

## CHAPTER 5

Sarah G Millin, *The coming of the lord* (1928)

Laurens van der Post, *In a province* (1934)

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### BLACK RURAL UNREST IN THE TWENTIES

Although only two novels came to light which involve a sustained concern to represent black rural unrest in the twenties, they seemed to me of sufficient interest to warrant a chapter to themselves.<sup>1</sup> As Millin's *The coming of the lord* is set in the early twenties at the time of the Bulhoek Massacre, it receives initial treatment. The second novel, Van der Post's *In a province*, involves the more characteristic type of black unrest at the time. Although it was published only in 1934, I argue that it is preoccupied with interaction between the Communist Party and the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) in the late twenties, a period when Van der Post was still living in South Africa.

#### Contextualisation

As the concerns of the two novels analysed in this chapter pertain to the beginning and end of the twenties respectively, the greater part of the contextualising material is devoted to the earlier and later years of the decade. In terms of the overall structure of the chapter, the shift in time enables me to deal independently with each novel and contextual material relevant to it. For coherence' sake, how-

ever, a limited amount of bridging material is provided at the beginning of part 2, together with some retrospective cross-references to chapter 4, which also concerns this decade. In terms of overall chronology this chapter should be thought of as roughly in tandem with the previous chapter, not its successor.

## Part 1

My sources of information in this section are listed alphabetically below, together with the referencing abbreviation for each. In keeping with my previous usage, dates are not repeated in each reference since there is only one text listed for each author (or pair of authors).

Robert Edgar (1988) *Because they chose the plan of God* – [Er]

Wilfrid H Harrison (1947) *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa 1903–1947* – [Hr]

Edward Roux (1964 [1948]) *Time longer than rope: the black man's struggle for freedom in South Africa* – [Rx]

Jack and Ray Simons (1983) *Class and colour in South Africa, 1850–1950* – [Sn]

Peter Walshe (1987 [1970]) *The rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* – [Wsh]

Concerning blacks in general, it should be noted that their lives were marked by the harshest effects of the economic consequences of World War I; and that their poverty was especially rampant in the rural areas. The influenza epidemic in 1918 and the severe drought in 1919 aggravated this already extremely grim situation. Regarding longer-term effects upon their lives, two other events are worthy of note: the failure of the ANC delegation at the Versailles Peace Conference to reap the expected benefits of black participation in the war; and the founding of the ICU in Cape Town in 1919 by Clements Kadalie. In terms of black political awareness, the teachings of the American Negro leader Marcus Garvey (Africa for the Africans) were becoming more influential, especially in the light of the increasingly racist and nationalistic tendencies of Hertzog's government. By 1925 Garveyism had been adapted to fit in with the black South African experience (RD:323), although Communist radicals were opposed to it, preaching black and white worker solidarity instead (Wsh:171).

The first momentous situation of black rural unrest involves the rather eccentric religious community who called themselves Israelites. How exactly

their decisions and attitudes relate to blacks' general experience of frustration and restrictedness would not be easy to establish – though it is worth noting the ANC's view that the Israelite leader, Enoch Mgijima, attracted people who had been pushed off their land by the 1913 Land Act; also that a thousand people in Mgijima's region died in the influenza epidemic (Er:12). In many ways the Israelites seem to be distinctly *un*representative of blacks. Yet, however delusory their religious beliefs, what is significant historically is their implicit refusal to accept white rule, which makes them a prototype of a very different kind of South Africa in which blacks would have the right to participate directly in making decisions, free from the prescriptions of white rulers.

In April 1920 the Israelite community came to celebrate Passover at Ntabelanga (Bulhoek commonage), near Queenstown, as they had already done for several years. This time, however, they refused to move away again: their leader, Enoch Mgijima, claimed that Jehovah had ordered them to await there the approaching end of the world (Er:15). At this particular time many policemen had been sent to Port Elizabeth because of ICU labour protests (17). The government therefore ended up having to wait till December before an adequate police force was available to deal with the stubborn Israelites (17). Finally on 12 December a party of police arrived, causing anger amongst the Israelites because they had already heard how the police had treated demonstrators in Port Elizabeth (18). To make matters still more tense, a local farmer, John Mattushek, shot two Israelites, killing one of them, on 14 December (19). In an attempt to sort matters out, a group of 'moderate' blacks (including ANC representatives) met the Israelites but without success. A government delegation which met the Israelites on 17 December also failed to persuade them to move. (Incidentally the Israelites wished the government to send Smuts himself, but he refused because of his involvement in the campaign for the hotly contested election set to take place in February 1921 (21).)

When the election was over, the government resumed negotiations with the Israelites via the newly established Native Affairs Commission on 6 and 8 April followed by another final unsuccessful attempt on 11 May. Meanwhile 800 police from all over the country had already assembled in Queenstown. (The total number of Israelite males at Bulhoek was under 500 (Rx:136).) Accordingly, Colonel Truter, in charge of the police force, issued an ultimatum on 21 May: the Israelites were to leave Ntabelanga, or the police would move in to arrest Mgijima and demolish his followers' houses. The next day Mgijima sent out two leaders with a letter to Truter, asking whether he was planning to

destroy the community. Meanwhile Mgijima told his followers that they could leave before the police arrived, but no-one did so (Er:27). Having surveyed the process of apparent negotiation thus far, one finds a sobering alternative perspective in the comment made by the Socialist writer Wilfrid H Harrison (of whom more below):

[T]here was no investigation as to their sacred purpose. Neither did there appear to be any consideration of adopting other ways and means of compelling them to surrender. They could have starved them to it, or arrested them in groups, as the natives were unarmed. On the contrary they adopted all the tactics of war strategy, surrounding the camp, placing artillery and machine guns in position ready for necessity. (74)



*The aftermath of the Bulhoek Massacre*

The fateful day for the Israelites was 24 May, ironically Empire Day. The police had arrived at the Israelite camp on 23 May and were ready by 10:30 am. At about 11:30 am they asked the Israelites if they wanted one more discussion (Er:29). Police and Israelites had different accounts about which side commenced battle. In any case, commence it did and the unfortunate Israelites in their white robes were 'conspicuous targets' (32). At least 183 Israelites were killed; nearly 100 were wounded (Er:33). Only one policeman suffered a stab wound. The shooting, or more aptly the massacre, lasted less than twenty minutes. The police subsequently arrested 150 Israelites, including Enoch, who were all sent to the Queenstown jail while the wounded were taken to the Queenstown hospital (Er:33).

In jail till November, the 150 Israelites were charged with sedition in the Queenstown court and found guilty. Enoch and his brother Charles were sentenced to six years' hard labour; their followers to between twelve and eighteen months' hard labour. Charles died in prison, but Enoch was released in 1924 and died five years later. Fortunately the Israelites received tremendous support from black political and trade union groups. Both the ANC and the ICU helped the Israelite families with money, and these organisations reminded people that the Israelites were victims of harsh government policies and controls.

