

"THESE NATIVES THINK THIS WAR TO BE THEIR OWN": REFLECTIONS ON  
BLACKS IN THE CAPE COLONY AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 1899-1902

by

Bill Nasson

Despite the growth in recent years of an historiography of African participation in the South African War (1), we remain relatively uninformed of the nature and extent of Afrikaner military penetration into the agrarian domain of black communities in the Cape Colony. For these groups, the unfolding of republican armed incursions, white rebellion and banditry, represented a period of considerable turbulence and trauma. At various phases of the conflict guerrillas asserted a territorial imperative, occupying small market towns and settlements in the interior and overrunning rural districts. This establishment of periods of Afrikaner military ascendancy subjected vulnerable fractions of black society to a violent process of conquest, submission and subordination within the power structures of Republican colonisation.

In order to understand something of the structural context within which violence arose, we need to look closely at the agrarian arena. The arbitrary violence directed against the lives and capital of peasant producers, noted in passing by such authors as Colin Bundy (2), should not be seen as solely the consequence of moral levity towards African life and a propensity to disregard property rights when the owners were black. These elements were certainly there, and considerable weight must be attached to them; however, the armoury of repressive devices which Afrikaner guerrillas brought to bear against black communities and individuals ought not to be divorced from localised social and political conflict between black and white interests. The intrusion of wartime commando violence was a phenomenon which did not exist outside the spheres of property, power and settler authority in the colonial political economy: it was closely interwoven with them.

In illustration of this, it is worth devoting some space to a brief exposition of developments at the Methodist mission station of Leliefontein in Namaqualand. For a start, the experience of Leliefontein calls into question any remaining notion that the prosecution of the South African War was strictly a white man's prerogative, while on the peripheries of conflict a supine peasantry laboured to maintain cycles of cultivation. Throughout 1900-1901 nomadic cultivators on the Mission reserve had become closely associated with the British military. The war set in motion a process of accumulation. A small number of producers disposed of their marginal surplus to army suppliers at inflated prices; they also hired out their labour as scouts and riders on a three-monthly contract basis. (3) Many of the more impoverished inhabitants completely forsook the reserves' fragile, shifting cultivation with its tenuous margin between subsistence and pauperisation. Some accrued capital through long-term employment as skilled labour with the Namaqualand Field Force. Others sold their only visible economic assets - cattle, sheep and goats - and purchased wagons and mules with which to establish themselves as small transport contractors with the army. The

dimensions of this labour force were considerable. During July 1901-June 1902, upwards of 200 "Leliefontein Boys" were operating as scouts for the Namaqualand Intelligence Department. (4) On the heavily used military convoy route between Carnarvon and Williston, labour from the Leliefontein reserve provided 275 armed auxiliaries and 180 mule drivers. (5) This labour oscillation was so widespread as to impede partially the functions of the Mission's administrative apparatus: important personnel were continually siphoned off for military duties. In January 1901 the RAAD (Mission Church Council) reported that it had been unable to hold sessions for several months "owing to so many of the Raadsmen and Burghers being employed as scouts during the Great Boer War". (6)

Small wonder that the mission station acquired for itself a reputation as a centre of sedition in a northwestern region in which the dominant Afrikaner land-owning interests were overwhelmingly Republican in political affiliation. The effect of the integration of hundreds of the reserve's inhabitants into military agencies of the colonial state is obvious. The mission burghers were seen to be identifying themselves with an imperialist agency highly repressive of Afrikaner interests in the colony. This evolving situation was one which may be said to have been reasonably provocative of some reprisal from the substantial commando presence in the region. Moreover, there were deep-rooted and acrimonious disputes between predatory white farmers and clerical authority at the station over the question of labour supplies. (7) By the turn of the century it was still possible for the bulk of Leliefontein's nomadic agriculturalists to extract a tolerable level of independent subsistence from the reserve's shrinking lands (8); proletarianization was fiercely resisted. Throughout the 1890s, white Methodist staff appeared to have done little to commend to their congregation the virtues of the wage relation; instead, burghers were supported in their hostility towards degrading labour conditions prevailing on white farms. (9)

These tensions between agrarian capital and the reserve were deepened after 1900: labour flowed from the station, but not in the desired direction. In order to stem similar migration from the lands of white Republican collaborators, harsh controls were instituted. The labour force on farms which covertly supplied guerrillas with provisions was marshalled into work gangs by commando overseers and subjected to a particularly brutal work regime; those who resisted, informed, or deserted, were threatened with death. (10) This intimidatory strategy merely encouraged widespread desertion of service, and scores of farm labourers took refuge at the station. (11) Furthermore, employees deserted other white farms and took up temporary residence as refugees in the reserve; from there they moved on to less burdensome and more lucrative employment as skilled army workers. The local farming lobby charged Methodist personnel with spreading insubordination among the rural workforce, and with explicitly encouraging farm labour to break wage and debt relations. (12) In the words of one representative, J. J. van Reenen, who wrote on 22nd February 1901, after a tour of the Garies district: "The farmers all along the line complained to me ... that their servants and labourers deserted their service, left them in the lurch and fled into the Institution of Leliefontein where this appears to be encouraged." (13) The refusal by the station to expel labour deserters created friction between Methodist authorities and the state bureaucracy, which strove to prevent labour supply levels from sinking to the point where it might seriously impair the rate of settler accumulation. (14)

