

AFRICAN LABOUR DURING THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 1899-1902

by

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The South African War represents the most intense conflict between Europeans in sub-Saharan Africa, involving in only thirty-two months over half a million combatants. The war, however, has been interpreted by historians exclusively as a "white man's war", in which only the interests and actions of the white communities in South Africa and the Imperial power directly involved, Britain, have been researched in any depth. Throughout the pages of the numerous accounts of the conflict, from the earliest accounts of military operations published in 1900 to the most recent Afrikaans and English monographs, the participation of black peoples in the war, the influence of war on African societies, and the response by Africans to the conflict, have been passed over almost completely. The need to study issues such as these is of importance not only to a more complete understanding of the war itself, as Donald Denoon has recently suggested (1), but, since war represents one of the most powerful agents of social change, also to provide information concerning the currents of change within South African societies at the turn of the present century and the way in which these were influenced by the circumstance of war, especially those trends affecting the incorporation of the indigenous peoples of the region into a society fast changing as a result of the development of the diamond and gold mining industries. In this paper I shall examine the role played by black workers during the war and the way in which the conflict affected their interests, paying particular attention to the disruption of the migrant labour system at the outbreak of war, the labour policies of the two armies, the pattern of recruitment of black workers, and the immediate post-war labour market.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century the expansion of the gold mining industry was accompanied by a considerable increase in the scale of African labour migration to the Witwatersrand. In 1890 the number of African workers employed on the gold mines was 15,000; by 1895 the labour force had risen to 50,000, and by 1899 this had more than doubled to 107,000. (2) The migration of African workers to the mines can be related to the fiscal pressures on Africans to acquire cash for taxes and rents and to provide for new consumption requirements (the rôle of the trader-recruiter being especially important in this respect), and the increasing difficulties experienced by many Africans in meeting their cash needs through the sale of agricultural produce and livestock. (3) The rinderpest epidemic which swept throughout southern Africa during 1896-97, destroying eighty per cent or more of African cattle, appears either to have terminated effectively many Africans' independence from the labour system or to have provided a fresh incentive to acquire cash with which to purchase stock to rebuild depleted herds. (4) The migration of workers to the mines

was also stimulated by the increased intensity of recruitment after the establishment of the Rand Native Labour Association in 1896, and by the conclusion of an agreement with the Governor-General for Mozambique in the following year which permitted licensed labour agents for the industry to recruit workers systematically from the Portuguese territory. At the outbreak of the South African War, workers from Mozambique constituted almost two-thirds of the entire black work force on the gold mines. (5) Until 1897 the supply of workers to the mines failed to keep pace with the expansion of mining operations, and during this period the mining companies were compelled to pay their workers more attractive wages than were available elsewhere. In 1893 the average monthly wage of black mine labourers rose from 42s to 48s, and two years later increased to 63s. (6) In 1897, however, the supply of workers exceeded the immediate demand, and a revised wage schedule was introduced which reduced the average monthly wage to 50s. (7)

The depletion of the Rand labour force began some months before the outbreak of the South African War. As early as in June 1899, labour representatives were obliged to send messengers along the line of reef to allay the anxiety of African workers who feared they would be prevented from returning home by seemingly imminent military operations. (8) At the beginning of October a rapid exodus of workers from the industrial region took place. On one day, October 9, 3,000 workers from Mozambique were despatched by train to Lourenço Marques, and a further 1,300 labourers issued with travelling passes to return home by whatever means were available to them. (9) The arrival of so many workers at Lourenço Marques caused the Portuguese administration difficulties in accommodating the migrants; temporary camps were established and troops held in readiness to deal with any signs of disorder. (10) The office of J. S. Marwick, the Natal Native Agent in Johannesburg, was surrounded by thousands of African workers, aware that no arrangements had been made for their return home and anxious lest their earnings be confiscated before they left the Republic. (11) Marwick successfully negotiated with the Pretoria government for permission to march the remaining workers from Natal to the frontier of the Colony. (12) The almost total suspension of gold production on the Rand not only stemmed the southward migration of labour from south-central Africa but also reversed it to some extent. In November 1899 large numbers of "boys" from the gold mines were reported passing through the Bechuanaland Protectorate to work on the mines in Southern Rhodesia (13), and during the war Africans from Basutoland, Bechuanaland and the Transkei were found working there. (14)

Many workers experienced considerable hardship. Those engaged by De Beers at Kimberley were swiftly encircled by the Republican forces, and though many successfully escaped investment, 18,000 workers were compelled to endure the subsequent five month siege. Because the Company's supply of fresh vegetables was taken over by the military for general European consumption, scurvy soon spread in the compounds: in January 1900, 260 deaths among the workers occurred, and during the following month 2,000 cases of scurvy were reported to be under observation. (15) There are many reports of African workers who left the Transvaal having been robbed of their earnings by Boer commandos and railway officials. (16) Labourers from all regions of southern Africa were often compelled to leave the Rand by the Delagoa Bay railway route, and a number of workers perished on the journey home. (17) Some workers returning home from the Rand and the coal mines of Natal, evacuated on account of the Boer invasion of the Colony, were detained by the British army in the districts placed under immediate martial law. In the Transkei workers were described as having returned "in a state of absolute destitution, great numbers having walked from inability to pay railway fares, and emaciated from want of food". (18) The disruption to the migrant labour system increased the pressure on food resources in the rural areas, especially in Natal, Zululand and the Transkei, where the unprecedented influx of population was accompanied by especially meagre harvest yields. Supplies of food were short during the first year of the war in the Entonjaneni, Nkandla and Nqutu districts of Zululand, and in some regions of northern Natal, where the laying waste of crops by military operations was an additional cause of distress. (19) In Nqutu,