Few whites saw any need to protest; on the contrary many encouraged the government to take ruthless measures. However, four Socialists were arrested in Cape Town for issuing a leaflet headed 'Murder, murder, murder! the Bulhoek Massacre ... Christians slaughter their Christian brethren. Great Empire Day Celebration' (Sn:255). W H Harrison (whose comment on the massacre I have already referred to) was one of the four. In his book, *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa 1903-1947*, he gives an account of their protest meetings and of the court case. At the meetings Colonel Truter was described by Harrison's colleagues as a 'brutal assassin' (74). At the hearing:

... the Government took the opportunity to indemnify their action by bringing all those concerned from Bulhoek, also Colonel Truter of the S.A. Police. When I say 'those concerned' I mean all the Government authorities there, including the magistrate. All the implements of 'war' found on the settlement were also brought to show what might, or could, have been done by the Natives if they hadn't had their brains blown out to prevent them. (77)

Having listed the particular objects in the Israelites' pathetic armoury, Harrison goes on to compare the situation with that of Amritsar in India where the 'general

concerned was severely censured. There was no attempt at such with Colonel Truter, in fact the whole court proceedings was [sic] to justify his action' (77).<sup>2</sup>

Although most black leaders were sympathetic, some such as John Tengo Jabavu and his son, D D T Jabavu, disapproved of the Israelite movement, believing that the followers were 'primitives' and 'fanatics' (Er:36). John Tengo Jabavu regarded it as a political movement as much as a religious one, since it challenged the laws and practices of the white government and its supporters (37). Nonetheless, Bulhoek has become part of the long tradition of the African struggle for liberty and freedom, and it takes its place alongside other tragedies such as Sharpeville in 1960 and Langa in 1985.

## The novel

**S G Millin:** *The coming of the lord*  
(published 1928; set in 1921)

Millin has kept close to the historical situation; mostly she has just changed the names: from Israelites to Levites; from Enoch Mgiijima to Aaron; and from Bulhoek to Gibeon. However, her particular choice of the name 'Levites' is, I would argue, of special importance, since it enables her to give politically symbolic resonance to their plight: in Aaron's confrontation with white authorities he refers to the biblical injunction 'that thou forsake not the Levite as long as thou livest upon the earth' (195). The unifying factor in the novel appears to be the *effect* of the Levite community upon the whole town of Gibeon. When Hermia Duerdon's marriage is in grave crisis she thinks: 'Everything had gone wrong in Gibeon since the coming of the Levites' (159-160). Shortly afterwards the narrator echoes her feeling, though not quite with such a negative emphasis: 'Everything in Gibeon, it seemed, worked round in the end to the Levites' (184). My analysis will consider why Millin made the Levites so crucial in relation to her plot as a whole, and how deeply she was imbued with a sense of the potential significance of the event for the country at large.

Only a very small proportion of the novel is devoted to actual representation of the Levites and their doings, yet their presence is felt on virtually every page. Millin sustains a fairly dispassionate attitude towards Aaron and his followers. Some irony enters into her mentioning that the Levites had a preference for the Old Testament over the New, but her reason ('They found it humanly more satisfying' (28-29)) does not suggest malice or hypocrisy on their part. She registers Aaron's madness and fanaticism but also his utter conviction:

[W]hatever their [ie the Levites'] Aaron desired for his followers he could find in the Bible. And he liked what it said ... He was a holier man than his religious instructors, who accommodated the Word to their needs. Aaron accommodated his needs to the Word. (183)

Perhaps what is more telling is Aaron's sense of being an equal to the whites: when he is visited by the magistrate, Mr Kneale, and the Chief of Police, the narrator observes: 'It was the first time ever a Kaffir had seated himself in the presence of either of these two white men' (191).<sup>3</sup>

At the very beginning of the novel Millin discloses its historical basis: the name Gibeon was chosen by the original trekker leader to commemorate his fictionalised version of what the local tribe had declared: 'We are the servants of the white lords' (2). Now, in the present of the novel, what both Dutch (sic) and English 'chiefly felt was the necessity of making common cause against the arising kaffir' (31). When the apparent threat posed by the Levites comes to be magnified in the eyes of the Gibeonites, the narrator's viewpoint becomes yet more explicit: '[T]here were nearly as many people in Gibeon of English as of Dutch descent, but on the subject of colour they thought alike ... they felt there were certain things nature had ordained for the dark-skinned' (12). Millin's irony separates her from such a belief, despite her own race phobia, which seems so prominent in novels such as *God's stepchildren*.

Furthermore her handling of Arnold Duerdon, the solicitor who has no clients, and his Vigilant group (set up to curb the Levite menace) reveals that she does not regard the Levites as a danger. Indeed Duerdon's racism is shown to be a mark of his immaturity, while his Vigilant leadership acts as a prop for a very insecure sense of manhood (the family depends on his wife as breadwinner). When Arnold confronts Aaron about his plan for the Seventh year, Arnold feels constrained to keep the upper hand at all costs: '[A] white man could not take defeat at the hands of a black man with equanimity' (72). Nevertheless, through the balancing kind of realism so characteristic of this novel, Millin makes us aware not only of Duerdon's severe limitations, but also of his better self: in the eyes of his daughter, Naomi, he is 'the greatest man on earth' (250).

Arnold's wife, Hermia, is handled with detachment, but her sensitivity and artistic talent mark her out as close to Millin's own consciousness. Opposed to the Vigilants, she sagely observes that 'they will call into existence what they fear' (53). For such tendencies she despises Gibeon, yet acknowledges that it 'was too strong for her' (160). Of particular concern to Millin in the predicament of this character is her need for male understanding – indeed

this aspect of the plot might well have served as the substance of an entire novel.<sup>4</sup>

The particular man who seems able to provide Hermia with the sort of spiritual and emotional companionship she craves is Saul Nathan, returned son of the Jewish shopkeeper, whose skill and dedication as a doctor become the culminating feature of the plot.<sup>5</sup> Although he is destined for a kind of heroic ending in the novel, Millin is at pains to prevent him from appearing in any way ideal. Only because he feels that his father and Hermia are against the Vigilants does he decide not to join. He is governed chiefly by a sense of being unwanted (103), and only desperate loneliness leads him to enter into friendship with Tetyana, the black doctor in Gibeon, as well as with Hermia. Furthermore, when he visits the Levite community he is jealous of their general state of idleness. Precisely because he is so ordinary and unpretentious, Millin inclines us to feel that his judgement is sound and reliable. Thus, when he perceives Aaron as 'a politician rather than a religious leader' (115), the cue seems to be Millin's, and needs to be related to the earlier point I have stressed about Aaron's insistence on being treated as an equal.

At this point I must turn to the individual who most of all comes to feel unwanted and rejected in Gibeon, and whose actions seem most dramatically to be shaped by the presence of the Levites: Dr Diethold, the German widower doctor, and only visitor of Old Nathan. Although opposed to the Vigilants in principle, his jealousy of Saul and Dr Tetyana, who have taken away his last consulting patients, leads him paradoxically to wish to be leagued with the Vigilants against both of them (129). Nevertheless he sustains his public opposition, telling the Vigilants to 'go to the devil' (150). This leads inevitably to a violent clash with Duerdon, who assaults the doctor on being told with vengeful relish that his wife and Saul are not to be trusted. Now Diethold feels that he is the 'only stranger, only outcast' (215), almost as if – victim of Vigilant brutality – he has become a quasi-Levite. Bitterly nurturing a sense of injustice, he indulges in private schemes of vengeance (261). When his attempts to put these into action are foiled, however, he comes to feel that he has been justly rejected and makes a suicide attempt. Although even this most desperate of all his plans also turns out to be a failure, it leads him paradoxically to a complete change of heart as if 'he had flung himself into hell and been thrown out to try life again' (287–288). His 'redemption' is a major preoccupation of Millin in the novel, only less absorbing than her concern with Hermia's needs.