What we have, then, is a steady degeneration of relations in the area. The local landowning class was much disturbed; it was experiencing what might legitimately be termed a crisis in its authority to maintain bonds of deference and obedience. That authority was being increasingly eroded by developments at the Leliefontein reserve. Roving bands of guerrillas were furious at burgher resistance to their labour and produce demands and by the reserve's seemingly unequivocal loyalty to the British. Throughout 1900-1901 sporadic commando activity bore portents of violence to come. Leliefontein's British military auxiliaries - scouts, drivers and despatch riders - were flogged and shot as a matter of routine when they had the misfortune to fall into Afrikaner hands. Pastoralists on the fringes of the reserve were subjected to physical harrying, and had agricultural implements destroyed. Finally, in January 1902, a guerrilla force under "Manie" Maritz struck deep into the station. The only

published account of what is supposed to have taken place is that provided by Deneys Reitz who, in Commando, suggests that Maritz "had ridden into the station with a few men, to interview the European missionaries, when he was set upon by armed Hottentots, he and his escort narrowly escaping with their lives. To avenge the insult, he returned next morning with a stronger force and wiped out the settlement." (15)

Limitations of space preclude a blow-by-blow account of what occurred; we should, however, note the main procedural features, as they are significant. After the missionaries had been forcibly detained by Maritz, a large crowd of Basters were compelled to assemble before the mounted commando. A number of handwritten proclamations were distributed: these were of a routine kind, issued by many guerrilla groups throughout the colony. Highly threatening in tone, they laboriously catalogued the reprisals meted out to "kaffirs" caught aiding the British. (16) In terms of immediate and specific local considerations, it is evident that the Maritz commando was also acting as the coercive instrument of Afrikaner farming interests; labour deserters on the reserve were ordered to return to their masters on pain of death. (17) As part of an apparent strategy to refurbish the weakened fabric of Afrikaner agrarian authority, the invaders also articulated a political dispensation. Maritz invited Basters to swear an oath of loyalty to Afrikaner republicanism (18), and even at his most threatening still held out the option for burghers to enter a collaborative relationship, and be assimilated into the Afrikaner forces. An intelligence despatch of 11th January reported: "Maritz read a proclamation to the unarmed Bastards. He forbade them on pain of death to give any help, information or forage to the English, and promised them protection. Wounded Bastards by his orders were to be sent to Garies for treatment, and he stated that passes would be given to all to leave the station and assist the Boer cause ... Bastards would be given land and cattle by the Boers." (19)

The assembly was not swayed by these inducements; the crowd remained in a bellicose mood, and when two of Maritz's subordinates tried to address it the Basters pelted them with fruit and shouted them down. (20) In this gesture of defiance they were led by two influential members of the Raad, Jan Dirks and Barnabas Links. Links had apparently had dealings with the commando before. As one of its members wrote subsequently of the confrontation: "Among the encircling audience was recognised with pleasure, the face of Barnabas Links, as one of the natives captured at Garies in September 1901, who, it was thought, after a beating, and according to his oath, had now come back to live in peace at Leliefontein." (21) In fact, Links had not been dormant. With Dirks and other members of the Raad he had been instrumental in the secret formation of a small resistance force, armed mostly with antiquated muskets. When advance notice was received on 3rd January of Maritz's proposed incursion, these men were mobilised. (22) In particular, the Raad wanted to protect the substantial central reserves of wheat and rye, a portion of which had been set aside as the food supply for refugees squatting on mission lands. This grain store was also an important source of capital at a time of inflated market prices. With good reason the reserve authorities nursed long-standing suspicions that guerrillas were intent on plundering this surplus. (23)

After several bitter exchanges between Maritz and the two Raad representatives, the commando leader apparently produced a sjambok and dismounted. The jostling crowd produced two knobkieries, with which Dirks and Links attacked Maritz. They were immediately shot, and the assembly rapidly dispersed. The reserve's armed auxiliaries took to the hills to cut off the Afrikaner retreat; in the ensuing series of clashes, seven Basters and thirty guerrillas died. (24) Four more Afrikaners were reported to have been stoned to death. (25) Maritz beat a hasty retreat and returned with an enlarged force; before he reappeared, virtually the entire Baster community sought refuge in the hills. Clearly, whatever cards were being stacked, those of the burghers were at the bottom of the pack. The occupying force wreaked havoc. Dwellings were gutted, muskets smashed, and wooden furniture and sheds consumed as firewood. The means of production - stock and agricultural implements - were either destroyed or expropriated. The granary was plundered and landowners in the Springbok and Garies districts absorbed a large portion. Similarly, ploughshares were hauled off to white farms in the vicinity. (26) Much of the transportation was undertaken by bywoners and landless "poor white" rebels, recruited from the

impoverished margins of local settler society. For their assistance they had been rewarded with mules and wagons seized from the station. (27) Understandably, this poor white retinue was almost everywhere highly predatory. The war unleashed for them considerable opportunities for accumulation, through their role in the expropriation of black cultivators who fell foul of Afrikaner military force.