the Rev. C. Johnson described a "terrible famine" existing in the area, caused initially by a disappointing harvest but exacerbated by "having so many more people to feed". (20) In Britain, the Aborigines' Protection Society established a Zululand Relief Fund which raised £500 to buy food for distribution in the most distressed areas. (21) Although the Natal government and the Colonial Office considered the Society's action unnecessary (22), the situation was sufficiently serious to induce the Department of Native Affairs to set up a relief committee with responsibility for purchasing mealies and allocating them to the worst affected areas. (23) In the Transkei, the government was also compelled to administer relief in the Butterworth and Willowvale districts, where between four hundred and five hundred Africans received daily rations of 1lb mealies. (24) The distress which resulted from the return of so many workers is evidence of the extent to which some communities in the Transkei and Zululand had already become dependent on the absence of men at work, and the money these migrants earned, to provide subsistence.

Throughout the campaign in South Africa, the British army depended on African labour for messengers, scouts, harness-menders, policemen, guards over supplies, and ox-drivers; for the heavy earthworks connected with the railways; for loading and off-loading supply trains; for work in the large military camps; and for supervising horses in the remount and veterinary departments. In addition, Africans were enrolled to defend the Transkei and East Griqualand, and later in the war to transport Afrikaner families to the concentration camps, to round up their livestock, and to assist in the patrolling of the blockhouse system. (25) The labour requirements of the Afrikaner forces during the war were considerably less than those of the British army, owing to the smaller size, local knowledge and mobility of the Boer units. In practice, many commando fighters were accompanied by one or more of their African servants or workers, though for certain tasks such as the destruction of railways and the attempted damming of the Klip river during the Ladysmith campaign, on which 500 labourers were employed, the Boers were able to bring together a large number of African workers.

The labour policy of the Republics, like that of the subsequent British military administration, was related not only to the requirements of the military forces but to the perceived need to preserve law and order among the black population, especially on the Witwatersrand, where after hostilities began a large pool of unemployed labour developed, swelled by many Africans who came into the region to seek security from military operations. Another factor to be considered by the governments was the need to provide additional labour to maintain agricultural output, which was made more difficult by the absence of farmers and their sons on commando. At the outbreak of war, therefore, Africans were conscripted to work on farms and forbidden to leave their employers for its duration, and to accompany the commandos as labourers, wagon-drivers, leaders of oxen, gun-bearers, and scouts. (26) To refuse to serve with the Boer forces was punishable by a fine of £5, by imprisonment, or by twenty-five lashes (27), and the methods of conscription employed did not err on the side of leniency. In October 1899, the Standard and Diggers' News protested that

It is time the attention of the authorities was drawn to the inhuman treatment meted out to the natives in town by some of the so-called commandeering officers. Lashes are quite common, and, while we are not ultra-sentimental, and believe in the native being firmly treated, we cannot allow cruelty to go by unnoticed. (28)

Conscription frequently took the form of raids into mining compounds and the Johannesburg location, usually on the pretext of searching out those engaged in the manufacture of beer, and served the additional purpose of preventing protests by Africans against the introduction by the government of a maximum monthly wage for African workers of 20s. (29) Despite such action, discontent among Africans on the Rand occasionally erupted: in October, two workers at the Driefontein Mine "occupied" the underground section, armed with Martini-Henry rifles; in January, between thirty

and forty workers at the George Goch location attacked a group of white policemen; and, during March, mine police all over the reef engaged in disarming workers of knobkerries and assegais, which on some mines were reported to have been found in large quantities. (30) When Roberts's columns entered Johannesburg in June 1900, African workers jubilantly burned their passes in relief at the apparent passing of the harsh wartime regime on the Rand and of the danger of conscription by the Boers to perform unpaid military labour at the front. It is clear, too, that their action symbolized an expectation that the British would introduce a new, more liberal labour system in the Transvaal. (31)

In November 1899 the British army appointed Colonel E. P. C. Girouard, an officer experienced in recruiting and organizing indigenous labour in the Sudan, to establish labour depots for the supply of workers to all the departments of the army except the transport department, which enlisted its own drivers and leaders. The first depot was established at De Aar, for which recruitment was initially entrusted to magistrates in the Transkei and the Ciskei; workers were enlisted for three months and paid 60s a month with free rations. Another depot was organized at Bloemfontein, which was administered on a similar basis, though the monthly pay was fixed at 40s and recruitment was largely the responsibility of the Resident Commissioner in Basutoland, Sir Godfrey Lagden. On the Witwatersrand, where 35,000 workers remained in the mining area, 8,000 were employed by the military on the construction of a railway for transporting coal along the gold reef at a wage rate of 10d a day, and another 4,000 workers conscripted to form the initial recruitment to the Johannesburg labour depot at the wage rate of 1s a day, these workers being reserved for the gold mining industry when production was again able to be fully resumed. The remaining workers were retained by the mining companies for maintenance work at the same rate. (32) Further recruitment to the labour depot was entrusted to agents who had formerly recruited workers for the mining industry (33), though the army also used its influence to increase its own labour supply. Any Africans in the Witwatersrand region who appeared to have no employment, or who were detained either for failing to produce a pass or suspected of desertion, were conscripted by the military and sent to the Johannesburg depot. (34) Those Africans who had been detained by the previous administration suspected of spying were also enrolled. (35) The conscription of Africans into military employment was used as a means of maintaining control over the black population; when four hundred Africans at Balmoral were reported by General Pole-Carew to be "getting out of hand", the Military Governor, General Maxwell, arranged for them to be transported by rail to Johannesburg to be enrolled at the labour depot. (36)