In terms of the plot, however, Diethold's revelation to Arnold about his wife's presumed relationship with Saul (it is not in fact adulterous) leads to the

second major violent incident in the novel when Arnold tries to throw Saul out of his house, and Saul, wishing to retaliate with most uncharacteristic fury, is injured by breaking the glass of the intervening door. As a consequence Saul begins to despise himself doubly, both in himself and with the added sense of Duerdon's contempt (246). It also needs to be pointed out that Saul has been hurt by Dr Tetyana's jealousy of his relationship with Hermia. (Tetyana, meanwhile, has come to be extremely dependent on his friendship with Saul because, as a black doctor, in this rabidly biased community he is treated as a scapegoat in relation to the Levites' obstinacy.) Saul's profound sense of being unwanted is thus all the more reinforced. Here Millin has him poised, clearly needing some large action to provide a basis for self-esteem and readiness to forgive himself.

That opportunity is provided by the violence which the police unleash against the Levites. Saul had gone to the Levites' camp with Dr Tetyana the previous night, but stayed to treat the maimed and injured since he refused to leave Tetyana alone on the Heights. Some of Millin's latent cynical pessimism is present even in this act of bravery and nobility: she emphasises that Saul's actions are not carried out 'in a holy passion for mankind – since it was not in humans to love one another; but in a terrible passion for duty – because it was in them to love what was right' (302). Her refusal to sentimentalise Saul is present in the last moments of his life – there is realism and irony in his self-questioning: '[H]ow could it happen that he was involved in this mad, black waiting for the coming of the Lord' (297). We guess that Saul's decision is also partly motivated by a wish to compensate Tetyana for having caused him pain through his friendship with Hermia. Previously, in ironic counterpoint to Aaron's insistence on equality with whites, we are told that Tetyana did not feel equal to Saul, and that 'neither of them could forget the colour of their skins' (113).

Saul's death as a consequence of being caught up in the ensuing massacre allows Millin to offer a humanist fulfilment of the Levites' expectation: through Saul's sense of duty, the Lord does, in a sense, come to them. In one of the cleverest and most affecting ironies of the novel, this vision of implications is explicitly attributed, not to the narrator, but to Old Nathan. Lest we credit him with too great a shift in enlightenment, however, soon afterwards the narrator reveals the father's deep regret that Saul's death 'had been for black savages'.

The various elements of the plot of *The coming of the lord* have been combined intricately and ingeniously to reinforce a concern with rejected individuals and a rejected group.<sup>6</sup> Finally, however, one has to ask whether Millin

was justified in using the Levites for this purpose. Although her exploration of the way in which they come to dominate the consciousness of the people of Gibeon raises pertinent questions about the racist foundations of South African society, that concern tends to be dissipated by her assemblage and interweaving of parallel cases of rejection. Furthermore, her hinted advocacy of the morality of duty through Saul's self-sacrificing final hours sidesteps rather than confronts the crucial issue of how to begin to undo the practice of injustice and domination underpinned by insidious prejudice.<sup>7</sup>

## Contextualisation: part 2

The next section of contextualisation for this chapter is related to the concerns of Van der Post's *In a province*, and thus the emphasis shifts towards the later twenties. At this stage a few reminders of interim dates will be useful: 1922 – the Rand Revolt occurred (chapter 3); 1923 – the Nationalists and Labourites formed a parliamentary pact (chapter 4); 1924 – The Nationalist/Labour coalition won the general election on the strength of the white backlash in the wake of the Rand Revolt, and were to remain in power for the next eight years (chapter 4). The material that follows focuses mainly on the activities of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and the ANC in relation to rural blacks, together with the consequences of these activities.

Below are listed in alphabetical order my sources of information for this section, together with the abbreviation for each used in references:

Helen Bradford (1988) *A taste of freedom: the ICU in rural South Africa, 1924–1930* – [Bd]

Robert A Hill and Gregory A Pirio (1987) 'Africa for the Africans': the Garvey movement in South Africa, 1920–1940'. In Marks, S and S Trappido (eds). *The politics of race, class and nationalism in twentieth century South Africa* – [HI-Po]

Sheridan Johns (1995) *Raising the red flag; the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa 1914–1932* – [Js]

D Omer-Cooper (1987) *History of Southern Africa* – [OC]

Paul Rich (1990) 'Laurens van der Post, the noble savage and the romantic image of Africa'. Paper given at the Conference on 'Literature in Another South Africa', Oxford – [Rich]

Edward Roux (1964 [1948]) *Time longer than rope: the black man's struggle for freedom in South Africa* – [Rx]

Christopher Saunders (ed) (1994) *The Reader's Digest illustrated history of South Africa* – [RD]

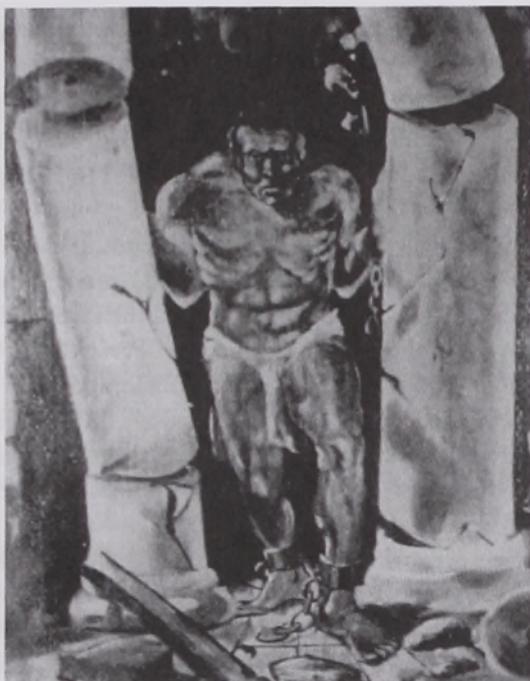
Jack and Ray Simons (1983) *Class and colour in South Africa, 1850–1950* – [Sn]

Peter Walshe (1987 [1970]) *The rise of African nationalism in South Africa* – [Wsh]

The ICU enjoyed its most vigorous period of growth between 1924 and 1927, when its influence became even greater than that of the ANC (Wsh:171). Its very success, especially in rural areas where the suffering of black workers was most acute, was part of the reason for the whites' growing sense of alarm, a response that led ultimately to the Hertzog/Labour victory of 1929 (the 'Black Manifesto' election). On the other hand, in the latter part of this period there was widespread antagonism on the part of black political groups to Hertzog's segregation programme: his proposed 'Native Bills' of 1926 through which



*The ICU executive in 1925. left to right (standing) are Thomas Mbeki, Jimmy la Guma, and John Gomas. Seated are Clements Kadalie and George Chapman*



*Painting of Samson breaking his chains. In the ICU Hall, Johannesburg, in the 1930s*

he sought to abolish the Cape black's right to vote on a common roll; to appoint a 'native Council' in an advisory capacity; and to set aside additional land for the black reserves (OC:172).

