AN ANALYSIS OF AFRICAN RELUCTANCE TO MEET THE LABOUR DEMANDS OF THE TRANSVAAL COLONY AS EXPRESSED IN THE LABOUR COMMISSION 0F 1903 AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIVE AFFAIRS COMMISSION, 1903 – 1905

by

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the subject

HISTORY

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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FEBRUARY 2002

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

The Transvaal Colony experienced a huge problem with the scarcity of African labour for the mines and for the farms after the South African War. From 1901 to 1906 African labourers displayed great reluctance to meet the labour demands of the Transvaal colony. Both black and white witnesses to the Transvaal Labour Commission (TLC) and the South African Native Affairs Commission (SANAC) gave their views regarding the reasons why African labourers were unavailable for wage labour.

The Chamber of Mines dominated the proceedings of the TLC so that in the end very little objective information could be gained from the TLC. Africans themselves, testifying before SANAC stated a number of grievances which might have been responsible for the widespread withdrawal from employment on the mines. It became clear that Africans preferred to work independently rather than to provide labour for whites who ill-treated them. This they could only do if land was available to them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am glad to have finally completed this dissertation that has been to me both a heavy and joyous task. I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the assistance and encouragement that I received from a number of people. Nompumelelo Mbongo was always in the forefront "pushing" me untiringly to "work at it", insisting that every available minute be fruitfully utilized. Her friendship and encouragement is greatly valued.

My gratitude is due to my supervisors, Mrs B M Theron and Dr E J Carruthers, whose comments and criticisms have, besides helping me complete this work, gone a long way to teaching me how this kind of academic research and writing is done. The patience and the extra time they devoted to me is greatly appreciated. May their generosity never dry up.

Many thanks to the Mahlangu sisters-in-law, my colleagues Winnie and Sphiwe , who typed all the assignments that led to this dissertation. Thanks to Juanita Fourie who, with great facility, typed this dissertation with "hand, heart and mind". Thanks also to Collen Mathentshi, he knows why. To all the members of my family, I wish to record a hearty thank you for the confidence you have had in me.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise of the gold mining industry had significant consequences for the use of labour in southern Africa. The highveld goldfields were the richest in the world but also the most difficult to work. Skilled white miners left Kimberley for the Witwatersand and many others came from Britain, Australia, Germany, France and the USA to seek their fortunes in the gold mines. Very rapidly, mining became the major employment sector in the Transvaal. The establishment of new markets on the Rand also led to increased agricultural production and a greater demand for farm labour. The demand for labour then spread to other sectors of the economy such as road building, construction, railways and domestic service. Secondary industries also followed later.

Clearly, changes of this magnitude were bound to have significant consequences on the social, political and economic lives of all South Africans. Inevitably, to African communities these developments meant a considerable disruption of their existing socio-economic structure. It also meant that the initiative had passed out of their hands. They were now obliged to react to European initiatives rather than set the ball rolling themselves.[1] The reactions of some of these African communities is a matter of much historical debate and provides an indication of the political problems of race and colour experienced in South Africa in later years.

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[1]Leonard Thompson, A history of South Africa (Wynberg, Radix, 1990), p 122.

Overseas capital, mainly from Britain and America and to some extent from Europe, poured into the country. It was necessary, however, that the cost structure be well planned and production costs be cut to a minimum in order to make the industry profitable.[2] Because of high fixed infrastructural costs one of the few ways of economizing was to keep the labour costs as low as possible. The establishment of a cheap, servile labour force, "a class of permanent wage-earning labourers who were both cheap and unskilled" [3] thus became a priority for the mine owners.

This dissertation focuses on the "cheap and unskilled labour force". It examines the experiences of those African workers who were drawn to the mines, as migrant labourers. It also examines their ability to adjust to the money economy, the conditions under which they worked, the attitude of their white masters and their ultimate unwillingness to return to wage employment after the South African War, 1899 – 1902. The extent to which the agricultural communities were affected is also of interest here. This work is concerned to establish the reasons and the circumstances expressed by the Africans themselves through the study of evidence presented by the Transvaal Labour Commission of 1903 and the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903 – 1905.

This study is inspired by the fact that until the 1970's the historiography on the socio-economic developments on the Witwatersrand in the first decade of the 20th century dealt almost

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[2]AM Grundlingh, "Prelude to the Anglo-Boer War, 1881 – 1889" in Cameron T & Spies SB (eds) Illustrated history of South Africa (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1986), p 184.

[3]M Legassick, "South Africa: capital accumulation and violence", Economy and Society, vol. 3 (1974), p 264.

exclusively with the standpoint of the white farmers, miners and industrialists. The African dimension of these issues, which should include an appreciation of African contributions, their feelings and attitudes to debate, but also an understanding of the structure of African society, consequently suffered neglect.

