

111 ZK Matthews, Freedom For My People..., p. 61.

112 ZK Matthews, Freedom For My People..., p. 61.

113 N Mokgatle, The Autobiography of an Unknown South African, p. 174.



political activity was seen to gain momentum. Aside from the making of laws and their impact several major events after World War I attracted the comment of various writers. Two of these directly concerned Blacks. These were the labour riots in Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg and the Bulhoek massacre. Another event would elicit a response from Black commentators dealing with the period under discussion, even though there might not have been an activist Black involvement. This event was the Rand Revolt of 1922.

The Bulhoek massacre of 1921 was seen as the manifestation of the relationship between land legislation and labour, and thus between colonization and dispossession. While Luthuli ascribes no reasons for the events of 1921 when "163 people were wantonly massacred by the police at Bulhoek",¹¹⁴ a more detailed comment is forthcoming from H Selby Msimang. Msimang sees the killings as part of an attempt to suppress a wider reaction to labour coercion resulting from the land laws. The deaths at Bulhoek, like those of the Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg riots that preceded Bulhoek, could have been avoided had the leader of the Israelites, Enoch Ngijima, persuaded his followers to indenture their labour to farmers of the surrounding districts. An equally effective measure would have been for the Israelites to donate their labour to employers. The irony of Msimang's comments becomes apparent when he says "[I]t is not for me to pass judgement against Ngijima's teachings, but I think it is within our right to condemn any system of Government which encourages lawlessness and defiance to constituted authority. Man is not bound to confess loyalty to a tyrant."¹¹⁵ In later years Mandela argues that the only crime of the dead and the injured at Bulhoek was to live on a piece of land.¹¹⁶

114 A Luthuli, Let My People Go..., p. 83.

115 "Address by Selby Msimang, President, Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of South Africa, July 23, 1921", (Published in The Cape Times), quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 320.

116 N Mandela, "A Land Ruled By The Gun", in N Mandela, No Easy Walk to Freedom..., p. 122.



Forty two years separated the views expressed by Msimang and Mandela. There is however a consistency in the conclusions implied and stated in their arguments. Both maintain that through dispossession of land and the enforcement of legal measures to enable the alienation of land, violent resistance was inevitable, if not a necessity. In this case, then, the perception of the past is not only to explain the present but to justify action taken or planned. Such action might, in strictly legalistic terms, be interpreted as illegal. But in this context the impression is created that not to take action could be construed to be a gross dereliction of duty if not immoral.

With reference to the Bulhoek massacre Ncube takes up the idea of Roux who states that the uprising was a manifestation of "the struggle for racial freedom in South Africa which has often taken a religious form."¹¹⁷ Aside from this perception of the nature of the revolt Ncube also sees the police action as part of the ruthless eviction of Blacks from the land "to compel them to provide cheap labour for the mines."¹¹⁸

Ncube's comment on the religious element, particularly the Christian one, is significant. It is apparent throughout all the sources that all the writers, commentators, speakers and critics are in one way or another concerned with Christianity. The concern is expressed in a variety of ways. Some writers see Christianity as the source of their present condition, while others see Christianity as the solution. In the case of the latter the writers did not merely content themselves

117 E Roux, Time Longer Than Rope. A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa, p. 135, quoted in DMJ Ncube, The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions in South Africa, p. 32.

118 DMJ Ncube, The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions in South Africa, pp. 31-32.



with entrusting their lot to divine intervention. Instead they would give Christianity a specific interpretation and establish certain criteria which would have to be met if Christianity was to be the means to resolving the situation of Blacks. This latter development is significant because Christianity was no longer seen as an absolute, but rather as subject to external criteria that conformed to Black aspirations. In many respects Christianity was meant to conform to the patterns that the Dutch Reformed Church had been condemned for and so become a civil religion.

The extent to which the ways of Black and White had separated became clear with the Rand Revolt of 1922. Under ordinary circumstances it would be expected that there would have been solidarity between workers, irrespective of race. But Blacks saw that although they played a pivotal role in the outbreak of the uprising they were unable to identify with the White workers who took up arms against the state. It was maintained that the strike was in reaction to the mine-owners' intention to allow Blacks advancement into more skilled levels of employment. On the one hand this would reduce labour costs but improve Black wages. For Blacks to side with White workers in the confrontation would have meant support to maintain the industrial colour bar. If, on the other hand, Blacks had sided with the Government against White labour it would have meant a tacit acceptance of Government policy. When viewed against their increasingly vociferous objections to the direction that government policy was taking, this was an untenable position. At best Blacks could adopt a policy of positive neutrality and maintain a low profile when the verbal and military shrapnel started to fly.