The ICU's potential force was first manifested in 1925 when 23 000 supporters staged a work stayaway in Bloemfontein. In the following two years it grew even stronger through the opening of 43 branches in the Orange Free state, the Transvaal and Natal with a largely rural membership.<sup>8</sup> (In the Cape, however, where the ICU had started, membership was beginning to dwindle (RD:320).) At this stage workers used to open and close meetings by singing the Communist anthem, the 'Red Flag' (321). European Marxists had indeed maintained contact with the ICU since its formation in 1919, and members of the Internationalist Socialist League had assisted with the ICU constitution (Wsh:171). In fact, by 1926 the Communist group within the ICU had a disproportionate influence in the National Executive. Bitterly opposed to Kadalie's increasing contacts with members of the Joint Councils of Europeans and Africans (established by liberal whites), and his tendency to be influenced by British labour reform policy (Wsh:172), they wanted a re-organisation of the

ICU, and also threatened to expose Kadalie's apparent misuse of funds (Wsh:172).

At an executive meeting of the ICU in December 1926, James La Guma (secretary of the ANC branch in Cape Town) announced his determination to attend the Brussels Anti-Imperialism Conference of the League Against Colonial Oppression. Kadalie, seeing this as in conflict with ICU discipline, and likely to interfere with his own intention of attending the Amsterdam Conference of the International Federation of Trade Unions (Wsh:172), attacked the CPSA (Sn: 354). The ICU National Council then decided that none of its officials could be a member of the Communist Party (Sn:354). At this stage three CPSA members, James La Guma, E J Khaile, and John Gomas, refused to resign and were expelled from the ICU (Sn:354). In relation to this conflict the Simonses note that all CP members were expected to join a trade union, and that the dual membership of the few Communists who held key positions in the ICU was normal in the labour and national movement. They also point out that no union, except the ICU, ever banned Communists or excluded them from office (355). It needs to be remembered also that the black membership of the CP in 1926 'had jumped from 200 to a massive 1600 out of a total of 1750 members' (RD:325). Clearly the ICU had grounds to feel threatened by the potentially dominating influence of the CPSA. Nevertheless, as Helen Bradford points out, 'Communists continued to provide the ICU with organisational and ideological inputs and some senior ICU officials still considered themselves socialists' (114). Also, the expulsion of Communists from the ICU 'confronted the CPSA with a new tactical challenge in their work among blacks' (Js:187), and they sought in every possible way to meet this challenge.

James La Guma did eventually attend the Anti-Imperialism Conference in Brussels in February 1927, and from there went on to Moscow (see below). Also present was Josiah Gumede, Natal ANC President and Vice-President of National Congress (Wsh:174). Gumede, while emphasising that he was not a Communist himself, paid tribute at the Conference to the Communists whom he saw as offering 'fresh new visions' (174):

We have nothing; and can only tell each other sad stories of our slavery. We have waited long for a liberator, but we do not know where to find him ... I am happy to say ... that there are Communists also in South Africa. I myself am not one, but it is my experience that the Communist party is the only party that stands behind us and from which we can expect something. (Sn:353)

The Tenth Anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in Moscow on October 1927 was attended by Josiah Gumede as well as James La Guma (Sn:394-395), who returned with a 'proposed programme based on African majority rule' (RD:325). Meanwhile Kadalie toured Europe for five months, the first African to represent his people in the Socialist and Trade Union movement of Western Europe (Sn:362), and he returned with plans to transform the ICU according to British and Western European trade union models (Js:189). Kadalie's predicament was that he was regarded as Communist by big employers of labour and government in South Africa, while looked on as bourgeois by the Communists themselves (359).

As the ICU shifted from town to country, its emphasis switched from trade unionism to militant nationalism (RD:321). Tens of thousands of blacks responded to calls for mobilisation, and many recruits actually thought the ICU would give them farms and cattle (322). Not surprisingly too, there were numerous farm strikes, but these inevitably aroused farmers' reprisals. The state response to African unrest (as already reported in chapter 4) was to pass the Native Administration Act in September 1927 which gave the Governor-General broad powers (327), and provided for compulsory segregation in 26 urban areas. Section 29 in particular engendered great enthusiasm in parliament; it created the 'crime of "acting with intent to promote any feeling of hostility between Natives and Europeans"' (Sn:346).

The Natal campaign of the ICU was spearheaded by George Champion (Natal Provincial Secretary for the Union). Between 1925 and 1927 he had successfully built his power-base into the mainstay of the national ICU (RD:321). Consequently, by the end of 1927 there were more than 100 ICU branches with a claimed membership of more than 100 000 (320).<sup>9</sup> Spurred by this impressive development, Kadalie applied for membership of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in December 1927, but in January the following year the application was rejected: Andrews and Stuart 'having conceded Kadalie's case in principle ... rejected it on grounds of expediency' (Sn:370). Thus, comment the Simonses indignantly, the 'two most powerful leaders in the movement, and also the most radical, rejected inter-racial solidarity at a crucial stage' (370).

Unfortunately also, greater tension had arisen between the 'moderate' and 'radical' wings of the ICU (RD:322). In particular, Kadalie and Champion fell out as the Natal leader's success was clearly a threat to Kadalie (322). ICU officials generally were not keen on strikes. The Simonses point out that 'the leaders never rose to the challenge of the workers' militancy' (Sn:363), and claim that Kadalie's British Socialist friends were largely to blame for

Kadalie's and other leaders' failure in this regard (363). Thus, although the ICU had acquired a reputation as an 'extremely radical, even revolutionary force' (364), it discarded 'militant nationalism' for formal trade unionism (RD:322). As Walshe puts it: 'The ICU refused to accept the Communist method of revolution and hesitated to confront white power with persistent strike action' (173). Farmers, meanwhile, harassed ICU members and formed anti-ICU leagues (Sn:367). A particular case occurred in March 1928 when Greytown farmers smashed up the local ICU office and set fire to union papers before chasing several thousand union members into the hills (RD:323; cf Sn:367).

Champion was suspended from office at the ICU Bloemfontein Conference in April 1928 after accusations about his handling of finances (he had been Acting National Secretary during Kadalie's absence (Sn:366)). He then formed a rival organisation, the ICU Yase Natal (368). The rapid growth of the ICU 'had, however, exceeded its organisational capacity with the result that, by 1928, a rapid decline set in' (Wsh:193).

Meanwhile the Communists were beginning to intervene more actively in black politics. The Communist International induced the local party to accept the slogan and analysis of 'an independent South African Native Republic' (first mooted by James La Guma on his return from Moscow) 'as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' Government, with full protection and equal rights for all national minorities' (Wsh:176-177). The CPSA accordingly began a programme of mobilising rural Africans. This was to be achieved, at least partly, through participation in the ANC which supported the 'native' republic policy. However, some South African Communists opposed the proposal because of what was regarded as the 'extreme backwardness and widespread apathy of rural Africans' (RD:325); while others regarded it as in direct contradiction with the 'non-racial proletarian solidarity' which they had sought to promote as CPSA policy (Js:201).

In June 1929 came Hertzog's 'Black Manifesto' election success, giving him an overall majority of seats in parliament though not yet the two-thirds majority he required for the passing of his segregation legislation.