The labour policy of the British army also cannot be separated from the growing refugee problem which the military administration was compelled to deal with, largely as a result of General Kitchener's "scorched earth" policy, which was intended to deny the Republican guerrilla groups all means of subsistence by destroying African as well as Afrikaner crops and livestock. This policy especially affected Africans residing on private farms, a group which made up 22.25 per cent of the African population of the Transvaal. (37) During 1901 concentration camps to house Africans were established, administered by a Native Refugee Department. In order to reduce the cost of supplying rations to the camps and to provide a reliable supply of workers to the military, those Africans capable of work were sent to the various departments of the army for employment. (38) The camps were situated along the lines of rail, in easy communication with bases of military operations and centres where labour was required. Rations in the camps were distributed without payment only to those who were either physically unfit for work or for whom no suitable employment was available. Inevitably, a high proportion of those detained in the refugee camps were obliged to accept work. Captain G. F. de Lotbiniere, the Superintendent of Native Refugees, wrote in January 1902 that supplying labour to the army "formed the basis on which our system was founded", and it appears probable that the reason why the African refugee camps, unlike the camps for whites, remained under army supervision, was to keep the control of African labour in military hands, a consideration of some importance since workers were needed by the mining industry for the resumption of gold production, the wealth

from which represented the keystone of Milner's reconstruction programme in the Transvaal. (39) By the end of the war there were sixty-six African refugee camps in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, housing 107,344 refugees. A high incidence of personal suffering unavoidably took place in the camps: epidemics of chicken-pox, measles, dysentery and other diseases attacked the hastily organized sites, owing to the overcrowded living conditions, contaminated drinking water, and inadequate supplies of food. In December 1901 the death rate in the African refugee camps in the Orange River Colony was estimated to be 436 per 1,000, and in the Transvaal 320 per 1,000. (40)

The British army, however, depended not only on "involuntary" labour, but also on the voluntary recruitment of workers. In many districts there is evidence of a direct relationship between the level of military recruitment and insufficient harvest yields and the existence of rural unemployment caused by the disruption of the labour market at the outbreak of war - in other words, those districts where a substantial proportion of the inhabitants appear already to have become dependent on the migrant labour system for necessary cash requirements. In the Bathurst district of the Cape in 1900, where crop yields were reported to be very low, seventy-two per cent of the adult male population were recruited by the military. (41) In Peddie it was reported that the local food supply was "... practically nil, and many families have been put in dire straits.... Large numbers were engaged by contract to the military authorities to such an extent that few able-bodied men were left". (42) The initial recruitment to the De Aar depot was concentrated largely in the King William's Town district, one of those worst affected by harvest difficulties in 1899-1900; during the war it was estimated that over 3,000 Africans left the district to enrol with the military. (43) The problem in areas such as these during the war was more than one simply of diminishing means to support a substantial part of the population independently from the labour system, compounded by adverse weather conditions and the influx of men normally absent at work. The demand for grain by the forces operating in South Africa and the increase in the cost of its transportation caused by the commandeering of draught animals by the military on a considerable scale further inflated the price (large quantities of American wheat were imported through East London for sale in the Transkei from 1900 onwards). (44) The commandeering of oxen which followed the rinderpest losses only three years earlier also reduced the ability of many African communities to provide sufficient food for their own requirements. (45)

The existence of contrasting prosperity both between and within African communities was an important feature of South African societies at the turn of the present century. During the South African War there existed in all but the remotest regions a remunerative market for agricultural produce and livestock, and African agriculturalists took advantage of the army's demand for animal products, grain, tobacco, draught animals and remounts, for which they often received considerably inflated prices. (46) Africans best able to do this were those who already supplied produce for the market and therefore were in a position to benefit directly from the inflation of grain and other prices; those who possessed the means of transporting produce to the areas where troops were quartered and who thereby cut out the system of local entrepreneurs and military contractors; and those who were in a position to extend their area of cultivation. Pondoland benefited especially from the wartime produce market, since the war came at a time when agriculturalists in the region were already producing a large grain surplus for the market. (47) Mpondo peasants also sold grain at high prices - though often paid in the form of livestock - to Africans from districts of the Transkei where resources of food were in short supply. (48) In a number of areas of the Cape and Natal, an expansion of the area cultivated by Africans was reported, the produce from which was sold on the market; in Ingwavuma district, Zululand, for example, it was noted that "the Natives have increased their hoeing operations, with the idea of having a surplus of mealies, mabele, etc., for disposal to the whites". (49) In a number of regions during the war, however, reports of local African prosperity derived from participation in the produce market occurred in