As for the Baster refugees, reports throughout March, April and May speak of their being harassed, hunted down and conscripted into forced labour gangs, in order to maintain a level of agricultural production to meet the subsistence requirements of the large Maritz force. By 18th April, at least 1,800 refugees had trekked to Garies and O'Okiep. (28) In the ensuing weeks, hundreds more followed. Replying simply to a query from General French about the refugee influx, the commander of the Namaqualand Field Force wrote on 15th May: "The people have nowhere to go. The Boers have burnt Leliefontein." (29)

The best evidence for the selective use of violence by Afrikaner guerrillas arises from scores of premeditated executions of individual civilians. We can advance one such case here: that of Abraham Esau. Although much of the evidence is conflicting and difficult to evaluate, we must attempt to reconstruct the picture as best we can. Esau, a blacksmith and prominent pro-British activist in Calvinia, appears to have been at the vortex of hostilities between the settlement's African and Coloured inhabitants and marauding guerrillas who were active in the district during the greater part of 1900-1901. Alarmed by a rising tide of rural intimidation, Esau and a group of fellow Coloured artisans volunteered during October 1900 to mobilise and officer a black town guard, in order to police Calvinia and its immediate environs. (30) This proposal was declined by magistracy officials based at Clanwilliam. (31) The colonial bureaucracy was ever mindful of the danger of alienating settlers by permitting military authority to accrue to independently organised native auxiliaries. Ominous events at Barkly East during November and December 1899 bore heavily on the mind of the Acting Resident Magistrate. (32)

Rebuffed by the local bureaucracy, Esau proceeded to forge direct links with the imperial armed forces. Commencing on 5th November 1900, he set about constructing a clandestine cell of spies and informers which filtered intelligence through to British units. In return, he appears to have accepted a flimsy promise of military protection for the black community in the event of a major commando assault. (33) Calvinia's Afrikaners seem to have been largely unaware of the nature of this informal pact; there was much speculation and rumour that the supply price for Esau's services was the provision of Krugerrands and weaponry. (34) Leading directly on from this were persistent reports (mainly based on inference and hearsay) that the blacksmith and his artisan associates were stockpiling rifles at a secret arsenal, in preparation for a rising. Growing rural drift from the land, precipitated by guerrilla exactions, swelled the ranks of discontented blacks in the settlement and Esau was accused of spreading "insurrection" among the mob. By December 1900, according to a confidential British intelligence report, Esau's activities had provoked "great suspicion and hostility" among guerrilla leadership as far afield as Fraserburg, Williston and Carnarvon. (35)

When an Orange Free State commando swept into Calvinia in January 1901, Esau was almost immediately incarcerated by a landdrost appointed to implement Republican native law in the occupied district. The pretext for this was his reported refusal to wear a pass, with which all blacks in Calvinia were issued from 22nd January. (36) Efforts to coerce him into divulging the location of the rumoured cache and publicly to renounce his British allegiance seem to have been unsuccessful. Afrikaner malice was intensified by a flurry of accusations from white landowners that Esau had authorised the maiming of stock belonging to known Republican sympathisers and had encouraged acts of arson on farms. After protracted public floggings on at least three consecutive days, Esau was by all accounts left bloody but unbowed. His intransigence probably speeded up final retribution. On 5th February 1901, he was strapped between two horses, dragged for three quarters of a mile beyond the town limits and shot dead by a guerrilla called Strydom. (37) Esau's demise removed an important focus of civil opposition to Afrikaner military power, which had always

vigorously to assert and extend its authority over an implacably hostile populace. Furthermore, the execution served notice upon the community that any further show of resistance to commando authority would be treated as a capital matter.

The incident created a minor scandal in the colony, and here it might be useful briefly to note its impact. Seized upon by sections of the settler press (38) and by British mission journals (39), the Esau murder was also taken up in the imperial metropolis by such publications as Lloyds Weekly Newspaper, which on 20th February 1901 argued that "Esau's fate calls for retribution. He has suffered cruel martyrdom for no worse crime than loyalty to the British". The case also became the topic of correspondence involving both Chamberlain and Milner. (40) The Commissioner was in high dudgeon over the affair, and adroitly manipulated its propaganda value; on 19th February he wrote:

Nothing more disgraceful has happened in modern war than the treatment of the coloured man Esau at Calvinia. Whether they have actually murdered him, I do not yet know. What I do know is that they flogged him till he fainted, for the offence of being loyal to the British Crown, he being born and bred a British Subject. The man is well known to me by correspondence, and is known to my staff personally. Though coloured he was a most respectable, upstanding, and for his class in life (a village blacksmith) superior man - far more civilised than the average Boer farmer. (41)

