

THE "GIFT OF THE CENTURY": SOLOMON PLAATJE, DE BEERS
AND THE OLD KIMBERLEY TRAM SHED, 1918-1919

by

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Your Company has made some generous donations during the past quarter of a century, but for the most epoch making because of its high value for the purposes of the recipients, and the consequent measure of their gratitude this request, if granted, will constitute the gift of the century.

(Solomon Plaatje to the General Manager, De Beers, March 22 1918)

If possible, I think it good policy to help the natives in the direction suggested by Plaatje.
(Sir David Harris, a Director of De Beers, to the Assistant Secretary, De Beers, March 20 1918)

For God's sake keep them (natives) off the labour agitators.

(W. Pickering, General Secretary of De Beers, to Solomon Plaatje, July 1918) (1)

Little scholarly attention has been devoted to an analysis of the historical evolution of class differentiation amongst Africans in twentieth century South Africa, or to the ideological forms that accompanied this. Such work as has been done in related fields has been concerned not so much to investigate such connections as to trace the "rise of nationalism": this term in fact provides the title for Peter Walshe's history of the African National Congress, in itself indicative of the extent to which it forms part of that genre of writing inspired by Africa's "independence decade", many of whose assumptions it shares. (2) In Walshe's book, the extent to which "nationalism" expressed fundamentally class-based aspirations and attitudes has been obscured. More direct expressions of class interest (which did not necessarily assume a "nationalist" guise) have been neglected; and African political thought and action is - as a consequence of an often uncritical acceptance of the stated aims of organizations like the ANC - characterized as "unrealistic", "naive", "inappropriate" and, in terms of these stated aims, as having "failed". The ideological element - taking ideology as constituting a set of beliefs and ideas that serve to explain or rationalize the interests of particular groups or classes as the general interest - is largely absent from the analysis.

But Walshe's work is by no means alone in having failed to come to terms with the reality of class differentiation amongst black South Africans and the effects that

this may have had on the development of ideological forms. Other work, informed by different perspectives, is hardly more illuminating. Thus Simons and Simons:

The conservatives [referring to Mahabane, Mapikela, Skota, Selope Thema, Dube, and Xuma, and their white liberal advisers] never quite understood their society or its power structure. They persisted in believing that liberation would come through reasoned argument, appeals to Christian ethics, and moderate constitutional protest. Because of timidity, as Bunting alleged, or want of experience in their people they refused to utilise them for the mass struggle. (3)

Such a characterization is perhaps surprising from a book with the title Class and Colour in South Africa, but it is by no means an isolated example: throughout the book one can detect a note of puzzlement as to why the "conservatives" did not assume their rightful place at the head of a mass working class movement and cast aside their restraining "false ideologies". Individual characteristics accordingly take on a primary explanatory function in order to indicate why this did not happen. It is hardly convincing, I think, to explain the behaviour and perceptions of "conservatives" in terms of their "timidity", "want of confidence", or even sheer stupidity ("never quite understood their society or its power structure"). In general, it seems to me, the Simonses have rather over-emphasized the extent to which, in a situation where "class divisions tend to coincide with antagonistic national or colour groups, the class struggle merges with the movement for national liberation" (4); like Walshe, they have paid insufficient attention to the importance of particular interest groups within single racial or colour categories.

But more recent and more sophisticated work on the nature of South Africa's political economy and on ideology in South Africa generally has not really shed much light on the nature and function of ideology as expressed by Africans. Martin Legassick has drawn attention to some African expressions of "liberal" ideologies in the 1920s, but these are presented almost as appendages to what whites were doing and saying, an indication of the success (for example, in the Joint Councils) of particular white "liberals" in securing acceptance of "their" ideologies. (5) The effect has in a way been to further obscure the historical agency of an African petty bourgeoisie whose ideological expressions accordingly appear to have been formulated by their "white liberal advisers" and accepted passively and uncritically.

Both liberal and Marxist schools thus seem to have left the African petty bourgeoisie in something of a historiographical vacuum. An examination of the way in which it took on, adapted, and developed ideological forms which were predominantly functional to its interests as a class (fragmented as this may have been in some respects) seems to me long overdue. One need not be deceived by the superficially archaic or "inappropriate" forms that these sometimes took. These did not indicate the survival "beyond their time" of ideological museum pieces from the days of Victorian Cape Liberalism into an age when they had no contemporary relevance or function. And nor, if a function be perceived, should they be seen as serving only to maintain the kind of society as prescribed by various "white liberals" or "friends of the natives". Stanley Trapido has drawn attention to the dangers of seeing the beliefs associated with Cape Liberalism as having been acquired "in other societies and retained (as a 'cultural lag') in an unsuitable environment". (6) Essentially the same point needs to be made in relation to much of African political and ideological expression in twentieth century South Africa, the understanding of which has been obscured by its characterization - from different perspectives but to similar effect - as being "inappropriate" or as constituting a "false ideology".

The connection between such considerations and an old tram shed in Kimberley may not, at first sight, be obvious. My hope is that my account of what follows may provide some empirical foundation for some of the remarks made above, or at least to suggest the need for a closer look at the connections between ideology and interest in relation to people like Solomon Plaatje. Accepting E. P. Thompson's concept of

class as a "happening" rather than a "thing", and as something that "cannot be defined abstractly, or in isolation, but only in terms of relationships with other classes", it seems to me that developments surrounding the Lyndhurst Road tram shed provide an interesting example of the way in which a particular conjunction of historical circumstances (a "happening") led to the expression of many underlying assumptions and interests which rarely came out in so coherent and explicit a form. (7)