districts where high levels of military recruitment took place. (50) In some of these it is clear that the wealth described was confined to a relatively small section of the African community. In Butterworth, where it was estimated that three out of four men were absent at work with the army, and where acute distress was reported consistently throughout the war, several Africans reaped over a hundred bags of mealies and more. (51) In Kalanga there prospered a community of over a hundred African producers who inhabited houses valued from £20 to £600; for the bulk of the population, however, supplies of food had been reported for some years to be quite inadequate, and during the war five hundred Africans enrolled with the Transkei levies and in 1901 "hundreds" more were said to be in military employment. (52) In Albany a small number of Africans ploughed extensively for oats with the specific intention of selling oat hay to the military, for which they received 7s per 100 lbs, though large numbers of Africans thrown out of work by the outbreak of war took employment with the army as wagoners and mule drivers. (53) It is probable, nevertheless, that the unequal distribution of resources within African communities is not the only explanation of why in some regions large-scale military recruitment accompanied local reports of remunerative peasant agriculture. Some producers may have taken up military employment as an additional means of raising capital. Since the length of contract to the army was normally only three months, it was possible for members of a community to go to work when their labour was not essential in the rural areas. The length of contract appears crucial; an absence of only three months could be incorporated relatively easily into a system of agricultural production. It was reported of the Basotho, for example, that

They generally work in pairs. One man goes off to labour abroad, we will call him 'A', and 'B' remains at home and looks after the cattle and attends to the sowing of wheat, and, when 'A' returns in three months 'B' goes abroad to labour and 'A' remains at home to attend to the sowing of mealies and kaffir corn. 'B' returns at the end of three months in time to reap his wheat and 'A' will return in time to reap his crops. So that their methods of labour fit in greater facility for three months than for six months. (54)

Two factors in particular may account for peasant producers attempting to secure the largest possible income during the war. First, since the devastating losses of livestock as a result of the rinderpest epidemic it became an a priori concern of Africans to build up again their depleted herds; the war provided a favourable opportunity to fulfil this ambition during its early stages when the livestock market was buoyant and when many white farmers in threatened areas were willing to sell cattle to Africans rather than risk either supplying the enemy or having their livestock commandeered on credit. There are many reports of Africans using cash acquired by working for the military to purchase cattle, sheep and goats. (55) Secondly, during the war a substantial increase took place not only in the price of livestock but in the price of consumption items such as cotton and woollen goods, implements and other small manufactures, owing to the dislocation of trade and high transport costs. African consumers, therefore, required a higher cash income to buy these items, which by many may increasingly have been regarded as "necessary" rather than simply "discretionary" purchases. (56)

African workers responded in different ways to the conditions of work which they found to exist with the military. Many workers acknowledged that they were well satisfied with the wages earned, which for ox-drivers and leaders, classed by the army as skilled workers, rose to 90s a month, and for a small number of scouts to as high as 120s a month. The magistrate at Albany reported in 1901 that Africans who returned from military employment expressed themselves "well satisfied and loud in their praises of the way in which they were treated by the military authorities". (57) However, resentment rapidly spread among those workers in the former Republics conscripted into military employment. Desertion from the military compounds on the

Witwatersrand remained a problem throughout the war, and in September 1901 fifteen workers at the Johannesburg store yard of the Imperial Military Railways struck work and refused to work any longer. (57) Complaints, too, were received from the African refugee camps, where protests were made against the system which virtually compelled a man to work if he wanted to eat. Two Africans at the Honingspruit camp in the Orange River Colony wrote that

... the only food we can get is mealies and mealie meal, and this is not supplied to us free, but we have to purchase same with our own money. Meat we are still not able to get at any price, nor are we allowed to buy anything at the shops at Honingspruit ... We humbly request Your Honour to do something for us otherwise we will all perish of hunger for we have no money to keep on buying food. (59)

Even among the better paid voluntary recruits dissatisfaction both with wage rates and the way workers were treated by their military employers erupted from time to time. Although the response of African workers in the Cape to military employment was immediate (within a short time of the establishment of the De Aar depot over 2,000 were enlisted), in the Orange Free State Basotho workers were less enthusiastic initially because of the smaller wage - 40s instead of 60s - offered by the army at Bloemfontein. When Sir Godfrey Lagden contacted the Basotho Paramount Chief, Lerothodi, he was told that it would be impossible to enlist the 2,000 workers required, because of the reduced wage: "... intercede for us ... chief for the wage to be increased", Lerothodi replied. Lagden urgently contacted the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts, who agreed that the wage offered at the Bloemfontein depot should be increased, and the workers requested by the Resident Commissioner were duly supplied. (60) Dissatisfaction among African workers largely centred on those employed by the remount department, who were generally paid lower wages than voluntary workers employed by other departments of the army. Workers at the remount depot at Pietermaritzburg, paid only 30s a month, refused to work in the areas where military operations were taking place unless they were paid 40s. When these workers returned to the depot those there also struck successfully for a wage rate of 40s. (61) Disillusionment with military employment was expressed by workers at the remount depots at Naauwpoort, Bowker's Park and Worcester in the Cape. In May 1901 a worker at the Naauwpoort depot complained of the high-handed treatment of the Chief Conductor, "a great enemy of Natives", and continued:

We do not live in tents ... but in very dirty places, we get very scanty rations and generally go to sleep without food, we work with spades, we carry bags, etc., we work by day as well as by night without any mention of overtime pay, we work also on Sundays. (62)

Complaints by workers of ill-treatment at Bowker's Park and Worcester induced the Cape government to make an independent inspection of conditions at the depots. The report submitted to them made it clear that the principal grievance of the workers was their low rate of pay, though complaints were also made concerning their diet, which did not include vegetables because of scarcity, and the money owed to men who died while in military employment, which suggests that the mortality rate among workers may have been high, though no evidence was submitted relating to this. (63)