Various implausible explanations accounting for Esau's death were offered by newspapers sympathetic to the Republican cause. By far the most unlikely was that postulated by the South African News, which ventured that his interrogators had been forced to shoot him in self-defence (!) when he assaulted them. Abraham Esau, the News blustered, had been "a man of great physical strength". (42) Finally, Esau's martyrdom (for such it rapidly became) featured conspicuously among the array of wartime atrocity stories (43) which circulated among the hustings during the 1904 election. Settler politicians (and representatives of the APO) exploited the episode. It was claimed that Esau had been an exemplary representative of non-white patriotism towards the colonial state, and had died selflessly in defence of British interests. Jameson's Progressives insisted that the lesson black voters could draw from Esau's fate was that only an electoral alliance between them and a staunchly pro-imperialist settler faction would entrench black rights against encroachments by a conjunction of hostile political interests - perhaps collusion between the Afrikaner Bond and the South African Party, which in the post-war period was accused by Progressive opponents of being the "Afrikaner Bond in sheep's clothing". (44) In this whirling propaganda battle, Esau was highly serviceable, and the example of his grisly end dangled before enfranchised blacks. This anti-Afrikaner strategem was mainly employed against the Bond, especially in constituencies where the Progressives were fighting to secure Coloured votes. (45)

The Esau case touches upon the question of Afrikaner military overrule, and provides a useful point at which to turn to a lengthier consideration of this process of conquest. For entire communities in interior zones which were temporarily overrun and staked out as Republican enclaves (46), the ordeal was especially sharp. Republican seizures bit deep into the social and political fabric; the routine, random plundering of peasant surplus, and disruption of the continuities of production and accumulation represented no more than the topsoil of conquest. It is wholly misleading to think of these successive waves of localised invasions solely in terms of indiscriminate rapine. Guerrilla commandants went to considerable lengths to impress upon black inhabitants of occupied territory that the armed invasion forces were not there purely as the military wing of the trekker states. Their encroachment was also explicitly political in intent. Men like Kritzingner, Olivier and Lotter appeared as bearers of a form of white power based (in theory at least) on the outright expropriation of blacks in the colony, and on racial superiority. (47) Through the distribution of written proclamations, public addresses and instructions to headmen, inhabitants were informed of their subjection to the sanctions of what was loosely termed Republican native law. Presumably intended in part to provide a legitimating basis to the imposition of military power, "Republican native law" proved to be a

pliant political construction, subsuming within its rubric all manner of coercive measures, ranging from disenfranchisement to the systematic extraction of surplus.

The question of the attack upon the non-white franchise is interesting, and deserves comment, not least because, as Stanley Trapido has pointed out, white parliamentary factions halted serious talk of contracting black franchise rights for virtually a decade spanning the turn of the century, including the years of the South African War. (48) However, Republican invaders with a premature whiff of victory in their nostrils were obviously not constrained by considerations of electoral arithmetic (49) from launching an aggressive assault upon suffrage rights. This seems to have arisen predominantly in agrarian districts where insurgents, with a collaborative base provided by local white rebels, established firm phases of military ascendancy. This enabled them to generate an apparatus of bureaucratic controls (Republican field cornets, landdrosts, native commissioners, and so forth) which reproduced in microcosm some of the dimensions of the Afrikaner state.

It was in these areas - for example, in and around Dordrecht, Lady Grey, Jamestown, and Aliwal North - during November-December 1899 that Republicans went most purposefully and systematically along the path of expropriation. Here the threat of African dispossession specifically included the stripping away of political rights. A rapid glance at events in Jamestown during November 1899 reinforces the point well. Shortly after Commandant Olivier swept into the settlement on 18th November, a detachment of his men made for the location. After conducting a fruitless search for four policemen from the Jamestown African constabulary suspected of having taken refuge there, Olivier installed armed guards on the location perimeters to prevent anyone leaving. (50) The location headmen were seized and forced to join local bywoners in assisting guerrillas to marshal together the black populace and assemble them in the location. (51) The round-up appears to have been thorough. The assembly included scores of refugee peasants (who had previously suffered enforced dispersal, or had fled the land to escape being pressed into labour drafts), seven Indian itinerant petty traders, and three Coloured wheelwrights. (52) After outlining curfew regulations, the planned extraction of tax payments, requisitioning of property, and the institution of a pass system, Olivier announced that, as Jamestown had fallen under Republican jurisdiction, suffrage rights for "Kaffers, Kleurlingen en Koelies" would immediately be revoked. A fundamental axiom of the new political process would be a racially exclusive franchise. (53) The Commandant appears to have possessed a keen appreciation of the rituals of repression: disenfranchisement was expressed through an ordered procedure (operating from 20th November-2nd December 1899) in which registered voters were ordered to report to a landdrost where their hands were specially stamped and they were issued with a pass. (54)