The tram shed which was to constitute for Solomon Plaatje the "gift of the century" was situated on the tram line from the centre of Kimberley to the outlying area of Alexandersfontein, just off Lyndhurst Road, itself part of the (now demolished) "Malay Camp". The origin of the shed's claim to historical significance can perhaps be dated to Plaatje's observation - in January 1918, after his return from a tour of the Transvaal - that De Beers were in the process of dismantling the Alexandersfontein track and had even begun to demolish the shed itself. (8) This observation moved him to direct action: "Knowing that this shed would be of inestimable value to our people", he recounted, "I immediately approached the General Manager, and also some of the directors, of the De Beers Company, with a fervent request to grant the tram station in Lyndhurst Road to the Natives to be used as a meeting and entertaining hall." (9) That Plaatje should have been on such evidently close terms with the hierarchy of De Beers is a point to which I shall return later. But even so, as Plaatje later told another audience, there were some who regarded such a direct approach as "the most amazing audacity". (10) In his letters to the General Manager ("a worthy son of a worthy American engineer") (11) and to the two Directors (Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and Sir David Harris), with whom he was on closest terms, Plaatje pointed out that "at present the Natives have NO place of meeting", and that if the company should be so good as to accede to his request a renovated tram shed turned meeting hall could become the property "of all Natives, of any Church or of no Church - and only the drunken and the rowdy will be barred". (12) Plaatje had in fact been in touch with De Beers with a similar request for a meeting place in 1914, but before this could be taken any further war had broken out, diamond operations ceased, and Plaatje anyway found himself away in England. But now, he pointed out, the fact that such a suitable building had become available gave the Company an ideal opportunity to meet their needs, which were at present more urgent than ever; just recently three charity concerts involving African performers had had to be cancelled because they lacked a suitable place in which to perform. Not only was the tram shed in an ideal geographical position to serve the African community at Kimberley, Plaatje went on, but "its construction is so singularly suitable for the purpose that a donation of this kind would go much further than any big sum with which the company might assist to build another after the war. (13) It thus provided De Beers, so Plaatje did not hesitate to point out, with a cut-price opportunity to "enhance their [the natives'] loyalty to De Beers as a generous employer of labour". It was for "these and many other reasons" that Plaatje sincerely trusted that the company might "feel pleased to endorse this request in the name of the natives of the Diamond Fields and adjacent districts and territories which supply the mines and the City with labour". (14)

Plaatje then embarked upon "three months of lobbying and persuasion". (15) De Beers considered the matter. Their Estate Department reported that the only valuable part of the building was 7,644 feet of corrugated iron, valued at £573.6/-. (16) Sir David Harris wrote from Cape Town to say that he thought it would be "good policy to help the natives in the direction suggested by Plaatje" (17), and it was finally decided at the Board Meeting on April 2 1918 - "after discussion" - to offer the lease of the building to Plaatje "at a nominal rent of 1/- per annum during the Company's pleasure, provided it is used for the purpose mentioned". (18) In addition, the company undertook to replace the windows which had already been removed. When Plaatje was informed he was, so he related later, "laid up for two days, sick with joy, for I already saw the foundation of the Movement well and truly laid". (19) The "Movement" to which Plaatje referred, and which corresponded with De Beers' conception of "the purpose mentioned", was the Brotherhood Movement. The nature of this Plaatje elaborated upon when he addressed a series of meetings in the Kimberley "locations" announcing the decision of De Beers to donate the tram shed for use by Africans. On June 23, he told one of these meetings how the new assembly hall was going to be used. (20) Its newly formed "Building Committee", so Plaatje announced, had already passed a resolution that "a Native Brotherhood be formed, upon the lines of the P.S.A. Brotherhoods and Sisterhoods of England, and the Fraternité Societies of France and Belgium, and that the hall be used for weekly and other meetings of the brotherhood", and further that

"the office-holders of the Building Committee were to be the office bearers of the Brotherhood for the time being, and that they should immediately take steps to renovate the premises and arrange for the maintenance of same". Plaatje's projected scheme of things apparently did not go completely unchallenged. There were, he said, "one or two friends [who] think that the hall should be under the control of certain individuals among us, and kept distinct from any organization". But Plaatje indicated how inadvisable this would be: "Our object is a modern institution, with a large assembly hall in front, a lecture room at the back, also vestries and antecedents on the premises." "A place of such pretensions", he argued, could not be maintained by "a number of individual, non-organised native working men": rather, he offered the example of the Brotherhood Movement whose constitution, he told his audience, was the Bible, but which made no distinction between men of different creeds. Many of those present at the meeting would already have heard - or read - about Plaatje's experiences of the Brotherhood movement: Chapter XVIII of his Native Life in South Africa (21), published two years previously, was devoted to this, and its essential message expressed by Plaatje in the form of a quotation from the Movement's English President, the Rt Hon A. Henderson, MP:

The Brotherhood must help not only the spiritual part of life, but also in social matters. They should always help the down-trodden, showing the brotherly feeling which was portrayed through the life of Christ. (22)

The efficacy of this practical Christianity and its relevance for South Africa had also been one of the main themes of an address that Plaatje had made at a large reception for him shortly after his arrival back in Kimberley in March 1917. (23) And it was, in fact, to facilitate the establishment of the Brotherhood Movement in Kimberley and the creation of a "Native Institute" that Plaatje had - at one level at least - negotiated with De Beers for the use of the old tram in Lyndhurst Road.

News of Plaatje's success in obtaining a meeting hall from De Beers, for thus it was perceived by many Africans, soon spread widely. At both the meeting of June 23 and at others preceding it, Plaatje read out letters and telegrams of congratulations from various people "who deeply appreciate the generosity of De Beers", many of whom sent or promised donations of money to be put towards the cost of improving the building. (24) Chief Mamogale congratulated Plaatje on his good fortune on the receipt of such a gift from "Mgibisa" (De Beers), promised a donation, and asked him to mention his letter to De Beers "if there is a chance". Both Chief Silas Molema and Meshach Pelem emphasized the importance of keeping on good terms with De Beers in the way that the gift indicated, and both were prompted to reminisce about the benevolence and far-sightedness of "that great Statesman and Patriot", Cecil Rhodes. A telegram arrived also from S. M. Makgatho, the President of the South African Native National Congress:

Please convey my hearty congratulations to Kimberley natives on valuable gift from De Beers. Build useful institution, showing natives' gratitude, and how De Beers secure native loyalty. Have already telephoned our thanks direct to Mgibisa. Am instructing our treasurer to send you £25. May your meeting tonight be successful.

Successful the meeting seems to have been. "Renewed cheers" greeted the news, when Plaatje announced it, that in addition to having given the tram shed for use as an assembly hall (an action "unprecedented in the relations of white and black in South Africa") De Beers had now decided to provide a cheque for £100 towards the cost of renovation. This brought the total amount collected to £229. After agreeing to communicating the thanks of the meeting to the donors, proceedings came to an end with the singing of the national anthem.

But this meeting marked only the beginning of a carefully orchestrated public celebration of the magnanimity of "Mgibisa". At the beginning of August - over the August bank holiday - no less a personality than the Governor-General of South Africa, Viscount Sydney Lord Buxton, came to lay the foundation stone for the new Institute's Assembly Hall. He was attended by an impressive array of local

dignitaries in which the upper echelons of the management of De Beers were particularly conspicuous. As befitted a local event of such importance, the Diamond Fields Advertiser was generous in its publicity. Proceedings on this occasion began with a "choir composed of native children" setting things in motion by singing "Rule Britannia", and this was followed by an opening address from the Chairman, Mr G. J. Boyes, magistrate for Kimberley. He began by congratulating Plaatje for having "initiated the business they had in hand", elaborated upon his own credentials as a "friend of the native", and commended "that great Corporation, De Beers", which had "throughout its history done everything that was possible for the welfare of the people of Kimberley, irrespective of colour and nationality (Applause)", continuing the policy initiated by "that great statesman, the Rt Hon Cecil Rhodes".