During the final months of the South African War and immediately afterwards the argument was often advanced by employers, both from the mining and the agricultural communities, frustrated by their inability to recruit sufficient unskilled labour, that the scale and conditions of military employment had disrupted the whole system of labour in South Africa. (64) There is evidence to suggest that allegations of Africans being "full of money" after the war may not have been wholly unfounded, though this circulation of cash appears to have been the result, first, of African agriculturalists having taken advantage of the inflated price and demand for produce and livestock, and,

secondly, the payment of military receipts and claims for compensation. In Basutoland, the value of mealie exports rose from £11,450 in 1899-1900 to £29,104 in 1900-01, £46,621 in 1901-02, and £55,014 in 1902-03; the value of Basutho ponies exported from the Colony in 1900-01 was £263,000, after which supplies became exhausted and breeding stocks irreparably damaged. (65) The Batlapin in the Taung reserve received £25,490 from the military for the hire of their wagons (66), and in Bechuanaland Plumer's Mafeking relief column bought cattle worth £25,000 from the Bamangwato. (67) The increased purchasing power of Africans is also apparent. The value of dutiable goods imported into Basutoland rose from £85,527 in 1899-1900 to £145,474 in 1900-01, £230,680 in 1901-02, and though this figure fell to £191,019 in 1902-03 (probably as a result of the exodus of Afrikaner refugees returning to the Free State), the Resident Commissioner reported an "embarrassing" number of applications for trading licences having been made throughout the year. (68) A branch of the Standard Bank opened at Maseru in July 1902. (69) The estimated value of goods imported into Natal for the "kaffir trade" increased from £159,910 in 1899 to £160,730 in 1900, £230,180 in 1901, and £271,450 in 1902. (70) By the end of January 1903, £163,109 had been distributed among Africans in the Transvaal as payment for military receipts, and £114,000 was set aside for compensation for livestock, grain, seeds and agricultural implements destroyed, stolen or requisitioned either by the Afrikaner or British forces without a receipt being issued. (71) As a result of the disarmament policy in the Transvaal, £60,989 was paid out in compensation to Africans for their surrendered arms and ammunition. (72)

It is arguable, however, whether this circulation of money can be related to the scarcity of labour which followed the war, as many employers alleged, or that it represented any great benefit to the vast majority of Africans. Since those best able to take advantage of the inflated demand and price for grain and livestock were Africans who possessed herds large enough for a proportion of their stock to be sold, who already produced a grain surplus for sale on the market, and who were able to extend their area of cultivation either by agricultural improvement or having sufficient draught animals and additional cultivable land available, a large proportion of this money presumably circulated among Africans who were not dependent on the labour system to raise their cash requirements (though some may have taken employment after the rinderpest epidemic and during the war as an additional means of raising capital). The supply of labour from the former Republics may nevertheless have been influenced by the beneficial occupation by Africans of land normally cultivated by Afrikaner farmers absent on commando. (73) Military receipts were haphazardly issued: the Native Commissioner in Waterberg believed that "for every receipt produced, three other receipts were due" (74), and in Heidelberg Africans calculated their total losses during the war to amount to £150,000, but military receipts accounted for only £4,733. (75) Many Africans handed in receipts to the military, whom it was found afterwards impossible to identify. (76) The continuing inflation of livestock prices, the short supply of cattle available for purchase at the end of the war, and the indebtedness into which a large number had sunk, resulted in many Africans being unable to put the cash they received into productive use. Compensation claims were by no means paid in full: in the Transvaal African claims were assessed at £661,106, but only 17.25 per cent of this sum was actually paid out. (77) Even the money paid for the surrender of arms and ammunition was considerably less than their market value. It appears that, though a number of Africans may have possessed the capital to avoid labouring in the immediate aftermath of the war, their independence from the migrant labour system in the longer term was undermined.

It is also unlikely that many fortunes were made by Africans from employment with the military. Although the remuneration for certain categories of workers was high, the length of contract to the military was normally only three months, and it remained a constant problem for the army that African workers rarely worked for longer than their contracts prescribed because of the arduousness and danger of the work - any Africans employed by the military who were captured by the Boers were invariably shot without trial. (78) Many of the best paid Africans, especially in intelligence

work, were drawn from among petty chiefs and headmen. The wages earned by workers also bought less as the war progressed because of the inflated price of grain and cattle, which induced many to invest in small stock such as sheep and goats (the inflation of cattle prices varied in all regions of southern Africa from as little as £7-£15 to £10-£18 in Basutoland, to as high as £10 to £25-£30 in Bechuanaland - prices not to be reached again until the 1960s. (79) Furthermore, the increase in labour migration after the war, even from those regions which did not suffer directly from devastation, suggests that the influence of military employment in affording workers greater independence from labouring was minimal: in 1903 the number of Natal Africans seeking work in the Transvaal was greater than in any pre-war year (80); "between 60,000 and 70,000" workers migrated from Basutoland in 1902-03 compared with 37,371 in 1898-99 (81); labour migration from the Transkei increased from 61,034 in 1898 to 66,695 in 1902, and 76,556 in 1903. (82)