Although the evidence is patchy, it would appear that the bulk of disenfranchisement threats were articulated in the north-eastern region of the colony. It can hardly have been coincidental that this was a significant reservoir of African electoral activity; here the peasant vote was still resilient and substantial. It was also here that the political nexus between peasant producer and the urban, mercantile appropriator of his product received its clearest expression. The main local forces of settler discontent were Afrikaner farming interests, traditionally hostile to liberal, mercantile advocates of imperial control, and a surplus producing peasantry. (55) During the periods of Republican sway, Afrikaner farmers in the triangular region bounded by Aliwal North, Barkly East and Queenstown played a substantial role in the new relations of domination. Commando leadership delegated a whole range of sub-military functions to them: for example, they administered passes and collected hut tax payments. (56) And, as a mass of treason trial proceedings bore subsequent testimony, these local rebels were deeply involved in the process of "stripping" blacks of the franchise. (57) A ready instance can be drawn from the Barkly West district, where in 1898 an alliance between Rhodes and the Koloniale Unie had mobilised the African and Coloured vote against the Afrikaner Bond - which singularly failed to make inroads into the black vote. In the closing weeks of 1899 a motley group of white civilians, with military support from a commando escort, toured the lands of Barkly East peasants, boasting of an imminent reversal of parliamentary political fortunes. Afrikaner landowners among them claimed that a Bond representative would be installed by the new regime, and Africans would lose their

vote. (58) Very similar propaganda exercises were orchestrated in Aliwal North and in the Herschel Reserve, where, as an indication of the manner in which Republican conquest was reshaping the terrain of white power, there was talk of redistributing expropriated African votes among unfranchised "poor whites" and bywoners. (59) It would, I think, be wrong to view this onslaught upon the franchise as having constituted mere rhetoric and bluster on the part of temporarily installed rulers. If one makes even the most cursory appraisal of African perceptions, it is obvious that peasant voters did not regard it in this light. For commodity producers, the summary "loss" of the franchise was traumatic. It signalled the end of a whole range of civil liberties, and, in the Republican scheme of things, their legal assimilation to the category of cheap (or unpaid) labour power for white agrarian capital. To Cornelius Olifant, "a native farmer" from the Douglas district, may be left some appropriately painful remarks:

I was on my land putting potatoes and pumpkins in bags for sale to the English soldiers when some Free State men rode up about the middle of November last (1899). With them were Jacobus Maree of the farm 'Witfontein' and Abraham Cronje of the farm 'Wonderfontein'. Maree said my vegetables and fowls and six of my goats would be given to the Boer soldiers. I asked for payment as my goats were worth fully £1.50s each. He said I would be given about 1s for each goat as all land was now Orange Free State property and natives could not make their own prices. Cronje also told me that I was now under the laws of the Orange Free State and made me put my name on a piece of paper with the names of other better class natives here which was a sign that my vote was taken away. When I did not want to do this thing Maree and the Free State Boers said they would shoot me. I was very afraid to lose my vote as I would then have no rights and just be a common native and have to work as a slave for these white men. These Boer soldiers who came here to steal our goods and our rights as civilised natives were not even white men really, but many had some native blood in them, they were not really white men, just Boer natives. (60)

Olifant's language neatly illustrates the sense of crisis brought about by Republican conquest. Commando military intervention in the Cape was in part very much a matter of the extortion of provisions and labour. Here blacks were everywhere the victims. For a fraction of the peasant community these incursions also threatened much prized political and social rights. For the high point of these invasions was the application of political violence in the form of forcible disenfranchisement.

Military occupation brought in its wake a predator state apparatus, which, however thin and flimsy, strove continually to enlarge its own labour and fiscal demands over settled agrarian populations. As we have already noted, commandos became the instruments through which a constellation of local white interests mediated their hostilities. There is a readily discernible pattern to this: it was, for example, commonplace for farmers to bring recalcitrant labour before landdrosts for disciplining (61), and for Indian traders to be expelled from occupied villages where white traders sympathetic to the Republicans were promised absolute trading monopolies. (62) At Kuruman and Douglas during December 1899-January 1900, bywoners were permitted to confiscate dozens of ploughshares from peasant holdings, the commando native commissioners announcing that Orange Free State "laws" permitted only one ploughshare per native family. (63) Very often there were attempts to put a juridical gloss on the paraphernalia of repression.

African commodity producers faced the prospect of degradation into captive labour at one stroke, while wage labourers were being riveted down at a time when inflated wages in the military sector were drawing thousands to camps and depots. It was perhaps inevitable that sections of white farming capital would make common cause with invading military forces; commandos could enforce labour compulsion and thereby maintain levels of accumulation, and also recuperate surplus from squatter peasants,

many of whom claimed that tenancy obligations need not be honoured in the case of "enemies of the Queen". (64) It should be emphasised here that colonial district officials, far from being the compliant filters of Afrikaner agrarian interests, did not hold as a wartime political priority the protection of their labour supply. Control over the amount of labour siphoned off white farmland by the military was often extremely lax. The colonial state also intervened in the process of labour distribution, to enforce sanctions against dissident settlers. To cite an extreme example, magistracy personnel at Herschel barred Africans from labouring on Barkly East farms during a period from 1900 to 1901, in an apparent effort to impede the production of landowners widely suspected of sympathising with, and secretly provisioning, rebel forces in the Cape. (65)