Plaatje - described as "the father of the scheme" - replied in loyal fashion: "They were but a poor section of the community, and they had no trophies to lay at their Excellencies' feet, but what they did offer was the abiding affection and loyalty of the natives of the Diamond Fields to their beloved King George V, grandson of the beloved Queen Victoria, the greatest friend the dark skinned races of the world ever had [Applause]." They had their local grievances - which he elaborated upon in some detail - but "still it was possible to bear with them on account of the sympathetic attitude and toleration which characterised the white people of this city", and they were all extremely grateful to His Excellency for the honour he did them by coming to Kimberley to lay the foundation stone to their new Assembly Hall. Meshach Pelem, the delegate sent by the South African Native National Congress, then spoke and read out a resolution passed by its Executive on August 2 that contained further expressions of gratitude to De Beers and the "unswerving loyalty of the South African Bantu races to His Majesty King George V and the British Throne", and reminisced about his own happy recollections of his early years on the Diamond Fields: "He would always look upon Kimberley, the mother of the mining industry, as the true home and representative of British institutions and principles of fair play, justice, freedom, humanity, and generosity (Applause)." And how could he omit a public affirmation of the point he had made in an earlier letter to Plaatje, namely his admiration for "that great far seeing statesman, Empire-builder, and founder of the De Beers Company, Cecil John Rhodes, who throughout all his career and dealings with man never at any time failed to recognise the fact that within the folds of the British flag lay enshrined the lives, interests, and well being of the different races of mankind [Applause]?" Similar expressions of appreciation were then read out from a variety of other interested individuals, including "Mr Taberer, of the Native Recruiting Corporation", described by the Diamond Fields Advertiser as "another friend of the natives".

The centre-piece of the occasion, however, was the speech by His Excellency the Governor-General. The early section of this was unremarkable. He was naturally pleased to be there "on such an auspicious occasion". As the grandson of Sir Thomas Buxton, he claimed "a hereditary interest in the welfare of the natives of Africa", and he hoped that he had proved this during his term as Governor-General. Africans in both Kimberley and the rest of the Union had demonstrated their loyalty during the war "in spite of the fact that in certain parts evil-disposed persons, friends of the enemy, had endeavoured to do mischief amongst them". Coming at last to the question of the several grievances that Plaatje had mentioned in his speech, Buxton was inclined to be philosophical about these: "Well, we all have our grievances, whether we are black or white. I never met anybody who found all that he wanted." But with regard particularly to the increased cost of living, he felt that if their grievances were presented "in a reasonable and moderate way, and with common sense ... and put especially through those who are here to represent and advise you, they will always receive sympathetic consideration from those in authority". Finally, he turned to the particular issue which had not hitherto been mentioned publicly but which in fact underlay the thoughts and actions of all those involved in the transformation of the Lyndhurst Road tram shed into the Brotherhood Institute and the celebrations surrounding it. Referring to the continued strikes of African workers on the Rand -

"You may have seen that only the other day, when there were some difficulties in Johannesburg in regard to various claims ..." - Buxton pointed out that things were now, fortunately, under control because "General Botha has asked the natives to elect representatives to meet him and discuss the matter with him"; this had been done, and a Commission of Enquiry had been set up under "Mr Moffat". Buxton was anxious that the significance of this should not be missed on his audience: "Mr Moffat, as you know, is the grandson of the great missionary, Dr Moffat, who was loved by the natives

so much. This shows at all events that the Prime Minister and the Government and Parliament are going as far as they can in regard to various matters affecting them." As regards Africans in Kimberley, his advice was "not to be impatient". The new Assembly Hall, he concluded, would "greatly assist you in bringing you together, and enabling you to understand one another, and lead to greater brotherhood, as the Bishop has said". Reminding his audience that it was "because I take an interest in the natives that I was glad to have this opportunity of coming down and meeting you", he finally laid the foundation stone, together with Mrs Pickering, the wife of the De Beers general manager.

The ceremony was nicely symbolic of the unity of outlook of state and capital when it came to staging events to impress upon the black workers of Kimberley the necessity of not becoming "impatient", as their colleagues on the Rand had already done, and to providing for the latter an example of the advantages proceeding from the existence of a harmonious state of things which they, unfortunately, had disrupted. There was, however, a lot more to the Governor-General's presence than his "interest in the natives", which, despite his ancestry, had hardly been conspicuous hitherto. Buxton had, in fact, come to Kimberley at the direct instance of the Prime Minister, General Botha, and had it not been for this he would no doubt have found more congenial ways of spending his August bank holiday. The opportunities and significance inherent in De Beers' gift had not been lost on the Prime Minister. He also requested his Secretary for Native Affairs to convey his appreciation to the Company in the following terms:

Apart from the money value of such a gift the action is of value as indicative of just that spirit of sympathy between Europeans and Natives in this country which it is so important to promote. It has created a most favourable impression. (26)

These "difficulties in Johannesburg" were of direct concern to the Government, to De Beers and to Solomon Plaatje alike, and it is these, which continued throughout the period 1917 to 1919, that provide the essential context in which both private negotiation and public celebration surrounding the old Lyndhurst Road tram shed took place. (27) It was with the deliberate intention of helping to prevent the spread of industrial unrest from the Rand to Kimberley that De Beers took the decision to enlist the support of influential "moderate natives" by handing over the tram shed for their use. This, essentially, was what Sir David Harris meant when he recommended as "good policy" that De Beers should "help the natives in the direction suggested by Plaatje". But there was more to it than that. In handing over the tram shed, De Beers were at the same time quite conscious of the ideological investment that they were making for the future. It was more than just a one-off public relations exercise - although the most was naturally made of this - because the Brotherhood Movement, as outlined to them by Plaatje, promised much for the future in the way of diverting the aspirations of their work force from immediate, militant demands, and in substituting an alternative ideology which, if pervasive, could do much to prevent their effective organization along class lines in the way that had caused so much concern on the Rand. That this was implicit in Plaatje's conception of the terms on which the hall could continue to be used by Africans emerges in his letters to the company: in acting as the medium for the company's act of generosity, Plaatje stated, he felt a "great responsibility, and shall request you and your co-directors to keep an eye on this scheme of the Hall so that whatever use it is put to may be for the advantage not only for the native population but of the community at large". (28) And just in case the Brotherhood Movement should fail, or change its nature in a way that was unacceptable to De Beers, the company was careful to retain the saving clause that the hall should be used for "the purpose mentioned", or otherwise it would revert back to its control. The shareholders, after all, could be expected to take a dim view of things if the building given by the company was to come to be used in organizing the labour force along class lines, with the attendant evils that this was likely to produce.