The new economic and political climate which the circumstance of war created, however, did play an important part in bringing about the labour shortage which immediately followed the conflict. The most seriously affected industry was gold mining, which in 1903 was able to recruit a work force only two-thirds of that which it had employed in 1899, but the scarcity of workers was confined neither to the mining industry nor to the Transvaal. Farming experienced particular difficulties, and in some areas of South Africa agricultural output was cut back by the shortage of unskilled labour. (83) The new monthly wage rates of 30s-35s introduced by the Chamber of Mines in 1901 compared unfavourably not only with pre-war rates but also with the wages earned by almost every other category of labour in South Africa except farm workers. (84) During the immediate post-war economic boom it was relatively easy for Africans to find better paid employment in reparation and repatriation work, in public works enterprises to improve road and rail communications, and at the ports. Whereas in 1897 the Chamber of Mines had been able to enforce wage reductions with very little effect on the supply of labour, largely because of the implications of the rinderpest epidemic and the absence of alternative better paid work, in 1901-03 the demand for workers in South Africa appears to have been greater than the supply. Conditions of travel for African workers were especially difficult and hazardous during the final stages of the war and immediately afterwards, since martial law restrictions were placed on the movement of Africans in view of the continuing guerrilla war, and insufficient rolling stock was available afterwards for the required number of trains to transport migrant workers from Mozambique and elsewhere to the Witwatersrand. (85) The much more sophisticated system of control over African workers introduced by the Milner administration also affected the labour supply (an issue neglected by Denoon in his study of the labour crisis). (86) During the 1890s many mining companies systematically recruited workers from each other by employing labour "touts" to procure newly arrived workers in the industrial area and to encourage desertions from the compounds of neighbouring mines, promising the workers better pay and conditions. Desertions became such a problem that in November 1898 the number of desertions reported by companies exceeded the number of workers legitimately discharged. (87) This system provided black workers on the Rand with the means to exercise selection in their ultimate choice of employer. After the war, however, workers were confronted by a maximum average wage schedule, the establishment of a monopolistic recruiting agency, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, which was created with the intention of "rendering impossible in the future the indiscriminate competition, touting and traffic in Natives which in the past existed among the mining companies" (88), and by an administration determined on regulating labour to a greater degree within the industrial area. The Milner regime extended the pass department, created a system of courts to deal with breaches of masters and servants legislation, introduced a scheme to register the fingerprints of all mining employees to help identify workers who deserted, and established regulations to prohibit mining companies recruiting workers in labour districts. The possibility of African workers exchanging employers to find the most congenial working conditions was therefore considerably reduced; the Native Commissioner at Pietermaritzburg reported that one of the main reasons keeping Africans away from the mines was "the fact that they cannot choose the mine on which they want to work". (89) This circumstance, together with the reduction of wages, produced a spate of protests by African workers on the Rand: strikes and mass desertions took place at the Consolidated

Main Reef, Geldenhuis Estate, Langlaagte and Durban Roodepoort Mines, as well as at the Vereeniging Coal Mines and the Brakpan Electric Works. Though these protests left behind them no permanent worker organization, the industrial unrest of 1901-02 represents the first evidence of substantial and well organized protest action by black workers on the Witwatersrand, almost two decades before the establishment of the first black trade union, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, in 1919. (90)

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Notes

- (1) D. Denoon, "Participation in the 'Boer War': People's War, People's Non-War or Non-People's War?" in B. A. Ogot, ed., War and Society in Africa (London, 1972), pp. 109-123.
- (2) Report of the Transvaal Labour Commission, Cd 1896 (XXXIX), 1904, p. 15. These figures are not necessarily precise, since before the war no uniform system of compiling labour statistics existed; some mines returned men actually at work, others the total number of workers in the compounds, and a number of mines included workers employed by surface contractors.
- (3) C. Bundy, "The Emergence and Decline of a South African Peasantry", African Affairs, 71 (1972), pp. 369-388.
- (4) Cape of Good Hope, Blue Book on Native Affairs (CBBNA), G.50-1900, p. 27. C. van Onselen, "Reactions to Rinderpest in Southern Africa", Journal of African History, 13, 3 (1972), pp. 473-488.
- (5) Chamber of Mines, Annual Report for 1898, p. 453.
- (6) J. P. Fitzpatrick, The Transvaal from Within (London, 1899), p. 105.
- (7) Chamber of Mines, Annual Report for 1897, p. 107.
- (8) Further Correspondence Relating to Affairs in South Africa, Cd 43 (LVI), 1900, p. 167. Report by J. S. Marwick, Natal Native Agent, Johannesburg, October 1899.
- (9) The Standard and Diggers' News, 10.10.99.
- (10) Ibid., 3.11.99 and 20.11.99.
- (11) Further Correspondence, Cd 43, pp. 167-170.
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) Colonial Office files, CO 417/309/1011, Commandant General British South Africa Company Police, J. S. Nicholson, to the High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner, 13.11.99.
- (14) For the impact of the South African War on labour recruitment for the Rhodesian mines, see Charles van Onselen, Chibaro (London, 1976), pp. 86-91.
- (15) Roberts Papers, Public Record Office, WO 105/14, T/12/1, Telegrams, Colonial Kekewich to Lord Roberts, 20.1.1900, 10.2.1900.
- (16) e.g. CO 179/208/35796, Statement by Sebastian Msimang, 29.11.99. Stanford Papers, Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, F(x) 11, George Dugmore to W. E. Stanford, 19.10.99, CBBNA, G.50-1900, p. 27.
- (17) Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg, SNA 1/4/7, c1678/99, Confidential Minute, Magistrate Umvoti Division to Secretary for Native Affairs, 14.10.99.