Blacks reacted violently to what many of them saw as a process of Afrikaner colonization. To say that the desperate struggles which were unleashed on the land bore some of the elements of agrarian class warfare would not be an exaggeration. African reaction took the form of muffled, localized forms of resistance against commando penetration in disturbed areas. Supervised labour drafts on Republican farms waged constant struggles against commando overseers and their landowning allies. The range of resistance was extremely varied, and can only be briefly noted here. Desertion, poisoning of drinking water, and the maiming of stock was widespread. Particularly sharp measures were undertaken by semi-independent cultivators bent on reclaiming expropriated property. Thus, during 1900 it appears that a number of autonomous armed levies, outside the controlling domain of the British Army and colonial militia, were operating in certain north-western districts of the colony. Lukas Plaatjie and Pieter Bok, two Basters from the Garies area, became celebrated thief-takers, hunting down (mainly poor white) perpetrators of such routine rural felonies as stock theft. These two men led a band of twenty Baster smallholders who apprehended thirty-two white suspects during August-November 1900. (66) Bok and Plaatjie were commended by an officer of the Namaqualand Field Force during December 1900, who afterwards recorded his impressions of them:

These fellows are very keen on upholding justice and the law. Even if their methods are rough this is all to the good. The infernal low class whites who are so swelled up by the presence of armed Boers in these parts are a great menace to nigger property. They seem to think they can steal freely from Bastards. It pleases me that this bunch of natives will not put up with Boer cheek. Bok and Pladkie have in them the spirit of John Wild and might even teach our English poachers a thing or two. (67)

The formulation that blacks in the Cape Colony were uniformly loyal to imperial interests has long been a conventional one for historians. For fractions of the African and Coloured petty bourgeoisie, inhabitants of larger urban settlements well removed from the cutting edge of Afrikaner military power, this is undoubtedly an accurate appraisal. In return for supporting an expansion of imperial state machinery into South Africa's hinterland, they anticipated that the question of black political rights would shift to a more prominent position in the locus of political power. At the very least, an expansion of British political resources would see the Cape liberal franchise extended to the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal.

The notion of black collaboration becomes less useful when we consider agrarian communities. Firstly, that both peasant and proletarian components of the rural order met fully British demands for labour and commodities is not in itself a fully convincing index of collaboration. Transport riders, who comprised a substantial proportion of the army's skilled labour force, defined their relationship in strictly contractual terms. (68) High wages and inflated commodity prices in general provided a secure fiscal underpinning to labour attachments to remount, transport and intelligence departments. Secondly, the adaptive stance which particular peasant groups took up during the war was never simply one of voluntary loyalty to imperial interests. Resistance to the Afrikaner war effort in the colony was forced upon them by periodic tides of white invasion which attempted to effect radical shifts in the balance of localized social forces on the land. An alignment with the colonial state was a significant defensive posture. The scores of self-proclaimed "government men" who fought bitterly against Afrikaner forces which lay hard upon Cape blacks were defending their own stake in the colonial order. Sections of the rural tenantry armed as farm auxiliaries and drawn into a defence of English landowning interests were

often protecting not merely the property of white masters but their own productive surplus, which was frequently indistinguishable from that of their landlords. Certain labour service and sharecropping agreements marked out the squatter peasantry as logical targets for Afrikaners striking at the capital of English farmers. The penetration of commando power became associated with prohibitions, eviction, dispersal and the leeching of hard won capital through harsh taxation. These were all powerful threats to already shrinking enclaves of peasant autonomy, to entrenched notions of petty proprietorship, and to ideologies of political liberalism, of the free market, and of free men, which became passionately supported values for blacks made suddenly subordinate to new structures of alien authority.

-----oOo-----

#### Notes

[The quotation of the title is taken from: National Army Museum (NAM), 7304/29/25, Hopwood letters, H. Hopwood to his family, 17.11.1900.]

- (1) Among published works, the following should be noted: Peter Warwick, "The African Refugee Problem in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, 1900-1902" in University of York, Centre for Southern African Studies, Collected Papers 2, 1977, pp. 61-81; "African Labour during the South African War, 1899-1902" in University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Collected Seminar Papers on the Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Volume 7, No. 21 (1977), pp. 104-16; "African Societies and the South African War", Ch. 8 in Warwick (ed), The South African War (Longman: London, forthcoming); Brian Willan, "The Siege of Mafeking", Ch. 6 in Warwick, ibid. See also, "The White Man's War", Ch. 33 in Thomas Pakenham, The Boer War (Weidenfeld and Nicholson: London, 1979), pp. 396-418.
- (2) Colin Bundy, The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry (Heinemann: London, 1979), p. 122.
- (3) It was common practice for sections of the peasantry to undertake stints of military wage labour as an adjunct to cash crop cultivation. See, for instance, Warwick, "African Labour ...", op. cit., p. 109.
- (4) South African Library, Methodist Church Archives (MCA), Box 25, File No. 4, W. H. Miller to Rev. J. G. Locke, 19.7.1902.
- (5) Archives of the Coldstream Guards, ACG/RO.10/9.10/22, Digest of Movements of the 1st Battalion, Entries for 17.12.1901 and 2.1.1902.
- (6) MCA, Box 37, Leliefontein Church Minute Book, 1887-1911, Report of Raad Meeting, 12.1.1901.
- (7) Cape Archives (CA), Archive of the Resident Magistrate, Springbok, 1/SBK, A/1/1/3, K. Wentzel to Civil Commissioner, 22.7.1899.
- (8) M. J. Price, "Leliefontein: history and structure of a Coloured Mission Community, 1870-1913", University of Cape Town, BA Hons. Thesis, 1976, p. 19.
- (9) MCA, Church Minute Book, loc. cit., Report of Raad Meeting, 1.12.1898.
- (10) CA, 1/SBK, 5/4/4, Statements by Jan Verwag and Lukas Bok, Encl. in D. C. Mack to Chief Constable, 23.7.1900.
- (11) St George's Gazette, 20 (218), 1901, p. 42.
- (12) CA, 1/SBK, 5/4/4, J. van Toller to Civil Commissioner, 16.9.1901.
- (13) 1/SBK, 5/4/3, H. J. van Reenen to Resident Magistrate, 22.2.1901.
- (14) 1/SBK, 5/4/4, Civil Commissioner to Commandant, Springbok, 22.3.1901.