Pre-emptive action on the part of De Beers of the kind expressed in the tram shed episode sprang from the same strategy as led in July 1919 to the decision to raise wages on their mines. The connection is neatly drawn through the medium of the tram shed-turned-assembly hall. The meeting of the Board of Directors on July 4 1919

were told of the use to which the building was being put by the General Manager, who said he had received a letter from the Inspector and Protector of the Natives "inviting him to be present at a meeting to be held in the Lyndhurst Road Native Hall on 6th July, and convened by the more moderate natives, with the object of forestalling a movement which is on foot amongst the natives to secure an increase of wages by means of a general strike". (29) In other words, the shed was more than justifying the hopes that had been placed in it the year before. It could not, however, be expected to be a complete panacea, and the company was alive to the necessity of supplementing its effects by more traditional pre-emptive methods. The Assistant General Manager put the case:

In this connection, the Assistant General Manager said that for some time past the Company's natives have been talking of, though not agitating for, increased wages, but the question has not yet become a burning one. He, however, felt that a demand would shortly be made which the Company would be unable to resist, and he therefore thought the best policy would be to anticipate the demand by voluntarily granting the natives increased wages. (30)

The Directors agreed, and the increases - costing the company £75,000 per annum - were implemented. That this should have been done, and that similar considerations should have lain behind the whole tram shed business, is not at all remarkable. It perhaps appears a little unusual in the South African context only because the existing secondary literature has concentrated almost exclusively on the gold-mining industry, whose response in comparable situations - at least after the Anglo-Boer war - was of a fundamentally different nature. De Beers did not have the degree of access to the South African state enjoyed by the gold mining industry (whose continued viability was dependent upon this), relying rather upon the operation of its traditional predominance in the labour market, itself derived from its ability and willingness to offer consistently higher wages than the Chamber of Mines to attract its work force. This being the case, there was a correspondingly increased importance attached to a mediating ideology that was appropriate and functional to such structural imperatives. Unencumbered by any substantial white working class on the diamond mines, and operating furthermore in a milieu in which African political leverage still existed and counted for something, this ideology built upon, modified, and in a sense gave a new lease of life to, that set of beliefs and assumptions known collectively as "Cape liberalism". One of its most important roles was to facilitate the development of an alliance of interest between De Beers and an African bourgeoisie. It is to the role of the latter that this paper is particularly addressed. In this alliance the reality of consensus of interest was never much below the surface of its ideological expression and rationalization. This comes out clearly in the interaction between perceived interest and ideology that is evident in the negotiations between Solomon Plaatje - by far the most important and influential local representative of this section of the African bourgeoisie - and the De Beers Company.

This is best illustrated by quoting from a letter that Plaatje wrote to De Beers in August 1918, a few days before the ceremony attached to the laying of the foundation stone to the new Assembly Hall took place:

... I beg to explain the cause of my delay in answering your letter of the 1st inst. I had to attend the Native Congress at Bloemfontein to prevent the spread among our people of the Johannesburg Socialist propaganda. I think you are aware of our difficulties in this connection since Mr Pickering, writing to me on an entirely different matter, a few days ago, ended his letter thus. 'For God's sake keep them (natives) off the labour agitators.' The ten Transvaal delegates came to the Congress with a concord and determination that was perfectly astounding to our customary native demeanour at conferences. They spoke

almost in unison, in short sentences, nearly all of which began and ended with the word 'strike'. It was not difficult to understand the source of their backing, for they even preceded the Congress and endeavoured to poison the minds of delegates from other parts. It was only late in the second day that we succeeded in satisfying the delegates to report, on getting to their homes, that the Socialist method of pitting up black against white will land our people in serious disaster, while the most that could happen to the whiteman would be but a temporary inconvenience. When they took the train for Johannesburg, at Bloemfontein station, I am told that one of them remarked that they would have 'converted Congress had not De Beers given Plaatje a Hall'. This seems intensely re-assuring as indicating that Kimberley will be about the last place that these black Bolsheviks of Johannesburg will pay attention to, thus leaving us free to combat their activities in other parts of the Union. Only those who saw the tension at this Congress can realize that the building discussion of this hall came just at the opportune time for South Africa. (31)

De Beers no doubt derived a lot of satisfaction from Plaatje's remarks. The overheard comments of the "black Bolsheviks of Johannesburg" provided ample vindication for their decision to hand over the old tram shed to Plaatje. With recognition and support from the Company, Plaatje was undoubtedly regarded as a valued agent in the task of keeping South Africa safe for capitalism. But throughout the letter, and evident in his dealings generally with De Beers over the tram shed, there is a distinct note of concern on Plaatje's part about the threat that the strength of the "black Bolsheviks of Johannesburg", with their "Socialist method of pitting up black against white", posed to his own position and credibility. His concern for "our people" and "South Africa" was quite obviously genuine, but his use of such phrases have an equally clear ideological character and function which sprung from an acute awareness of the reality of this threat to his class position. And in the use of imagery such as "poisoning the minds of delegates", and in his characterization of the "black Bolsheviks of Johannesburg" speaking "almost in unison, in short sentences, nearly all of which began and ended with the work strike", the tone is surely comparable with that emanating from other interests under threat in similar contexts. If the lines of class conflict became too clearly drawn, as they now threatened to be, there could be little possibility, Plaatje perceived, that an African bourgeoisie could survive as it had done hitherto. His response, accordingly, was to move closer to De Beers. Fortunately for him, the crisis eventually passed and he emerged largely unscathed. But others in comparable positions on the Rand during the crisis were less fortunate. One of these was Saul Msane, one of the older generation of educated African leaders who had in some respects a similar background to that of Plaatje. (32) And in Plaatje's own account of Msane's fate there is an implicit realization of what could well have happened to himself had his constituency been the Rand rather than the Diamond Fields:

During the past year or so Mr Msane became very unpopular among the younger native workers on the Reef. The cause was rather extraordinary. A small band of white men, the Industrial Workers of the World, boldly and openly sympathised with the natives in the long hours they have to work and on the niggardly pay as well as the bad housing conditions on the Witwatersrand. Naturally, their programme appealed to the native labourers. But, rightly or wrongly, Mr Msane held that it would be suicidal for the helpless natives to ally themselves with an insignificant body of white extremists who are in the bad books of the Government and very unpopular with Boers and English alike: and each time there was a clash Mr Msane threw the whole weight of his influence on the side of the authorities, and earned thereby the name among the labourers of 'Isita- sa Bantu' ('Enemy of the Natives'). (33)