Revisionist historians have since the 1970s revisited some aspects of the South African past. Writing about the lives of Africans in the rural highveld, Keegan has observed that in South Africa "where the dominant racial minority has always largely controlled the creation and dissemination of public knowledge and opinion, the documentary sources of evidence on the past usually contain little echo of the historical experiences of black people".[4] This dissertation is an attempt to give audience to the voices of Africans through the evidence that they themselves presented to the two commissions via their chiefs, ministers of religion, newspaper editors, missionaries, farmers, teachers, court interpreters and others. An exploration of some published sources that do contain an echo of African experiences that help to explain why Africans withheld their labour after the war, will also be undertaken.

For example, in this dissertation much reference is made to Peter Warwick's book; Black people and the South African war 1899 - 1902,[5] in which he discusses the part black people played in the war. Warwick claims to have been inspired by the diary of Sol Plaatje,[6] that was edited by Comaroff, which described the experience shared by some 7 000

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[4]Tim Keegan, Facing the storm; portraits of black lives in rural South Africa (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988), p 166.

[5]Peter Warwick, Black people and the South African war 1889 – 1902(Cambridge,CambridgeUniversityPress, 1983).

[6] John Comaroff (ed) The Boer War diary of Sol Plaatje: an African at Mafeking(Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1973).

Black people in Baden-Powell's frontier during the siege of Mafikeng. He contends that he wanted to know how black people interpreted the issues that led to the war, their part in the operations and how the war affected their lives. Furthermore, he argues that a revision of the accepted views is necessary, a kind of revision "that interpreted the struggle not from the vantage point of either London or Pretoria but rather in the context of a complex and rapidly changing colonial society increasingly shaped, but not yet transformed by mining capital."[7]

Not only does Warwick review the war, he also discusses its aftermath - the time of Lord Milner's reconstruction. He analyses the unrest that occurred in the Transvaal countryside and in the mining industry in this period, a situation which compelled Milner to appoint, first the Transvaal Labour Commission (TLC) and, second the South African Native Affairs Commission (SANAC) to look into the causes of this unrest with special reference to African labour.

Some revisionist historians have focussed on the labour problem in the Transvaal. Bundy's flagship book The rise and fall of the South African peasantry,[8] has a broad scope and does not give a detailed empirical analysis of the reasons for the shortage of labour experienced in the Transvaal Colony. It does, however, provide a spring board for further research. For example, he revealed that African peasants "showed a keener insight into the functions of capital and the market...than did the whites", which goes a long way towards explaining the

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[7]Peter Warwick, Black people, Preface.

[8] Colin Bundy, The rise and fall of the South African peasantry. (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988).

determination of Africans to engage in farming activities for themselves rather than accepting poorly paid employment.[9]

The most serious problem experienced by the mines and by white farmers during Milner's administration was the shortage of African labour. DR Burton has made an intensive study of the South African Native Affairs Commission and has found that its "major concern was the framing of resolutions which provided large numbers of Africans for the mines".[10] Burton has asserted that land, taxation and the transformation of African societies were given attention by SANAC and that major policy decisions relating to Africans at the time of Union in 1910 – and even thereafter - were based on the resolutions of SANAC.

The TLC failed to give more than two Africans the opportunity to state their views. The proceedings of the commission were dominated by the Chamber of Mines. In their report, the majority members of the TLC stated that "the bulk of the evidence... is of an authoritative nature" and that "men of weight and authority came forward".[11] Clearly, Africans could not be expected to meet such standards. SANAC, on the other hand, gave some Africans the opportunity to articulate African thinking and feeling. Though only about 68 Africans were given the chance, the white missionaries who gave evidence did express African opinion. Some Africans confided in some of these missionaries, no doubt, those that they trusted. For example, the Revd E Creux of the Swiss Free Church Mission, who testified before the two commissions, stated that missionaries did allow their African converts to voice their grievances. "Many of them can read English and they read the papers",

[9] Bundy, The rise and fall, p 205.

[10] DR Burton, "The South African Native Affairs Commission 1903 – 1905: an analysis and evaluation". (Unpubl. MA dissertation, UNISA, 1985), p 1.

[11] Transvaal Labour Commission, Reports of the Transvaal Labour Commission (London, Darling + Son,1904), pp 2 – 3.

he said and argued further that Africans had begun to have their own newspapers wherein they wrote in Sesotho, Tsonga and in English to air their grievances. "We missionaries let them write as they like", contending that "half the evil is done away with when they can speak".[12]

Indeed, African views were eloquently expressed in African newspapers such as Imvo Zabantsundu, Koranta ea Bechuana, Ilanga lase Natal, Izwi labantu among others. The African press, SANAC admitted in its report, proved itself to be fairly accurate in tracing the course of events that took place in the country and that it was useful in extending the range of information on Africans.[13] The Commission pointed out, however, that while the African press, at times threw interesting light on what educated Africans thought, it was not yet "a faithful reflex of the opinions of the more staid and experienced men who are in closer touch with the masses."[14] This point is subject to dispute as shall be seen, since educated Africans wrote letters and read newspapers for the benefit of their illiterate brethren including chiefs and headmen.