At this stage (exact dates are not provided in any of the texts I consulted) the ANC, in support of the Communist 'native' republic ideal, also began organising in the Western Cape rural areas. Under its president, James Thaele, a disciple of Garvey, this wing of the ANC had become virtually synonymous with the ICU. Elliot Tonjeni and Bransby Ndobe, two young and militant leaders, co-operated closely with the CPSA.<sup>10</sup> In fact *Umsebenzi* (the CPSA publication, later to be called *The South African Worker*) became to all intents

and purposes the organ of the Congress. Wherever they went throughout the country districts of the Western Cape, Tonjeni, Ndobe and their supporters took with them copies of the Communist paper and sold them at meetings (Rx:232). However, 'farmers, enraged by Ndobe's "agitation" among their workers, kicked him out of both Swellendam and Robertson' (RD:327). Ndobe and Tonjeni, determined for the sake of their campaign to resist this kind of opposition, then scheduled another ANC meeting for Robertson. The dramatic result was a violent clash between ANC supporters and white opponents in which more than 1 000 whites attacked a crowd of 200 ANC supporters, leading to several injuries.<sup>11</sup>

These clashes had three major effects:

- The dominant conservative faction of the ANC, perturbed by the violence, decided to expel the 'radicals' of the Western Cape branch, including Thaele's own brother, Kennon (whose first name may well have struck a chord with Van der Post, as he uses it for the main black character of *In a province*).
- Appealing for a united front against repressive legislation and police raids in August 1929, the CPSA arranged the first successful merging of working-class and national radicals in the liberation movement, entitled the League of African Rights. At its conference on 15 December the League planned to collect 1 000 000 signatures on a petition for civic rights (which was widely supported); and to organise anti-pass demonstrations on 16 December (Sn:418). These anti-pass demonstrations were ultimately held under the joint auspices of the League, the ICU and the CPSA, but not the ANC. Gumede, incidentally, not only joined the League but became its figurehead and president (Wsh:177). The League's special song was 'Mayibuye i Africa' (sung to the tune of 'Clementine') (Sn:418). Walshe notes how it began to seem 'quite possible that the League would develop into a mass organisation, outflanking Congress and picking up the remnants of the ICU'. As it turned out, however, this 'threat did not materialise as Moscow suddenly reversed its policy, insisting on the abandonment of the movement' (Wsh:178).
- Smuts called for measures to suppress Communism (Sn:418); he was of course especially disturbed by the new slogan of an 'independent native republic' (Wsh:220). The government were also alarmed at the rapid growth of the ICU, the launching of the League of African Rights, and the growth of ANC agitation in the Western Cape (220).

Pirow's solution as Minister of Justice, in order to legislate Communism out of existence, was the Riotous Assemblies Amendment Bill. It was a severe follow-up to the earlier state response to black unrest embodied in the Natives Administration Act of 1927, giving the Minister dictatorial powers to prohibit meetings and banish persons from specified areas (Sn:418). Its manifest aim was to prevent all opportunities for criticism of impending legislation against the black masses. However, clamour against the Riotous Assemblies Amendment Bill led to a mass protest meeting in Johannesburg on 10 November 1929 addressed by ANC, ICU and CPSA speakers (419). Pirow struck back in Durban on 14 November when 700 policemen descended in a tax-collecting raid on black compounds at 3:30 am (420). In support of this raid, Pirow claimed to have definite proof that the CP, ANC, ICU and the League of African Rights were in correspondence with the Communist International (420–421). Hopes for a united front amongst black political organisations thus faded under the pressure of anti-Communist propaganda and the Comintern's instruction to dissolve the League (425–426).

Nevertheless, the league 'survived long enough to provide the immediate cause for the resignation of Gumede's ANC Executive in January 1930' (in protest against the close ties of the president, Josiah Gumede, with the CPSA) (Wsh:178). Gumede had urged the ANC to reinstate the expelled Communists. These, meanwhile, formed their own independent ANC, which, together with their CPSA allies, frequently demanded universal free education, full franchise rights and the return of land. When the Riotous Assemblies Amendment Act was passed in February 1930, the level of state repression increased rapidly, and there was also great turmoil in the ANC because of its CPSA links. Walshe comments helpfully on the nature of the internal ANC conflict:

Those who opposed Gumede represented the established trends in ANC ideology. Congress alone was to be the central co-ordinating body for national expression. Freedom, which meant equality of opportunity and not African domination as the predominant political power in a Native republic, was to be achieved by consultation and the growth of a more enlightened public opinion rather than by African political assertion and mass action. (178)

Roux gives a detailed account of a shooting which took place in Worcester on 4 May 1930, and which, like the Robertson debacle, may well have been prominent in Van der Post's mind when he came to write *In a province*. This incident which

... resulted in the deaths of five non-Europeans, was the subject of a magisterial inquiry, during which evidence was given not only by the police, but by Congress leaders ... Tonjeni, giving evidence, said that armed white civilians had participated with the police in a beer raid on April 5. A black man had been killed. On Sunday, May 4, the news was spread that a Native had been seen at the Congress meeting carrying a rifle. This was enough to create a furore among the white population. [Police who remained at the meeting after the arrest of the man – who had no rifle when taken – ] were attacked by members of the crowd, who were incensed at this summary arrest of one of their number ... the police then committed the inexcusable provocation of marching into the Native quarter with fixed bayonets. Of course they were attacked. They opened fire and five Natives were killed. (234)

Subsequently, reports Roux, 'a hue and cry developed among the white citizens of Worcester. Armed civilians patrolled the streets' (235).

The pass-burning campaign, launched by the CPSA (the league having meanwhile disbanded), was to have begun on 16 December 1930. Because of the government's ban in terms of the Riotous Assemblies Amendment Act, and because the ANC and ICU refused to participate, the CPSA conducted the campaign alone. Durban had the most successful demonstration in terms of numbers of passes burnt (5 000), but the defiant procession ended in a violent clash between policemen and marchers in which the black CPSA leader and three other blacks were killed. Walshe points to the resulting increase of tension between Congress and the CPSA since 'Congress moderates were entrenched in their reliance on consultation and resolutions', while in the Communists' view, 'when the moderates failed to back mass action and civil disobedience they were ... avoiding organised opposition as scandalous and revolutionary' (179).

Another piece of information of possible importance for this exploration is that Max Gordon, a Trotskyite, was actively involved in the Western Cape in the early 1930s, organising trade unions before moving to the Witwatersrand (Rch:13). More specific information about Gordon's Cape activities, in particular whether his involvement included the ICU (despite its 1926 stand against officials with Communist membership), I have not been able to track down. This is partly because Helen Bradford's study of the ICU has 1930 as its cut-off point, and also because Baruch Hirson concentrates on Gordon's Johannesburg involvement with trade union organisations from 1935 to 1942.<sup>12</sup>

Frederic Carpenter, whose book is the first full-length study of Van der Post, reports the novelist's recollection that in the Depression era most of his friends were Communists (1969:43). Whether Gordon was amongst this circle of friends, or whether another person altogether is the original of Burgess, the Communist trade union organiser in the novel, remains to be determined.<sup>13</sup>

It has also proved difficult to find relevant information after 1930 itself but perhaps there are two explanations: the CPSA, ANC and ICU were all in decline between 1930 and 1935, largely, I presume, on account of ruthless state repression; and although *In a province* was published only in 1934, it seems to be responding to events of the late twenties and the year 1930 itself. Between 1928 and 1929 Van der Post had been living in London. In 1930 he joined his friend Desmond Young as assistant leader writer of the *Cape Times*, a job that he maintained for fourteen months till he returned to England. *In a province* was actually written in 1933 during a period of temporary seclusion in France. Certainly there seem to be no incidents between 1930 and 1933 which are as close to the culminating episode of *In a province* as the Robertson and Worcester events. Prior to that clash there was clearly much to alarm whites, 'whether it was Garveyite or Communist calls for a "native republic"; or the millennial expectations of [the Israelites]; or whether it was the organisational expansion of the ICU' (RD:327).