Msane had initially identified himself with African grievances on the Rand and had entered into negotiations with the authorities, but his evident lack of enthusiasm for this role when under so much pressure from below drew forth fierce accusations at several meetings that he had done no more than sell out African interests. (34) J. L. Dube was another member of this African bourgeoisie who felt similarly threatened by the disturbances, although he was fortunate to have had alternative sources of support and influence. Thus, commenting on the recent wave of strikes in early 1919, his newspaper expressed the opinion that he had "cause to view with considerable apprehension any movement that is subversive of all government", that these "revolutionary fads" would be "positively harmful" for Africans, and concluded as follows: "We would advise our people to steer clear of these foreign adventurers with palpable stores of 'good times to come' to the Natives if they join themselves to their creeds, and rely more on the accustomed authorities who have proved themselves the friends in need to the Natives and have 'no axes to grind'." Plaatje and Dube alike would have considered themselves as falling into that category.

For Plaatje in Kimberley the situation was not as acute. The dangers were nevertheless perceived as being very real, and in Plaatje's participation in the whole process of negotiation and ceremony attached to the transformation of the old tram shed into the Lyndhurst Road Native Institute can be seen a conscious attempt on his part to respond to such dangers by allying himself more closely with De Beers, and in so doing making clear to the company the advantages that due recognition of the special role that he could play offered to the company itself. The most effective way of doing this was to suggest to them the consequences that would follow from an eclipse of his position of influence and that of the "moderate natives" in general. "At the risk of being too personal", Plaatje wrote to the General Manager on March 22 1918, "[let me add that] there is a belief among some of the native population here that I am in the pay of De Beers - employed to keep them quiet". This "erroneous impression", Plaatje contended, had originated in the fact that in the past he had, on several occasions, refused to head deputations appealing to the company for funds for various causes because he considered them too insignificant, and had advised that De Beers should be left "until we had a national object in view". The present application, Plaatje told the General Manager, was "just such an object" and he therefore "respectfully appealed to the sympathy of [the] Company to take the same view of it". (36) Sir David Harris, from the beginning, seems to have taken precisely this view of the matter (although there were considerations other than "sympathy" involved as well), and in his letter informing Plaatje that his application had been successful he offered confirmation of his recognition of the role that he could continue to play: "The keen and intelligent interest that you have always taken in the welfare and improvement of the native races, who rightly look to you for light and leading, was a great incentive for me to assist you to secure the building, which I trust will help your laudable efforts to benefit and advance their condition." (37)

Recognition of such a role - privately and publicly - was central to the whole series of negotiations and celebrations surrounding the whole tram shed episode. The prominent position occupied by Plaatje at the stone laying ceremony, and his characterization as being the "father of the scheme" was public affirmation of this. In private, Plaatje indicated his clear awareness of the reciprocal obligations that were part of this recognition:

Personally, I feel highly honoured that the Directors of De Beers have made me the carrier of their first great gift to the native section of the community. And it will be my onerous duty to see that the use it is put to be worthy of the liberality of your great Company (who graciously entertained my request in the name of the native population) and the widespread gratitude of the natives. (38)

And elsewhere, even more explicitly, in a letter to the General Manager:

Please let me add that in moving the Company in this direction you have incidentally conferred an honour upon me personally for nobody can ever rob me of the distinction that when De Beers extended its well known generosity ... to

the native community, they used me as their medium. On the other hand I feel the great responsibility and request you and your co-directors to keep an eye on this scheme of the Hall so that whatever use it is put to may be for the advantage not only of the native population but of the community at large. (39)

Plaatje illustrated the point with the help of a homely metaphor:

As a father, you will, I feel certain, appreciate my solicitude for it would be more cruel than kind for any man to present his son with a motor car, put him on top and starting the machine off without first seeing that the son knows how to control it.

If Plaatje's position as "medium" were to be challenged, in other words, or if the hall came to be used for purposes which were not conducive to the good of the "community at large", then De Beers could be expected to intervene in appropriate manner.

Plaatje was, of course, concerned also to ensure that his own role in securing the old tram shed from De Beers was fully appreciated by those outside the corridors of power of Stockdale Street. Many needed little convincing. In the large number of letters and telegrams of congratulation that he received - and which he read out at several public gatherings - the fullest possible recognition was accorded to Plaatje personally in his magnificent achievement. And in several of these letters of congratulation from Africans outside Kimberley can be detected the strong conviction (tinged with a hint of jealousy) that the recognition accorded to Plaatje ought to be accorded to his class as a whole in other parts of the country, and that herein lay the greater part of the solution to the country's "racial" problems. The telegram from the South African Native National Congress, for example, expressed the view that the "present from De Beers Company" would be "certain to go far towards removing the causes of friction between black and white in South Africa"; and it wished to assure the directors of the company "that they have indicated the way towards a solution of the native problem". (40) It was rather a different prescription from that of the "black Bolsheviks of Johannesburg" who had narrowly failed to gain control of the Congress.

But even in Kimberley there were some who were not wholly convinced by the illusion. As Plaatje himself put it:

It must not be supposed that the enemies of the Brotherhood were not busy. They say to the natives: 'Sol Plaatje is playing on your ignorance for his own ends. His Brotherhood has done nothing for you; it is De Beers Company who did everything.'

To such persons, Plaatje was disposed to counter with a question:

All the wealth of De Beers is the creature of cheap native labour, and how is it that De Beers gave us nothing these last thirty years until Sol Plaatje wanted a hall for the Brotherhood? (41)

Whether the more perceptive of these (unnamed) persons then pointed to the events on the Rand as being not unrelated to the reason for this is not recorded by Plaatje. For both Plaatje and De Beers, it was important that he should have appeared to have exercised his admittedly considerable powers of persuasion on the company's latent generosity and goodwill, with the very visible outcome in the shape of a new assembly hall. Hence the big public relations exercise surrounding its donation. But it was nevertheless not always an easy position for Plaatje to be in: on the one hand there were those who regarded him as being "in the pay of De Beers" to keep the workers quiet; on the other, and at the same time, he was regarded as being no more than a convenient cypher through which De Beers chose to exercise its generosity on the African population of Kimberley: the path left for the African petty bourgeoisie was

it would seem, a dangerous and a narrow one.