- (18) CBBNA, G.50-1900, p. 27.
- (19) CO 179/216/6695, Secretary for Native Affairs, F. R. Moor, to the Secretary of the Relief Committee, Pietermaritzburg, 8.12.99.
- (20) CO 179/211/11833, Rev. C. Johnson to Resident Magistrate Nqutu District, 1.3.1900.
- (21) CO 179/216/4527, H. R. Fox Bourne, Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society, to the Colonial Secretary, J. Chamberlain, 12.2.1900. Colenso Papers, Natal Archives, Box 37 Fox Bourne to Harriet Colenso, 26.1.1900. The Times, 26.1.1900 and 10.2.1900.
- (22) CO 179/216/4527, Minutes by Chamberlain and other Colonial Office officials.
- (23) Ibid., Fox Bourne to Chamberlain, 12.2.1900.
- (24) Cape Archives, Cape Town, CMT 3/8, 2/853F, Secretary to the Native Affairs Department to the Chief Magistrate of the Transkei, 14.12.1900, and 2/821F, 7.12.1900, CMT 3/60, 9/586, Resident Magistrate Butterworth to Chief Magistrate of the Transkei, 24.8.1900. CBBNA, G.50-1900, p. 41.
- (25) Unfortunately, no comprehensive figures for the number of African workers employed by the British Army were maintained, and it is impossible to use government statistics of the number of workers leaving particular districts to build up a picture of military recruitment, since the Army often enlisted workers independently of local magistrates. It is unlikely, however, that during most periods of the war the British Army employed fewer than 50,000 African workers.
- (26) Transvaal Archives Depot, Leyds-Argief, 781(i), "Gebruik van zoogenaamde wilde volksstammen", rapport van Kapt. Ram en Luit. Thomson, n.d., pp. 66-73. S. B. Spies, "Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902", University of the Witwatersrand, PhD thesis, 1973, p. 26. J. H. Breytenbach, Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899-1902, Vol. 1 (Pretoria, 1969), pp. 36-37, 132.
- (27) The Standard and Diggers' News, 25.11.99.
- (28) Ibid., 20.10.99.
- (29) Ibid., 11.1.1900.
- (30) Ibid., 25.10.99, 3.1.1900, 6.3.1900, 21.3.1900.
- (31) Denoon, op. cit., pp. 114-115.
- (32) Royal Engineers Institute, Detailed History of the Railways in the South African War, 1899-1902 (Chatham, 1904), pp. 257-262.
- (33) CBBNA, G.25-1902, p. 7. Free State Archives, Bloemfontein, C(S)O 81, 20/02, A. E. Tarry, General Manager South African General Agency Ltd., to Military Commander, Bloemfontein, 28.12.01.
- (34) Transvaal Archives Depot, MGP 24, 3345/00, Tel. Military Governor to O. C. Rietfontein, 18.9.1900.
- (35) MGP 1, 08/00, Capt. A. R. Hoskins to OC Supplies, 9.6.1900; MGP 63, 605/01, Superintendent of Natives to Director of Supplies, 8.2.01.
- (36) Spies, op. cit., p. 235.
- (37) This figure is taken from the census conducted by the British administration after the war, Transvaal Departmental Reports: Native Affairs Department, 1904.
- (38) Transvaal Administration Reports for 1902: Final Report of the work performed by the Native Refugee Department from June 1901 to December 1902, p. 1.
- (39) C(S)O 86, 358/02, de Lotbiniere to Major GooId-Adams, 18.1.02. Spies, op. cit., pp. 355-356.
- (40) E. Hobhouse, The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell (London, 1902), pp. 350-355.
- (41) CBBNA, G.52-1901, p. 16.
- (42) Ibid., p. 21.