## The novel

### Van der Post: *In a province*

(published 1934; set in the late twenties)

Laurens van der Post's first novel, *In a province*, was published in 1934, eight years after *Turbott Wolfe*. Yet in his introduction to the 1965 edition of Plomer's novel ('The *Turbott Wolfe* affair') he makes no mention of his own, although its concerns are similar in a number of respects. The relationship between Van Der Post's novel and the aspects of *Turbott Wolfe* that he singles out for praise in his Introduction are, however, of crucial importance for my purposes.

First I propose to highlight what Van der Post regards with such favour. To him and some of his generation, he claims, *Turbott Wolfe* was a 'book of revelation', suddenly making visible 'aspects of reality hitherto invisible' (139). Plomer took on, 'for the first time in our literature', 'the whole of South African life' (148); and indeed, Van der Post does not believe his friend 'ever saw farther or more deeply than he did then' (159). Admitting the occa-

sional presence of signs of the author's hurt feelings rather than his writing skill in *Turbott Wolfe*, Van der Post nevertheless deems it an 'exceptionally unbiased, rounded, and unsentimental view of reality' (157), one which has 'changed the course of our imagination in South Africa' (162). Hostile critics of the work are accordingly compared with Van der Post's childhood memories of captured baboons who would smash mirrors in the conviction that a dirty trick was being played on them.

The particular feature of *Turbott Wolfe* that seems to have been of overriding importance for Van der Post is what he sees as its Jungian-type preoccupation with racism as the 'denial of [man's] own other self' (154). For whites, blacks are the image of what is natural but rejected in themselves (155). Since one of the highly predictable patterns of behaviour in South Africa is therefore that blacks are denied white love (161), Van der Post is particularly gratified by a work in which he finds this sad situation overturned, allowing the 'idiom and beauty of another race to be discovered' (157).

A subsidiary element of interest in Plomer's novel (at least in terms of the space allowed it in Van der Post's Introduction) is what he refers to as Plomer's prophetic sense of the 'immense potential of Russian influence in Africa' (160).<sup>14</sup> This aspect is indeed allowed no more than a few sentences at the end of a long paragraph. Yet I wish to suggest that the predominant interest in Communism in Van der Post's novel is the main clue to understanding its relationship to *Turbott Wolfe*.

At this stage a brief plot summary of *In a province* (generally less well known than that of *Turbott Wolfe*) will enable me to proceed more efficiently with discussion of significant contrasts between the two novels. Book I begins with the serious illness (whether spiritual or emotional, one cannot be sure at first) of the protagonist, Van Bredepoel, and the necessity for him to be sent to recuperate in the country. The rest of book I involves a return to the past to describe the farm childhood and youth of Van Bredepoel with his aunt and uncle, and to initiate his relationship with Kenon Badiakgotla, who has also left his home to work in Port Benjamin (Cape Town). This first book culminates in Kenon's unfair trial and imprisonment after being the only one of a group caught in a brothel, and Van Bredepoel's futile subsequent attempt to assist him. Book II begins after Kenon's return to his tribe, the Bambuxosa. Remembering that the change in Kenon was attributed to the influence of agitators, Van Bredepoel attends an address by the so-called doctor given in one of the town squares, under the auspices of what is referred to as the African Workers' Union. When a racist incident on a bus brings Van Bredepoel into

contact with Burgess, a young Communist who happens to be the secretary of this union, opportunities arise for debate about the merits of Communism. The riot that occurs when the Doctor is assassinated at a later public meeting not only intensifies the already divergent political views of Burgess and Van Bredepoel, but causes the protagonist to have a nervous breakdown. Book III begins where the prelude to book I ended, with Van Bredepoel's convalescence in Paulstad (a country town near his original farm home). Here by chance he meets Kenon, now a drug-addicted revolutionary, and determines to help him wholeheartedly in whatever way he can. Here too, however, he once again meets Burgess, who has come to Paulstad to address a black political rally on a significant historical date—6 November (presumably a fictional substitute for 16 December). Burgess will not accede to Van Bredepoel's pleas to avoid this gathering because of the extreme likelihood of racial violence (as a result of machinations by the local CID major). In the confrontation between black protesters led by Kenon, and fascist whites, which Van Bredepoel can do nothing to prevent, Kenon and the heroic chief of the local police are killed, while Burgess is seriously wounded. When Van Bredepoel later tries to help Burgess escape lynching, Van Bredepoel himself is killed in an ambush by a white commando.

Except for descriptions of the protagonist's dream (book II, chapter IV) and his state of delirium (book II, chapter V), *In a province* employs the conventions of realism. My impression is that the choice of medium is intended as a deliberate contrast to *Turbott Wolfe*, almost as if Van der Post found it necessary to build a sense of stability and reliability into the fibre of the novel as a way of offsetting the precarious, angst-filled state of the protagonist, and the tense volatility of his society. Gray sees the sabotaging of realism as part of Plomer's satire of that society (1980:197), while Lockett in her later article notes the close parallels between the form and the protagonist's consciousness, especially the 'disjunctions between appearance and reality' to be found in it (1987:33). Furthermore Plomer seems to have been satisfied with an ironic exposure of the type of liberalism represented by Wolfe without offering, as Stephen Watson notes, an 'alternative intellectual mode' (1980:182). Van der Post's own comment on Wolfe suggests an implicit recognition of this feature of the novel:

He can recognise what is sterile and destructive in his civilised values, he can be stirred by the beauty of Africa, yet he is just as incapable of rejecting the one as committing himself to the other. (158)

More will be said later about the implications of Wolfe and Van der Post in relation to the concept of the 'beauty of Africa'; here I need merely note that embedded in Van der Post's eulogising of Plomer's novel is the germ of the critique that emerges in *In a province*, if one extends the above comment from character to novelist.

When one considers the level of mass violence that Van der Post represents as capable of erupting easily in the country, it is understandable that, for him, the finding of a solution is more imperative than it was for Plomer. One might indeed see the use of realism as an all-embracing analogy for the sense of serenity and stability captured in the seventeenth-century painting by De Groot in Van Bredepoel's farm homestead:

There in that picture, van Bredepoel thought, was everything the life around him lacked: faith, security, calm, contentment. He was convinced that the picture did not owe these qualities to the painter, who had been, as Johan's aunt was so fond of pointing out, a wild disorderly fellow. (122)

Whereas Plomer's satire could afford to be open-ended, the upheaval in Van der Post's society might well have made him feel that it was not enough to expose a false form of liberalism or merely to hint at a more adequate one (as Lockett suggests is the case in Plomer's novel (1987:33)). Carpenter comments that *In a province* deals 'not only with the racial problems of South Africa, but also with the destructive nature of the Communist exploitation of those problems' (1969:41), and shows 'how difficult it is for any South African, who disagreed strongly with the segregationist policies of the government, to avoid the seductions of communism'.<sup>15</sup> Fear of the Burgess type of solution based on collective political action seems to have been the factor which prompted Van der Post beyond resistance to Marxism to an explicitly affirmative standpoint which would involve the re-vindication of what he would regard as an authentic liberal position. That the outcome for the liberal protagonist should turn out to be tragic would not, in terms of Van der Post's presumed strategy, undermine Van Bredepoel's viewpoint, but make it more persuasively realistic and more emotionally compelling.