In the tram shed episode, then, can be seen the common response of Plaatje and De Beers to the threat that both perceived to their interests in the unrest on the Rand in the period 1917-1918 and in the danger of its spreading to Kimberley. These were the immediate circumstances that produced in both a heightened realization and a clearer expression of the advantages of co-operation in the manner that took place. During the course of discussions and communications relating to this, the class interests of each party are clearly expressed. As far as Plaatje is concerned, I have drawn attention to his own awareness of this and to the common ground that he perceived there to be with the interests of De Beers, because this is not a consideration that has received much recognition or substantiation in the secondary literature in relation either to Plaatje as an individual or to an African bourgeoisie as a whole. It is not possible, I think, to accept Simons and Simons's contention that such a class "never quite understood their society or its power structure". Plaatje for one had a remarkably good understanding of this, and I suspect a closer examination of the attitudes and interests of other members of the African petty bourgeoisie to which he belonged would produce similar conclusions. But, having said that, it needs to be stressed that Plaatje's motivation and behaviour during the tram shed episode cannot be understood solely in these terms. His behaviour should not be seen essentially as a cynical Machiavellian manoeuvre that sprung from a temporary convergence of interest with De Beers, but rather as something that proceeded from, and was dependent on, a pre-existing set of ideological assumptions in which there was already a well established degree of consensus between the two parties involved. Plaatje was not an opportunist, and it was because his actions sprung from deeply held convictions that his response to comparable situations both before and after the period 1917-1919 was consistent to the point of predictability. Thus it had been Plaatje who in 1913 had been the moving force in disassociating the South African Native National Congress from the proposals that Africans on the Rand should go on strike: "I have not the minutes with me, but I can definitely tell your readers", Plaatje wrote to several newspapers in February 1914, "that the idea to associate the natives with the strike movement was defeated; and a fresh resolution, drafted by myself, was passed, disassociating the natives from the strike movement." (42) The point is repeated in Native Life in South Africa, and similar sentiments are discernible at a more ideological level in Plaatje's celebrated telegram to the Congress in February 1914:

... we invite the Congress to hospitable and British Kimberley, where public meetings close with the singing of the British National Anthem and not with the singing of the 'Volkslied' or the 'Red Flag', as is the case in meetings at other South African centres. (43)

Throughout the 1920s and up until the time of his death in 1932, the same ideology led Plaatje to campaign actively and enthusiastically for the return of suitable Kimberley members (who were usually De Beers directors) to Parliament ("Return Sir David Harris with a sweeping majority and strike a blow for freedom on the Diamond Fields") (44), and to remind De Beers in 1929 that he and his colleagues "have had our hands full combatting and trying to keep the Communist movement outside Kimberley", and that "this had been a stupendous task since Mr Bunting came here last September and left his agents to spread his communistic propaganda". What Plaatje therefore required on the latter occasion was not, he told De Beers, a new Assembly Hall but funds for the publication of his new Sechuama readers which, if granted, would "merit the abiding gratitude of all respectable Natives". (45)

The tram shed business of 1918-19 thus should not be seen as an isolated episode. Rather, the existence of a large degree of ideological consensus between Plaatje and the directors and management of De Beers was a pre-condition to all that surrounded the transformation of the tram shed into an Assembly Hall. Without this, Plaatje would simply not have been in a position to have approached the company in the way that he did; it was the existence of these assumptions that gave meaning and significance to particular terms and phrases (some of which have been quoted earlier, e.g. "the community at large") which appear in letters that were exchanged over the matter and which made it possible for the De Beers General Secretary to say to Plaatje, simply and to the point, "For God's sake keep them off the labour agitators".

A proper assessment of the origins and development of these assumptions is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, it is essential that some consideration is given to their interaction with other developments in the 8 or 9 years prior to the tram shed episode, for these contributed to producing a closer structural and ideological consensus between Plaatje and De Beers which comes out in the events of 1918-1919. One important stage in this process was marked by Plaatje's move from Mafeking to Kimberley in 1910, a move which significantly reduced - in a literal sense - the distance between "base" and "superstructure" at a time when Plaatje was becoming increasingly aware that the possibilities of access to an alternative political and ideological base - the state - were becoming progressively reduced. The Act of Union, in Plaatje's perception, marked an important stage in this process - although in the first year or so of union he found some grounds for optimism that the intrusion of hated "northern influences" would be mitigated by the strength of liberal influences as represented in the first Union cabinet. Thus he thought that General Botha had "won the approbation of all Natives by appointing Hon. H. Burton, a Cape Minister, to the portfolio of Native Affairs" (46), and several of Burton's actions kept alive this hope. But not for long: soon the Government "trampled under foot their own election pledges, made during the first Union General Election, guaranteeing justice and fair treatment to the law-abiding Natives" and capitulated to the "Dutch extremists" by introducing the Land Act in 1913, which threatened to destroy the wealthy African landowning class with whom Plaatje had strong links, and the other existing alternative economic and political base for Africans. The effect of this, I believe, was to draw Plaatje closer - in several respects - to the remaining power base that gave expression and substance to many of his own political assumptions and aspirations, the diamond industry. De Beers, at the same time, felt similarly threatened: gold could be expected to assume the predominant role in the affairs of the new unified state. There was a stronger basis, in other words, for Plaatje's expectation that herein lay the possibility of more than a mere identity of outlook which had existed in the past. Such a mutual realization perhaps lies behind the episode in 1914 described by Plaatje in Native Life in South Africa:

De Beers Company, which had hitherto shown the greatest hospitality only to European assemblies and not to native conferences and organizations, acted otherwise in the case of this Congress and its requirements. Presumably, Mr Pickering, the secretary of De Beers, had had information that even mining labourers in the enclosed mining compounds were heart and soul with their countrymen outside; and so the Company's hospitality was extended to the native delegates. (47)

This "hospitality" on the part of De Beers was duly recognized and acknowledged by a vote of thanks to the company at the end of the SANNC's deliberations. There were limits, though, as to just how far De Beers were prepared to go at this stage in assisting the SANNC: they had not been prepared to accede to Plaatje's request that their compound managers should assist the Congress in the collection of funds for the deputation to England - a course of action hardly likely to commend the company to the government, which had already strongly advised the Congress against sending the deputation. (48) Nor were they prepared to assist Plaatje in another way which he requested, aware, no doubt, of the potentially unfavourable repercussions - this despite the tempting reasons that Plaatje offered for doing so:

As a Kimberlyite who is proud of his home I would be extremely sorry if anyone could leave the Congress with an impression that our Chiefs and leaders are better treated elsewhere. The agents of the Rand Chamber of Mines and other Recruiting Organisations always lavish their hospitality on some of these men at Johannesburg, and I would be glad if a special tram could be arranged to take them to Alexandersfontein on Sunday the 1st March. (49)

Just four years later - with the stimulus of some rather more pressing considerations - De Beers took little persuasion to accede to a different and rather more substantial suggestion of Plaatje's in connection with the same tram line.