- (15) Deneys Reitz, Commando (Faber: London, 1929), p. 299. Reitz judged it to have been "a ruthless and unjustifiable act".
- (16) NAM, 6112/190/15, Cooper Papers, "Copy of Boer Proclamation at Leliefontein Mission Reserve", Encl. in H. Cooper to W. M. Barry, 21.2.1902.
- (17) Interview, G. Alias, 16.6.1978. This, and other oral testimony cited, was provided by mission survivors of the South African War. To them the author is much indebted.
- (18) Interview, C. Plaatjies, 17.6.1978.
- (19) NAM, 6807/189, 1st Cavalry Division Intelligence Papers, Confidential Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 19, 11.1.1902.
- (20) Interview, K. Draai, 17.6.1978.
- (21) MCA Box 25, File No. 3, "Copies with Translations of some papers found at Concordia after its evacuation by the Boers on 2nd May 1902" (undated and unattributed).
- (22) MCA, Box 26, W. Hewitt to C. Nuttall, 4.2.1902.
- (23) Ibid., J. G. Locke to J. F. Shelton, 25.10.1901, conf.
- (24) NAM, 6112/190/17, W. M. Maxwell to H. Cooper, 21.1.1902, conf. tel.; Reitz, op. cit., p. 298.
- (25) NAM, 7208/8, Paterson Letters, J. Paterson to his parents, 5.2.1902.
- (26) In June 1902, army intelligence reported that more than 100 double-furrow ploughs from the mission were being utilised on white farms near Springbok. See NAM, 6807/189, Confidential Weekly Intelligence Summary No. 41, 12.6.1902.
- (27) MCA, Box 37, Leliefontein Church Mission Book Reports, 1880-1912, Report of Meeting, 10.6.1902.
- (28) South African Library, H. R. Moffat Collection, J. Henwood, MS Diary of events in O'Okiep, April-May 1902, Entry for 14.4.1902; NAM, 6112/190/16, J. White to E. Haig, 18.4.1902.
- (29) NAM, 6112/190/4, H. Cooper to J. French, 15.5.1902, conf. tel.
- (30) Lloyds Weekly Newspaper, 19.11.1901.
- (31) CA, Archive of the Resident Magistrate, Clanwilliam, 1/CWM, 4/1/2/1, Acting Resident Magistrate to Special Justice of the Peace, 22.10.1900, conf.
- (32) 1/CWM, 4/1/2/2, Acting Resident Magistrate to P. Schmidt, 28.10.1900. At Barkly East and Rhodes (a village twenty miles away) in November 1899 the Resident Magistrate and Commandant, Captain Hook, started to induct peasants and labourers into a "native militia" to maintain security in the district. At the same time, fearful of a local Afrikaner rebellion against the state, he denied farmers access to a central munitions store in Barkly East. This precipitated a crisis within the settler community. A series of petitions and delegations protested against the arming of Africans (seemingly at white expense), and there was familiar talk of "savages" massacring whites and plundering property. See, for instance, South African Library, Merriman Papers, No. 403, J. Hugo to Merriman, 16.11.1899; CA, Attorney General's Department Files, AG 2013, Prime Minister to Resident Magistrate, Barkly East, 10.11.1899; South African News, 14.11.1899.
- (33) NAM, 6807/188, Folio 5, Summary of confidential report on arrangements with A. Esau, C. Hodge to M. Raymond, 27.11.1900.
- (34) NAM, 6807/187, Folio 7, P. van der Westhuizen to H. Joubert, 18.12.1900 (trans.).
- (35) NAM, 6807/190, Military Intelligence Reports 1900-1901, Summary of Intelligence, June 1900-January 1901, Section C, 22.12.1900.
- (36) This device seems to have been similar to the metal arm badge which Transvaal Africans in designated labour districts were compelled to wear under pass laws enacted by the Volksraad in 1895.
- (37) Army and Navy Gazette, 26.2.1901; Daily Graphic, 28.2.1901.
- (38) Cape Times, 20.2.1901; Diamond Fields Advertiser, 5.3.1901.