Mine owners had welcomed the opportunity to increase the Black labour complement at lower wages during World War I.¹¹⁹ With the return of peace the mine owners were reluctant to increase White employment. White miners saw this as an infringement of the colour bar and thus

119 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 58.



came out on strike.¹²⁰ The White miners had come out to protect their privileged wage position. Their advantageous position in the labour market was seen to be due to the artificial scarcity of skilled labour created by the industrial colour bar. The dilemma of Black labour was seen in the position of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union. By showing solidarity with the White miners they would be tacitly supporting the colour bar. This was clearly untenable. On the basis of the argument that "my enemy's enemy is my friend" the ICU supported Smuts. This in turn created an odd alliance, as Smuts had been responsible for the suppression of the Bulhoek and Bondelswarts rebellions. Smuts was also seen to be acting in collusion with the Chamber of Mines. It was therefore not surprising that the ICU should feel uneasy about an alliance with the obverse side of the coin of labour relations.¹²¹

The position of the individual Black was also invidious. Champion remarks that he was nearly shot by White strikers for aiding troops in Fordsburg. This incident taught him the importance of worker solidarity.¹²² But subsequent events were to show him that this was a unilateral lesson, not to be reciprocated by most White workers. The Transvaal Native Mine Clerks Association saw another lesson to be learned from the Rand Revolt. The Association believed that Whites should learn that without proper communication channels for Blacks with their employers they would be open to virtually any form of agitation.¹²³ Indirectly the 1922 strike was seen as a warning to employers that they could expect similar action from Black workers

120 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 57.

121 DMJ Ncube, The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions in South Africa, p. 34.

122 UNISA, AWG Champion, typed reply by Champion to biographical questions, Acc. 1, Box 1 Autobiography/Biography, File AWG Champion - Section 2 Biography, set of papers numbered p. 2.2.2., np.

123 "Memorandum from the Native Mine Clerks Association to the Mining Industry Board, 1922", quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 321.



unless their demands were heeded.

Champion had viewed the strike as a lesson for the need for solidarity. Opposed to this is the perception of Magubane who believed that the strike and its suppression were the beginning of the transformation of the White labour movement "into an emasculated adjunct of Afrikaner nationalism."¹²⁴ Given the general tenor of Magubane's perceptions of South African history as a gross manipulation by finance capital this is a somewhat aberrant comment. In this instance he is giving recognition to a political movement rather than an economic force. To an extent Ncube also echoes Magubane's viewpoint when he argues that through attacks by Whites on Blacks "the white workers changed the ideological focus from a white working class to that of white domination."¹²⁵

The Rand Revolt was also seen to be a fillip for Afrikaner nationalism. The reaction from the White electorate was such that the Pact government with the aid of the Communist Party ousted Smuts.¹²⁶ The two apparently disparate elements of nationalism and socialism that made up the Pact government were cemented together in reaction to Smuts's handling of the strike.¹²⁷ A general sentiment about the opportunism of the Communist Party of South Africa is aired by Tsotsi who believed that the CPSA would not support the lifting of the colour bar. This refusal to support the abolition was based on the belief that only a few Blacks would benefit from such an action.¹²⁸ Despite this contention there does not appear to be any hint that the CPSA might hope to

124 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 282.

125 DMJ Ncube, The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions in South Africa, p. 33.

126 JK Ngubane, "African Political Movements", in Africa South, Vol 1, #1, October - December, 1956, p. 74.

127 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 58.

128 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 57.



achieve more by solidarity with the White worker. None of the sources appear to suggest that the CPSA might have followed this, with a far longer term objective, step to ensure solidarity in the Black proletariat.

Generally it appears that Blacks viewed the 1922 strike on the Rand as an internecine affair amongst Whites that served to confirm the perception that Whites would see to their own concerns first. If any attention was given to Blacks it was in terms of a "problem" that had to be removed by legislative measures, rather than resolved by a mutually agreed solution.

The next instalment in the formal exclusion of Blacks from a say in government was seen to be the Native Administration Act, No. 38 of 1927. On the one hand it was accepted that the Act agreed with the principle that no legislation affecting Blacks should be implemented without prior consultation with them. This may have been implied in the legislation but the Native Affairs Commission, established in terms of the Native Affairs Act of 1920, had not met for five years. Therefore there could be no talk of consultation based on the precedent of the Native Affairs Commission.¹²⁹ Instead the Act was seen as "tyranny invoked in the name of customary law."¹³⁰ The 1927 Act was the final step in the conquest of the Blacks and completed the political evisceration of the African people by making a White the "Supreme Chief" of the African.¹³¹ In keeping with the evolving perception that the thrust

129 "Urban Native Legislation." Memorandum to the Minister of Native Affairs from the Location Advisory Boards' Congress of South Africa, September 8, 1930. (Published in the Report of the Location Advisory Boards Congress of South Africa), quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 342.