- (43) Ibid., pp. 2, 17.
- (44) CMT 3/8, 2/199E, Secretary to the Native Affairs Dept. to Chief Magistrate of the Transkei, 18.5.1900. Colony of Natal, Blue Book on Native Affairs, 1900, pp. 107, 127. CBNA, G.52-1901, p. 44. In Willowvale, probably the most distressed district in the Transkei, mealies cost 40s a bag at the beginning of 1900, compared to the usual price of less than 10s: CBNA, G.50-1900, p. 41.
- (45) NBNA, 1901, pp. 39, 40; 1902, pp. 33, 50.
- (46) CBNA, G.52-1901, pp. 24, 35; G.25-1902, pp. 7, 9. Natal Departmental Reports for 1899: Annual Report by the Magistrate, Alfred Division, p. 31. CMT 3/96, Annual Report by Magistrate, Flagstaff, 1899, and Agricultural Report, 4.7.1900.
- (47) William Beinart, "Peasant Production, Underdevelopment and Stratification: Pondoland c.1880-1930", paper presented to the African seminar, University of Cape Town, October 1974, pp. 9-11. I am grateful to the author for permitting me to use the paper.
- (48) CBNA, G.52-1901, pp. 35,50.
- (49) NBNA, 1901, p. C11.
- (50) Bizana, Butterworth, Ngemakwe, Xalanga, Albany, Herschel, to name but a few.
- (51) CBNA, G.50-1900, pp. 31, 37-38; G.25-1902, p. 39.
- (52) CBNA, G.25-1902, p. 50.
- (53) Ibid., p. 6; G.29-1903, p. 10.
- (54) Report of the Transvaal Labour Commission, Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence, Cd 1897 (XXXIX), 1904, Rev. R. H. Dykes, p. 3.
- (55) CBNA, G.25-1902, pp. 21-22. NBNA, 1901, pp. C2, C4, C11; 1902, p. 42.
- (56) G. Arrighi, "Labour Supplies in Historical Perspective: a Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia", Journal of Development Studies, 6, 3 (1970), pp. 197-234. The transformation of "discretionary" cash requirements into "necessary" ones is seen by Arrighi as being of fundamental importance in the process of growing African dependence on exchange with the capitalist sector of the economy.
- (57) CBNA, G.52-1901, p. 7.
- (58) Transvaal Archives Depot, SMA, 2, 3/01, Capt. A. E. Hodgins to Acting Commissioner of Mines, 16.11.1900, SMA 3, 88/01, Lt. J. W. Sewell to Secretary for Native Affairs, 17.10.01.
- (59) C(S)O 74, 4282/01, Daniel Marome and G. J. Olliphant to Major Goold-Adams, 23.11.01.
- (60) Lesotho National Archives, S3/2/5/2, Lerothodi to Resident Commissioner, 10.5.1900, 18.5.1900; Resident Commissioner to Director of Railways, Bloemfontein, Tel. 5.5.01.
- (61) CO 179/222/7666, Proceedings of the Native Labour Conference, Newcastle, 23.1.02. Evidence of Major Hammett.
- (62) CMT 3/9, 2/606G, Secretary to the Native Affairs Department to Chief Magistrate of the Transkei, 17.5.01. Encl. David S. Mokuena to Resident Magistrate Mount Fletcher, 23.3.01.
- (63) Cape Archives, NA 500, folio 103, "Complaints by Native Labourers of their ill-treatment by the Military Authorities, 1901-02".
- (64) e.g. Report of the Annual Meeting of the Chamber of Mines, Rand Daily Mail, 27.2.03.
- (65) Compiled from Basutoland Annual Reports, 1899/1900-1902/03.
- (66) CBNA, G.25-1902, p. 33.
- (67) Q. N. Parsons, "Khama III, the Bamangwato and the British, with special reference

- to 1895-1923", University of Edinburgh PhD thesis, 1973, p. 191.
- (68) Basutoland Annual Report for 1902-03, Cd 1768-13 (XLV)1 1904, p. 4.
- (69) Basutoland Annual Report for 1901-02, Cd 1388-4 (XLIII), 1903, p. 27.
- (70) Compiled from Natal Blue Books on Native Affairs, 1899-1902.
- (71) Transvaal Administration Reports for 1903: Native Affairs Dept., p. A9.
- (72) Transvaal Administration Reports for 1902: Native Affairs Dept., p. A27.
- (73) SNA 13, 1569/02, Native Commissioner Pretoria District to Secretary for Native Affairs, 26.10.02. Transvaal Archives Depot, Lt.G. 122, 101/26, Native Commissioner Waterberg District to Secretary for Native Affairs, 26.10.02.
- (74) Transvaal Administration Reports for 1902: Native Affairs Dept., p. A18.
- (75) Ibid., p. A22.
- (76) SNA 15, 2075/02 de Lotbiniere to Sir Godfrey Lagden, 22.10.02.
- (77) Denoon, op. cit., p. 116.
- (78) Public Record Office WO 32/8085-88, Lord Kitchener to the Under-Secretary of State for War, 22.11.01-21.3.02. Cape Colony Archives AG 2071, "Anglo-Boer War correspondence relating to the shooting and outrages on Natives, 1899-1902".
- (79) Parsons, op. cit.
- (80) S. Marks, Reluctant Rebellion (Oxford, 1970), p. 135.
- (81) Basutoland Annual Report for 1899-1900, Cd 431-5 (XLV), 1901, p. 22; 1902-03, p. 15.
- (82) Report of the Transvaal Labour Commission, p. 22.
- (83) South African Native Affairs Commission, Minutes of Evidence (SANAC), Vol. 5, S. H. Roberts, Chief Inspector Native Locations, Queenstown, p. 75.
- (84) Because of the scarcity of agricultural labour immediately after the war, farmers were induced to pay wages in advance (sometimes in the form of livestock) and to increase the land set aside for their workers' use in order to secure a reliable work force.
- (85) The conditions of travel for black workers on the railways have generally been overlooked. African trains were classified as goods, rather than passenger, trains. It was the normal practice for trains carrying workers to stop to allow goods trains to proceed, with the result that workers were compelled to endure long journeys in closed trucks with no sanitary facilities. The congestion of the Transvaal railway system, the shortage of rolling stock causing the terrible overcrowding of workers in available trucks, and further delays in the delivery of workers from Braamfontein station to particular mines, exacerbated the problem after the war. One in eight mining recruits were found physically unfit immediately to begin work.
- (86) D. Denoon, "The Transvaal Labour Crisis, 1901-6", Journal of African History, VIII, 3 (1967), pp. 481-494.
- (87) Chamber of Mines, Annual Report for 1898, p. 78. See also, Alan Jeeves, "The Control of Migratory Labour on the South African Gold Mines in the Era of Kruger and Milner", Journal of Southern African Studies, 2, 1 (1975), pp. 3-29.
- (88) Chamber of Mines, Annual Reports for 1900 and 1901, p. 111.
- (89) Lt.G. 121, 110/5, Report by Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, n.d.
- (90) P. Warwick, "Black Industrial Protest on the Witwatersrand, 1901-02", Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York, 1975.

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