- (39) See, for example, Primitive Methodist Quarterly Review, 24, 1901, p. 578.
- (40) CO 48/551/5078, encl. in Hely-Hutchinson to Chamberlain (conf.), 20.2.1901, Memorandum by G. V. Fiddes, Imperial Secretary, 18.2.1901; Telegram from Sir A. Milner to the Secretary of State for War, relating to the reported outrage on Esau at Calvinia, CO 464, 1901.
- (41) Milner to Lyttelton Gell, 19.2.1901, quoted in Cecil Headlam (ed), The Milner Papers (South Africa 1899-1905), Vol. 2 (Cassell: London, 1933), pp. 233-4.
- (42) South African News, 18.9.1901.
- (43) See Stanley Trapido, "White Conflict and Non-White Participation in the Politics of the Cape of Good Hope, 1853-1910", University of London, PhD Thesis, 1970, pp. 416-7; "The Origin and Development of the African Political Organisation" in ICS, Collected Seminar Papers on the Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries, Vol. 1, No. 10, 1971, p. 11.
- (44) T. R. H. Davenport, The Afrikaner Bond: the History of a South African Political Party 1880-1911 (Oxford University Press: Cape Town, 1966), p. 257.
- (45) A. S. Skillicorn, "The Role of the Black Voter in the 1908 Cape General Election (with particular reference to the Eastern Cape)", University of Cape Town, BA Hons. thesis, 1975, pp. 7-8.
- (46) It would serve little purpose to catalogue these here: Barkly East, Aliwal North and Kuruman can be advanced as three obvious examples.
- (47) See, for instance, NAM, 6807/187, Intelligence Summaries relating to W. D. Fouché, 14.10.1901, and P. H. Kritzinger, 16.7.1900, encl. in W. H. Macdonald to P. Clark, 19.10.1901.
- (48) Trapido, "Liberalism in the Cape in the 19th and 20th centuries" in ICS, Collected Seminar Papers on the Societies of Southern Africa ..., Vol. 4, No. 17, 1974, p. 56.
- (49) In the 1898 election (and again in 1904), electoral struggles between formal parties obliged both English and Afrikaner blocs to campaign for the black vote. Fear of alienating important segments of the African vote inhibited open talk of tampering with franchise rights.
- (50) CA, Archive of the Resident Magistrate, Jamestown, 1/JTN B/1/I, Affidavit by Moses Sayedwa, 4.4.1902; Rhodes University, Cory Library for Historical Research, Ms. II/002, A. J. Kidwell, Notes on Jamestown and the Boer War, 1899-1901.
- (51) CA, 1/JTN, B/2/2, Affidavit by Silas, 13.8.1901.
- (52) The Oakleaf II (6), 1900, p. 187.
- (53) CA, Archive of the Resident Magistrate, Fraserburg, 1/FBG, 4/1/8/1/17, copy of statement by Commandant Olivier, concerning native affairs during the Boer occupation of Jamestown, encl. in D. Mackenzie to Civil Commissioner, 18.3.1901.
- (54) CA, 1/JTN, B/1/1, L. J. Brookes to Civil Commissioner, 22.9.1900.
- (55) In this connection, see for instance Bundy, op. cit., pp. 134, 147.
- (56) See, for instance, Diamond Fields Advertiser, 13.3.1900; Bandolier I (14), 1901, p. 14.
- (57) For example, CA, Archive of the Resident Magistrate, Aliwal North, 1/ALN, 4/9/8, Statement by Native, Ventvogel, 21.3.1901.
- (58) CA, Archive of the Resident Magistrate, Barkly East, 1/BKE, 1/1/2/2/2, Jacob Kehle to A. R. White, 29.1.1900.
- (59) Archive of the Grenadier Guards, AGG/R/432, M. Gurdon-Rebow, Letters 1899-1902, Gurdon-Rebow to Brigade Major, 16.1.1900.
- (60) CA, Archive of the Resident Magistrate, Douglas, 1/DGS, 1/4/1/2, Statement by Cornelius Olifant, 19.9.1900.
- (61) Diamond Fields Advertiser, 22.2.1901.
- (62) Light Bob Gazette 2 (9), 1901, p. 13.
- (63) CA, 1/DGS, 1/4/1/3, H. Hooper to Civil Commissioner, 17.3.1900.
- (64) Ibid., Abraham Nello to Civil Commissioner, 16.5.1900.

- (65) South African Library, Schreiner Papers, No. 192, W. P. Schreiner to Captain Hook, 7.1.1900; South African News, 1.5.1901.
- (66) NAM, 6112/190/7, W. H. Eustace to H. Blair, Conf. Memo. No. C14207, 11.12.1901.
- (67) Ibid., H. Cooper, Confidential Notebook, Entry for 13.12.1901. The reference is almost certainly to Jonathan Wild, a notorious eighteenth century English bounty hunter and scourge of poachers; for a pointer to his activities, see E. P. Thompson, Whigs and Hunters: the Origin of the Black Act (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1977), esp. p. 163. The name Pladkie is a probable mis-spelling of Plaatjie.
- (68) Bill Nasson, "Black Transport Workers and the British Army in the Cape Colony during the South African War", Paper delivered at the Research in Progress Conference, Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York, March 1980.