Friston, the new missionary in *Turbott Wolfe*, who turns out to be a Bolshevik agent, is a kind of 'double' of Wolfe. His frenzied self-questioning:

Friston? Who's Friston? Which Friston are you talking to?

Mr Friston, you mean. And which Mr Friston, I ask you? because I want to know. Do you mean the Reverend Rupert Friston, who

wears out his knees in ineffectual prayer? Or do you mean Friston that is possessed with a devil? (87),

and his later admission, 'It is very inconvenient when you don't know who you are, or whether you are one person or two' (95), is surely intended to alert the reader to the idea of a double, and to Wolfe's lack of awareness of how divided his consciousness is. Friston's crazed outburst in which he informs Wolfe:

Your god's Fear. So is mine. But wait till you see 'HORROR', my child, written on the sun. (88)

is, I assume, one of the crucial passages whereby Plomer indicates to the reader how much we are to mistrust Wolfe's overt and often complacent judgements. Of course Wolfe's conclusion that Friston must be a 'raving lunatic' (88) reveals how far he is from self-insight in response to these haunting and perplexing messages. The fear of which Friston speaks is nevertheless there, and is the presumed cause of Wolfe's departure, sense of failure, and terminal illness, which I take to be symbolic representations of Plomer's sardonic view of the state, and the typical role, of liberal consciousness in South Africa.

In Van der Post's novel it seems at first that Burgess is intended to have a similar role as Van Bredepoel's double, his more effectual self; and also as his saviour, the one who is to rescue him from his state of extreme existential doubt (a condition on which the epigraph to book II focuses).<sup>16</sup> Their agitated conversation immediately after the riot in Port Benjamin suggests vividly what Burgess might do for the young Afrikaner:

[Burgess] 'Your way of living distresses me a great deal. I've never known anyone with such good instincts as yours, or do as little about them as you do. No sooner do you have a good impulse than you allow some doubt to cancel it out ...'

[Van Bredepoel] 'You're quite sure that something is wrong with the world and that you can make it better, so you can go straight ahead. But I, you see, I don't quite know what I have to do with it all. I can't see myself in relation to it all. I feel such an anachronism, anyway ...' (159)

In the discussion between these two men before the Paulstad protest meeting, Van der Post begins to weigh the scales more obviously against Burgess when he makes him use predictable Marxist rhetoric:

Don't you think you're taking bloodshed too seriously? Don't you think you take the life of the individual too seriously? Don't you think that the interests of the whole are far more important than the interests of the units? Surely it's a simple question of social mathematics, and nothing more. (221)

Burgess's virtual repetition, at this stage, of his original perception of Van Bredepoel, 'All your life you've been sitting on your little liberal fence, with your fears on either side' (223), is not given the weight, in terms of the shaping of the scene as a whole, of Van Bredepoel's unusually firm and measured judgement:

I think you're terribly wrong. You're playing with forces you neither understand nor can ultimately control. You've no right to play with things that are potentially out of your control, even in the name of truth and justice. I refuse to help you even as a spectator; I won't add one more cell to that mass-mind you'll have before you tomorrow. (224)

With the force of the epigraph to book III hanging over the reader's head,<sup>17</sup> we are left in no doubt about which side of the fence we should keep on, or move to. Thus, in the final confrontation between Burgess and Van Bredepoel after the Paulstad riot, the voice of what is truth for Van der Post emerges clearly through Van Bredepoel in his lengthy attack on the idea of blaming the 'system' for social injustice (242–243). The doom-laden imagery of the hours that precede the political meeting, and the appalling consequences of Burgess's decision to go ahead with it, should have induced us to be fully receptive to Van Bredepoel's simple brand of liberalism in his subsequent reflections:

I'm going to begin by minding my own step. Each one must take heed for himself, and the system will in the end take heed for itself. If the system perpetuates a colour-prejudice, we can counteract it by refusing to admit a colour-prejudice in our own lives ... (246)

Van Bredepoel's noble self-sacrifice – giving his life to save Burgess – provides an appropriately emotive plot support for Van Bredepoel's ultimate sense of commitment, while the narrator's final comment, in which his compassion extends beyond Van Bredepoel and Kenon to include Burgess as well, is a skilful way of ensuring appreciation of the value of magnanimity rather than doctrinaire narrowness. 'Torn between these opposites [that is, of Communism and evil]' (as Carpenter puts it, in full acceptance of Van der Post's

point of view (1969:109)), Van Bredepoel does not suffer a final collapse into psychic illness like Turbott Wolfe, but dies in actively practising what seems to him and his author the only valid option. Moreover his death, the closing paragraphs of the novel suggest, has a redemptive possibility. While people 'like Burgess still sow out of their love of the oppressed the seeds of a terrible hate', those like Van Bredepoel and Kenon ('poor unhappy children of life') are urged to take courage as if relationships like theirs are, through some mysterious and only dimly hinted-at process, seeds of a spirit of love in the future.<sup>18</sup>

If we reflect on the presentation of the African Workers' Union and the climactic events of the novel, we find that a certain distortion of historical circumstances has occurred. Jackie Withers, a Natal Honours student who wrote a study of Van der Post's novels as a whole, thought him careless with detail in allowing the black worker, Daniel, to be subordinate to Burgess in the union office (1989:12). However, as my earlier contextual information reveals, although the up-front ICU emphasised its unwillingness to be regarded as a Communist agency, in practice the organisation was very closely involved with individual Communists, and also shared a common platform on several important occasions (Bd:114). One cannot, in any case, be sure that the fictional union is based directly on the ICU, though the importance of the African Workers' Union in terms of public meetings and rural activity suggests that this is probably the case. What is clear, however, is the strong likelihood of white Marxists having prominent roles within the organisation of particular trade unions, even if not the ICU; and Van der Post's fictional account may well conflate his knowledge of several unions. On a larger scale one can argue that he has conflated the activities of the ANC, ICU and CPSA in his portrayal of the Paulstad riot circumstances. Since the actual overall situation was clearly one of great complexity, the distortions and inaccuracies may well not be deliberate, but, plausibly, the genuine interpretation of a reasonably well-informed journalist who lacked access at the time to the multiplicity of facts and the overview now available.