130 "Presidential Address", by Dr. A.B. Xuma, ANC Annual Conference of December 14-16, 1941, quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol. 2, p. 181.

131 "Congress Youth League Manifesto," issued by the Provisional Committee of the Congress Youth League, March 1944, quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 2, p. 303.



of colonization in South Africa was towards labour coercion Modisane contends that the law was designed to redistribute "surplus labour".¹³²

The legislative measures previously discussed were not believed to have originated in a vacuum but were part of a deliberate programme. This programme sought to rehabilitate the poor-Whites. The "Afrikaner workers and poor whites saw in the petty-bourgeois program their only salvation from poverty and despair."¹³³ Simultaneously the solution to the poor-White problem fuelled national chauvinism.¹³⁴ Because the advancement of the poor-White was seen to encourage the interests of Afrikaner nationalism, it appeared that the programme to rehabilitate the poor-White was a unilateral solution to a universal problem.

The causes of poverty recognized no racial distinctions. The Xhosa, for example, had social structures to absorb the "refugees" from poverty, while the poor-Whites resorted to the "robbing of black Peter to pay white Paul."¹³⁵ The frontier struggle of the preceding centuries had become a struggle between a Black and White proletariat which was "euphemistically called the 'Poor White Problem'."¹³⁶ To ensure electoral support "the Afrikaner political class" had to wean the Afrikaner proletariat from a radical class consciousness. This weaning process was achieved by introducing legislation that ended the Afrikaner workers' "poverty and despair". At the same time a more

132 B Modisane, Blame Me On History, pp. 305-306.

133 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 168.

134 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 246.

135 N Jabavu, The Ochre People, p. 115.

136 DMJ Ncube, The Influence of Apartheid and Capitalism on the Development of Black Trade Unions in South Africa, p. 37.



positive identification with the symbols of Afrikaner nationalism such as Afrikaner churches, commerce, cultural movements, literature and politics had to be striven after.¹³⁷

The idea had to become entrenched that White security lay in White supremacy.¹³⁸ The answer to the poor-White problem was achieved at the expense of the poor-Blacks. The poor-White was encouraged to urbanize by industrialization, while the poor-Black was repatriated to the reserves from the industrial centres. This repatriation intensified the pressures on the already overcrowded reserves.¹³⁹ Industry could not, however, survive entirely on White labour and thus from the 1930s one saw the establishment of a "permanently urbanized semiskilled black proletariat". Thus, Tabata alleges, the solution of the poor-White problem held a certain irony in that the answer resulted from "racial-economic integration, not racial separation."¹⁴⁰ This interpretation is significant because in many respects Tsotsi has highlighted what, to many Blacks, is the inherent contradiction in the evolution of South African history. The contradiction lies in the increasing economic interdependence that is matched by an equal determination to counteract this integration by measures to segregate all others spheres of being.

Much of the comment and criticism of the preceding legislation was made against the background of an even more ominous legislative package that first appeared in the 1920s but would only be promulgated in the 1930s—the Hertzog "Native Bills".

The passage of the Hertzog Bills, the Natives Trust and Land Act and

137 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 167.

138 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 170.

139 G Mbeki, South Africa The Peasants' Revolt, p. 71.

140 WM Tsotsi, From Chattel to Wage Slavery..., p. 60.



the Representation of Natives Act of 1936, confirmed a trend that many Blacks had discerned developing since 1652. The Acts "established once and for all that the conquered land could not be acquired by Africans either by commercial purchase or political means."¹⁴¹ The token consultation that the government had undertaken with Blacks should not let it be thought that Blacks had acquiesced to the proposed legislation. The government had failed to realize that the "Black race has passed that stage where it can be made to swallow anything given by the legislators and enjoy it with gusto."¹⁴² It was also unacceptable for the government to take 8-9 years to frame the legislation and then only allow Blacks three months to consult on the Bills. In addition, this consultation was via a select committee, the Young Commission, that had no Black members.¹⁴³

Jabavu's comments at the end of the last paragraph are an indication of the hardening of Black attitudes. Until the tabling of the Hertzog Bills, Blacks had tenuously clung to the belief that there was some prospect of hope; that an equitable resolution of conflict was possible. This belief was held despite the increasing perception that the development of South Africa's past clearly showed that Whites had not come to the subcontinent with any altruistic motives. Jabavu's views are also a reflection of a new generation of Black writers, who did not feel themselves as constrained by their background. They increasingly expressed their views in terms that denied a debt to Whites.