What happened during the intervening four years is of great importance to an understanding of the events of Kimberley in 1918 and 1919, for it was during this period that Plaatje acquired a new dimension to his total outlook which enabled him to transcend - in terms of his own perceptions - the contradictions between capital and labour at a time when these were becoming increasingly pronounced. This was the Brotherhood Movement. Plaatje had first come into contact with this in London in 1914, soon after he had arrived with the SANNC deputation. After the deputation's representations had been dismissed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, it was largely through the Brotherhood Movement that Plaatje mounted his campaign protesting against the Land Act of 1913 to the British public; and it was from members and sympathisers of the Brotherhood Movement that he received much moral and financial support as well. Plaatje was particularly attracted to the Movement because it demonstrated to him the possibilities of the practical implementation of Christian ideals in a contemporary context. It was, he felt, "no parody on religion, but is that practical Christianity which bears no distinction of colour or artificial boundaries between nations". The contrast with Christianity as practised in South Africa was obvious to him. Although there were strong circumstantial reasons for Plaatje to respond in a favourable manner to any organized body which was prepared to assist him in his campaign in England, there were deeper reasons for the impact that it made upon him, and for his decision to make it his task - upon his return to South Africa - to establish the movement and to spread its ideals there: for Plaatje, the appeal and relevance of the Brotherhood Movement far outlasted the circumstances of its initial impact. To an important extent, the Brotherhood Movement and its ideology went far in the direction of providing a kind of ideological bridge that made possible and appropriate the consolidation of the "De Beers connection" which he perceived to be a precondition (both to his own survival and to the creation of the type of society in which he believed) in the face of the growing tensions between capital and labour in South Africa. The ideals and aims of the Brotherhood Movement and the hope that it held out for an organic, Christian society that effectively diffused class conflict was an ideology particularly appropriate to this. The movement appealed to him at other levels as well - for example, its emphatic interdenominational posture struck a distinct chord with Plaatje since the divisive effect of missionary rivalries was a common theme throughout his journalistic writings.

The role that Plaatje saw the Brotherhood Movement playing was consistent with both the origins and social base of the movement as it had developed in England, and with its very particular concern to infuse industrial relations with the spirit of Brotherhood. Thus its analysis of the world's unrest in 1919:

The industrial unrest of our day grows out of denied Brotherhood. Our present industrial system has divided men into groups and has depersonalised the relations between them. Misunderstanding, friction, and strike are not mere incidents and accidents; they are due not alone to the discontent of working men and the ambitions of employers. They are inherent in the system, and will continue until in the system itself competition is replaced by brotherly co-operation. (51)

And its prescription:

It is for us to recognise our social, industrial, and international life as the foundation of Brotherhood. This will involve some thorough-going changes in the ideas of men and the organisation of society. It means the creation of common Christian ideals and principles in the minds of men on which to lay the foundation of a new social order. It implies such a change in the industrial system as will bring all parties together, and will give all partners a voice in the direction of the enterprise. It means that industry will become a social service, and the whole process of industry, both in production and distribution, will represent the co-operation of all in behalf of all. It demands that the Church shall become a fellowship of all brothers, and that the men of all churches find some way of expressing

their common life and of co-operating in the service of the Kingdom. (52)

It was with ideas such as these that Plaatje returned to South Africa in 1917, and they were to play a crucial role in conditioning his perceptions and influencing his behaviour during the tram shed episode and subsequently. It is not surprising either that De Beers saw much in the Brotherhood Movement to commend it to them. Over the possibilities perceived in turning an old tram shed into a Brotherhood Institute the two parties came together. What better example of practical brotherhood, Plaatje asked in January 1919 during the course of an address entitled "Samples of Practical Brotherhood" to an African audience at the new Institute, could there be than this?

... it was not necessary to go outside the four corners of that hall for concrete instances of good Samaritanism in action. A practical demonstration of Christ's interpretation of the word "friend" was recently given by the directors of the De Beers Company, in placing at their disposal a tram shed which could have been sold for a very large sum ... Through the generosity of De Beers, supplemented by liberal donations from European sympathisers (a liberality that natives would do well to simulate), the local natives would in the course of time possess a hall that no community earning on the average 2s 6d a day could ever hope to build. (53)

In April 1919, there was something approaching a repeat performance of the stone laying ceremony of the previous August, when the Bishop of Kimberley came to "dedicate the building for Brotherhood meetings and educational purposes". On this occasion as well, developments on the Rand were as pressing as they had been at the time of the first ceremony. For Plaatje, this served only to underline the value and ideals of the Brotherhood Movement:

Just before going to the dedication service I got another message: 'The mounted police just charged a crowd of men and women, five killed by horses' hoofs, scores of men and women maimed. Most of the victims were singing or praying when police charged.' That was the picture on the Gold Fields while we on the Diamond Fields held a Brotherhood dedication over which the city magistrate presided, supported by the Mayor, Councillors, and clergy of the district. (54)

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Notes

Much of the primary material upon which this paper is based is to be found in the records of the De Beers Company, Kimberley. I would like to express my appreciation for their permission to consult, to make copies of, and to use material which I found there.

- (1) All three letters are contained in the Lyndhurst Road Native Institute file (Estate records), De Beers Head Office, Kimberley.
- (2) Peter Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa (London, 1970).
- (3) H. J. and R. E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa (Harmondsworth: 1969), p. 429.

- (4) Ibid., p. 9.
- (5) Martin Legassick, "The Rise of Modern South African Liberalism: its assumptions and its social base", ICS seminar paper (Ideology and Social Structure in 20th Century South Africa series), March 1 1972.
- (6) S. Trapido, "Liberalism in the Cape in the 19th and 20th Centuries", CSP, Societies of Southern Africa, Vol. 4, 1973.
- (7) E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth: 1968), p. 939. Thompson defines his use of the term class as follows:

When we speak of a class we are thinking of a very loosely defined body of people who share the same congeries of interests, social experiences, traditions, and value systems, who have a disposition to behave as a class, to define themselves in their actions and in their consciousness in relation to other groups of people in class ways.
- With such a definition, I think it is quite legitimate to talk of an African petty bourgeoisie in twentieth century South Africa as a class.
- (8) Related by Plaatje at a meeting in the Centenary Hall, Kimberley, June 23 1918; reported in the Diamond Fields Advertiser, June 25 1918: "De Beers Company and the Natives. How 'Mgibisa' wins the affection of the tribes."
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Basil Matthews (ed), World Brotherhood (London, 1920), p. 92. This book consists mainly of a verbatim report of the proceedings of the First World Brotherhood Congress, which met in London in September 1919. One of the delegates was Solomon Plaatje (who was in London as the leader of the SANNC delegation), and the text of his address (in which the provision of the assembly hall by De Beers for African use figures prominently) is to be found on pages 90-96.
- (11) Ibid., p. 93.
- (12) De Beers Lyndhurst Road Native Institute Estate file, Plaatje to A. Williams, March 22 1918, and to Sir David Harris and Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, March 15 1918.
- (13) De Beers Lyndhurst Road Native Institute Estate file, Plaatje to A. Williams, March 22 1918.
- (14) Ibid.
- (15) Basil Matthews, op. cit., p. 92.
- (16) De Beers Lyndhurst Road Native Institute Estate file, "Extract from Minutes of Board Meeting, 2nd April 1918".
- (17) Lyndhurst Road Native Institute Estate file, Sir David Harris to the Assistant Secretary of De Beers, March 20 1918.
- (18) Lyndhurst Road Native Institute Estate file, "Extract from Minutes ...".
- (19) Basil Matthews, op. cit., p. 93.
- (20) Proceedings reported in the Diamond Fields Advertiser, June 25 1918: "De Beers Company and the Natives. How Mgibisa wins the affection of the Native Tribes."
- (21) S. T. Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa (London, 1916).
- (22) Ibid., p. 223.
- (23) This was reported in detail in the DFA, March 28 1917, "Reception to Mr Sol T. Plaatje". A copy of an illuminated address presented to Plaatje in England by the Brotherhood Federation was read out by the Rev. P. E. Kuze, and Plaatje himself elaborated on other examples of the hospitality extended to him there by people associated with the Movement.
- (24) DFA, June 25 1918. The originals of these letters and telegrams have also been preserved in the De Beers Estate file, having been passed on to the company by Plaatje as evidence of the extent of appreciation for their action.
- (25) Reports of the proceedings and the speeches appear in the DFA, August 8 and 9 1918. My account and quotations are drawn from both issues.
- (26) De Beers General Secretary's files (microfilm reel 50A), Edward Dower (Secretary for Native Affairs) to the Chairman of the De Beers Board of Directors, July 16 1918.

- (27) The extent and importance of these has not been adequately brought out in the secondary literature. The most useful account is probably that in R. J. and H. E. Simons, op. cit.
- (28) Lyndhurst Road Native Institute Estate file, Plaatje to W. Pickering (Secretary of De Beers), May 13 1918.
- (29) De Beers General Secretary's files (microfilm reel 35a), "Extract from Minutes of Meeting of Directors of the De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd, July 4th 1919".
- (30) Ibid.
- (31) Lyndhurst Road Native Institute Estate file, Plaatje to the Secretary of De Beers, August 3 1918.
- (32) Saul Msane, c. 1850-1919. Born Natal, educated at Healdtown, one time compound manager of the Jubilee and Salisbury mine, subsequently a labour agent, one of the founders of the South African Native National Congress, and a member, with Plaatje, of the Congress deputation to England in 1914.
- (33) S. T. Plaatje, "Mr Saul Msane: death of a Rand Native Leader", African World (London), October 25 1919. "His subsequent [to the closure of the Jubilee Mine] chequered career", Plaatje also commented, "marks the sad uncertainty that characterizes native life, especially of the civilised natives, in South Africa."
- (34) In June 1918 Msane, still Vice-President of the SANNC, issued a manifesto which advised workers on the Rand against striking in the following terms:

If you do wish to ask for more money, choose your leaders amongst yourselves, and approach your employers in a proper way. There is no harm in asking your employers for a rise in wages. One thing we ought to start to do is to ask the Government to reduce the rent which storekeepers near the compound have to pay. It is because of these rents that charges have gone up ... This is my injunction. Not a single man must leave work. Keep at work all of you. The question of a rise in wages can be represented while you are still at work.

Quoted in the DFA, July 1 1918.

- (35) Ilanga Lase Natal, May 2 1919.
- (36) Lyndhurst Road Native Institute Estate file, Plaatje to the General Manager, March 22 1918. In this typewritten letter, it is clear that Plaatje had originally written "... there is a belief among the native population here that I am in the pay of De Beers ..."; "some of" was inserted before "the native population" in Plaatje's own hand, presumably on reading through the letter prior to sending it off - a small point, but arguably of considerable significance.
- (37) Plaatje read this letter out to the Brotherhood Conference in London in 1919; see Basil Matthews, op. cit.; p. 94.
- (38) Lyndhurst Road Native Institute Estate file, Plaatje to the General Secretary, June 3 1918.
- (39) Ibid., Plaatje to the General Secretary, May 13 1918.
- (40) Read out at the stone-laying ceremony, reported in the DFA, August 9 1918.
- (41) Basil Matthews, op. cit., p. 94.
- (42) e.g. in the DFA, February 18 1914.
- (43) Quoted in S. T. Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa, p. 182.
- (44) DFA, June 11 1924, "Natives and the Election. Why they should vote S.A.P.", by Sol T. Plaatje. Or, in similar vein, Plaatje in support of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, as reported in the DFA, June 7 1924:

'I feel certain we are going to win this election', Mr Plaatje declared, amid applause, 'and there is only one thing you want to do as a tribute, and that is to return him with a big majority. There is no doubt about his return, but we want the biggest majority in the Union. We will give them such a result on the seventeenth that they will say, "This is what No 2 Location did".' (Loud cheers)

- (45) De Beers General Secretary's files, Plaatje to the General Secretary, November 19 1929.
- (46) Native Life in South Africa, p. 22.
- (47) Ibid., p. 183.
- (48) De Beers General Secretary's files, Plaatje to the General Manager, October 29 1913.
- (49) Ibid., Plaatje to the General Secretary, February 21 1914.
- (50) For a useful descriptive account of the history of the Brotherhood Movement, see A. E. H. Gregory, Romance and Revolution: the story of the Brotherhood Movement 1875-1975. Mr Gregory is the current National Secretary of the movement. It was founded in the industrial Midlands in 1875 by John Blackham, who was "born into a middle class family of printers and publishers with a family business in Moor St, Birmingham, where he eventually took up employment". Prominent amongst the early leaders of the Brotherhood's PSA meetings (PSA stood for Pleasant Sunday Afternoon) were "employers of labour who were in a position to help in finding a needy man a job".
- (51) Basil Matthews, op. cit., p. VI.
- (52) Ibid., p. VII.
- (53) DFA, January 17 1919, "Practical Brotherhood. Address at the Native P.S.A."
- (54) Basil Matthews, op. cit., pp. 93-94.