While Turbott Wolfe seems to be, and feels he is, superior to most of the other whites in his community, he turns out to be only more subtly racist. This is shown partly in his responses to Nhliziyombi, and partly also in his condescension and insensitivity towards his assistant, Caleb. (His answers to Caleb's questions in their final conversation are little short of callous.) Van Bredepoel, on the other hand, is beset mostly by circumstances in his dealings with Kenon. Though Van Bredepoel is a man of many doubts, those that involve Kenon are related to ways of helping him; at no stage do the white

character's attitudes reveal the sort of doubleness that Friston helps to unmask in Wolfe. Furthermore, Van Bredepoel's response to Kenon is seen as a genuine alternative, in the author's eyes, to that of both Burgess and racist whites (who are prominent in Van der Post's handling of his protagonist's hostel experience in Port Benjamin, as well as later in Paulstad at the hotel, and at the club). While Van Bredepoel is tragically unable to save Kenon from corruption and exploitation, the significant consideration for Van der Post is that his white protagonist has crossed the racial barrier:

[Van Bredepoel's relation with Kenon] had been deep enough to destroy the traditional barrier between white and black. For whereas through the mind of white Port Benjamin runs a bleak and deserted corridor which separates European from black and coloured people, a secret lock seemed to have been sprung in the walls of Van Bredepoel's mind ... (108)

While Van Bredepoel sits brooding over what has become for him the dire necessity of persuading Burgess against holding an African Workers' Union meeting in Paulstad, he happens to notice a black family passing by. The way in which he perceives them:

They walked slowly along the road which led to Masakama's Drift, and that luminous mist of dust which gathered round them seemed to him a symbol of all the mystery and attraction that unknown Africa held for him. (219)

echoes several of his earlier responses to Kenon – the sense of wonder, for example, at the young man's dancing (43), and at how, even in his ordinary movements, his life burns 'so vividly, so spontaneously, so unshadowed by doubt and illness' (59). The novel demonstrates how this attractive spontaneity (which Van Bredepoel envies) is corrupted and destroyed by the whites' civilisation, a process which a single white person like Van Bredepoel is unable to counteract. However, as Withers points out in her study, the kind of romanticisation involved in this stress on black mystical otherness brings Van der Post perilously close to an endorsement of government repressive policy (1989:7–14), just as with Lewis in *Wild deer*. For the negative side of the spontaneity stereotype that Van der Post employs in such passages is his belief in the lack of rational thought or logic in blacks, and their consequent vulnerability to the calculated influence of a systematised, rational programme such as Communism. The corruptibility of African innocence in Van der Post's

work is, thus, in practice, scarcely distinguishable from the racist propagandist image of blacks' capacity for swift reversion to savagery.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, while Van der Post celebrates what he sees as Plomer's prior, daring recognition of the mystical beauty of Africa and its people, he must have felt at the time of writing *In a province*, that his friend lacked a sense of realism in contemplating the exposure of black intuitive sensibility to certain aspects of Western intellect. In particular, the reverence for blacks which *Turbott Wolfe* is meant to inspire (according to Van der Post) would, I assume, be inadequate in his view to cope with the increasing, insidious Communist menace of the late twenties. My argument, then, is that Van der Post, under the pressure of the greatly intensified racial and political tension of South African society after the publication of *Turbott Wolfe*, probably felt himself to be fulfilling in a more pragmatic and realistic way what he thought Plomer's mission had been. The novel which he celebrates in 'The *Turbott Wolfe* affair' is not so much Plomer's as a highly selective reconstruction that conceals or blurs (whether consciously or otherwise) the reasons which prompted him to make his own first novel a kind of critique of Plomer's.

## Conclusions

Van der Post is much influenced by the myth of blacks as spontaneous, primarily non-rational beings. They are thus easily corrupted by clever schemers using Western intellectual argument. Millin in a way denies this myth through her portrayal of Aaron and his resistance to white arguments and persuasion (though of course the kindred myth that blacks are ordained for the service of whites is only too prevalent in Gibeon). On the other hand she is predisposed to accept the idea that blacks tend automatically to feel inferior to whites; this provides a loophole for whites, since it is hard to resist treating blacks as they apparently expect to be treated.

Millin invites considerable sympathy and admiration for the Levites, especially for Aaron's wily, sustained refusal to yield in his conviction (whether deeply religious or mixed with political goals, she leaves an open matter). The whole novel is infused with special concern for minority figures, but the Levites constitute the major case. Correspondingly, the Vigilants who seek to remove the Levites are viewed *unsympathetically*. She notes, with ironic realism, the contradiction in Saul Nathan's and Dr Diethold's positions with regard to the Vigilants. Nevertheless, Saul is led finally to a kind of solidarity with the Levites, while Diethold, who did not intend to oppose the

Vigilants in the first place, also emerges, via *his* opposition, into the possibility of a totally unforeseen spirit of renewed engagement with life. Arnold Duerdon as leader of the Vigilants is shown as immature and insecure. Their ostensible threat actually gives him a role and status he would otherwise lack. Paradoxically though, his successive conflicts with Dr Diethold and Saul Nathan (resulting from Nathan's relationship with Mrs Duerdon) enable the other two men to achieve a kind of redemption.

In relation to South African racism the Marxist Burgess in Van der Post's novel is as much a dissident as the liberal Van Bredepoel. However, Van der Post supports Van Bredepoel in his refusal to join forces with Burgess, who is regarded as playing with forces he does not understand and cannot ultimately control. Van Bredepoel is eventually completely vindicated when Burgess's planned protest meeting at Paulstad is brutally disrupted by white racist farmers, making victims of the very blacks whom Burgess hoped to be empowering. Millin induces the reader to feel horror and outrage at the violence inflicted by the police on the Levites, who have not in any way shown violent tendencies. Earlier episodes of individual violence involving Arnold Duerdon, Dr Diethold and Saul Nathan invite mixed sympathies, but shrink in comparison with the massacre of the Levites.

Duerdon's personal confrontation with Aaron in which he desires to retain the upper hand is, in effect, a refusal to allow Aaron to exercise his rightful agency. Although the black leader is undaunted by this pressure, it is not so easy to decide whether he can be credited with agency in his ultimate defiance of the police. In one sense he is so completely deluded (and at no stage has Millin allowed the reader to forget the eccentricity of his religious beliefs) that even legitimacy becomes a dubious issue. What nevertheless emerges with force is the complete lack of legitimacy in the police approach and strategy. As I have already intimated, when Saul Nathan visits the Levite camp with his friend, Dr Tetyana, to treat the maimed and injured, he gains access to a degree of agency he had previously battled to attain. The fatal experience turns out to be precisely the large action that he has needed for self-affirmation and forgiveness. It also achieves for the Levites a kind of humanist fulfilment of their expectations. In both novels considered in this chapter it is a curious coincidence that the favoured protagonists have to die through violent racist action, and that their deaths are seen to have redemptive possibilities.

Although Van Bredepoel's death is tragic, his standpoint is, in the writer's eyes, legitimate, while Burgess's is not. Kenon is portrayed with great pity, but he has been duped by Burgess into perilous and fruitless resistance. In effect he has sacrificed his agency and been betrayed into illegitimate action.

Finally, on the other hand, Van der Post invites us to celebrate Van Bredepoel's crossing of the race barrier: his relationship with Kenon may contain the 'seeds of a future spirit of love' (as opposed to the hatred bred by Communism). The often cynical Millin cannot accept that human beings could be inspired by love, but Nathan's sense of duty has enabled him to do a 'far far better thing' than he had ever done previously, and may hint at her bedrock solution for a desperately confused, insecure society.