The tone of the writers who came to the fore in the 1930s (and later) showed that age of the supplicant was gradually dying out. While Blacks still believed that they depended on the goodwill of Whites they could

141 BM Magubane, The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa, p. 85.

142 DDT Jabavu, The Findings of the All African Convention, p. 25.

143 DDT Jabavu, The Findings of the All African Convention, pp. 26-28.



not readily afford to portray the role of Whites in South African history as antagonistic to that of Blacks. But the circumstances surrounding the passage of the Hertzog Bills were such that this inhibiting factor was jettisoned. It appears in the criticism of the Hertzog Bills that, relatively speaking, Blacks had thrown political caution to the wind. In many respects the Hertzog Bills were envisaged as a crisis moment. Unless everything was thrown into the opposition against the Bills then all would be lost. Similarly if the struggle failed then nothing was to be lost anyway, and thus there was no point in explaining their opposition to the proposed legislation in polite terms.

There appears to have been a sense of relief at the publication of the Bills. By announcing his intentions Hertzog had at last brought the question of race-relations into the open.¹⁴⁴ Further gratitude to Hertzog is expressed by the feeling that the very nature of the Bills held the key to Black liberation.¹⁴⁵ Hertzog had broken pledges that dated back to unification and had committed "a breach of faith which can only result in the most serious menace to peace and security of this land."¹⁴⁶ Thus Blacks saw themselves as relieved of any explicit or implicit obligations to Whites.

The opprobrium attached to the Bills was not only directed at Hertzog but at Whites in general. A modern writer contended that the Bills allowed for Blacks to be excluded from the electoral process, while

144 "Report on Proceedings and Resolutions of the Annual Conference of the African National Congress, January 4-5, 1926 [Extracts] (Published in The Friend), quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 299.

145 "The Challenge" and "The Alternative". Extracts from pamphlet The Crisis by Selby Msimang, quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 2, p. 61.

146 "Resolutions of Demonstration Against the Prime Minister's Native Bills, 1926", quoted in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 1, p. 326.



Whites could "feel moral about doing so at the time".¹⁴⁷ The unanimous support given by Whites to the "political emasculation" of Blacks in 1936 "showed how little they respected the solemn undertakings to which they had been party."¹⁴⁸ Government policy was stripped of the "sweet promises for the future" as Blacks at last realized that they had been dispossessed of their country. Blacks now realized that they could rely on no one but themselves.¹⁴⁹

This declaration of political independence had important repercussions for Black historical perceptions. As has been stated previously there is a close linkage between the ideology of Black politics and historical perception. If independence of political thought and action had been declared then it was to be expected that the historical perceptions underlying these new directions in political thought had also changed. Blacks increasingly portrayed South African history in accordance with their political programme. In this sense the perception of the South African past as being one of unmitigated disaster for Blacks gains the ascendancy. The image of the past no longer had to pay obeisance to White sensitivities. There was no longer be the tendency to view the past as part of a shared experience. Increasingly Blacks argued that their past was unique, because only they had borne the brunt of White political machinations. Opposed to this Whites might have lived through this past, but could not claim to have experienced it as Blacks had done.¹⁵⁰

Even those writers who, for a variety of reasons, declined to follow

147 G Mbeki, South Africa The Peasants' Revolt, p. 28.

148 G Mbeki, South Africa The Peasants' Revolt, p. 29.

149 "Address by I.B. Tabata, AAC Conference, December 16, 1941", in T Karis and GM Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge. Vol 2, p. 341.

150 Preface to 1920 edition contained in 1921 edition, in DDT Jabavu, The Black Problem..., p. x.



the preceding argument to its logical conclusion and dismiss White involvement in Black politics as irrelevant or as being a form of inverse racialism, expressed a more vehemently independent perception of the past. That they adopted this stance can probably be attributed to the need for Blacks to make it clear that their claims were not based on a fallacious interpretation of the past, but rather on a harsh appraisal of what had gone before.

The writers of this era and later generations, had the advantage of more concrete examples of the thesis that colonization, exploitation and dispossession were synonymous. Therefore it follows that they would seek to establish a far closer relationship between the final legislative measures of the era 1870 to 1936 and initial colonization.

It is against this background that the perceptions of the next period, 1936 to 1960, should be viewed.