Black protest manifested itself in the formation of political associations that started in the Eastern Cape and mushroomed in the mining centres. These were closely linked with African separatist churches which became "vehicles of religious enthusiasm and political protest".[15]

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[12]South African Native Affairs Commission, vol IV, Minutes of evidence, evidence of Revd E Creux (Cape Town, Cape Times Ltd. 1904), p 616.

[13]South African Native Affairs Commission, vol I, Report of the Commission (Cape Town, Cape Times Ltd, 1905), p 65.

[14] SANAC, I, Report, p 65.

[15] TRH Davenport, South Africa: a modern history (Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1987), p 207.

Sir Godfrey Lagden, the Native Affairs Commissioner and chairman of SANAC, recognised the existence of these movements and allowed them to give evidence before SANAC.[16] The Native congresses and vigilante associations in all the colonies sought to attain their ends through constitutional means and their resolutions were a public matter. Like the press, they presented the African people with a platform to air their grievances and propose reforms. SANAC considered the wishes of these bodies as "the more easily dealt with by being openly expressed and clearly understood, and regards such public expression as being far better than discontented silence".[17]

If this dissertation is not to be a bewildering array of fortuitously collected data or a loosely connected compilation of research, a convenient section division has been devised. Section I is the introduction. Section 2 highlights important events, during the Milner administration, that led to the realization that progress could not be made on the mines because of the labour force that had suddenly disappeared. It deals with the appointment of the two commissions and outlines the personalities who made up these commissions. A survey of the African respondents is also made. Section 3 which deals with the evidence presented to the two commissions, is divided into three parts: Firstly (in part 3.1), evidence is presented regarding the difficulties experienced by Africans in the urban areas. The issue of a pass as a prerequisite to finding employment, the introduction of the curfew, location life and forced removals, the dangers of alcoholic drinks, wages, violence and the general treatment given to Africans as "inferior beings", are all dealt with.

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[16]Andre Odendaal, Vukani Bantu! the Beginnings of black protest politics in South Africa to 1912 (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984), pp 40 – 63.

[17]SANAC, I , Report, p 66.

Secondly (in part 3.2), evidence is presented by various informants, regarding life on the mines and in the compounds. This will include accommodation, the quantity and quality of food, health care, cleanliness, wages and the kind of treatment that was meted out to the workers.[19] The relationships between workers and their white supervisors, the different "tribal" groups and between workers and the mine police, are also researched. And thirdly (in part 3.3), the issue of land and agriculture is discussed. All Transvaal Africans who appeared before SANAC voiced opinions on land. Africans in the other colonies also showed interest in the question of the ownership of land as a means towards self realization. The issues raised, mostly by Afrikaner farmers, were issues pertaining to the chronic shortage of farm labour, the Squatters Law and its restrictions on African families, the use of Crown lands, wages paid by farmers and the right of Africans to purchase land.[20]

From the evidence presented by Africans to both the TLC and SANAC, it shall be realised that it was not 'laziness' or 'political ganging-up' that kept Africans away from labour on the mines and on farms as many whites thought. Education was teaching Africans the value of work while Christianity extolled the 'dignity of labour'. Young men, converts and non-converts, were going out to work. The plough relieved women from the hoe and western clothing and western ways were making inroads into African society. Africans were clamouring for education and needed money for taxes, rents and the European foodstuffs they were beginning to enjoy.[21]

[18]See Luli Callinicos, A people`s history of South Africa: gold and workers 1886 - 1924 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press , 1985).

[19] See Jeremy Krikler, Revolution from above, rebellion from below: the agrarian Transvaal at the turn of the century (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993).

[20] SANAC, II , evidence of John Tengo Jabavu, pp 723 – 749.

Many testified to these changes taking place and to the disappointment they felt with the sudden reduction of wages on the mines, Africans realised that the only way to progress lay in their independence, that is, the freedom to work for their own future in the best way they knew; which was the use of the land. They preferred to cultivate the land rather than take up wage employment. Others left the mines and farms for greener pastures on the railways, in road construction and at the ports.

The story of the development of roads, railways and harbours in South Africa is well known. Recent histories have dealt with migrant labour in all its facets. For example, Crush dealt with the creation of a vast labour empire in southern Africa which served as a reservoir of labour for the mines.[21] Jeeves discussed the control of migrant labour in the time of President Kruger and Lord Milner as rulers of the Transvaal,[22] while Denoon studied closely the causes of the sudden disappearance of African labourers from the mines,[23] but none has so far dealt exclusively with what African informants had to say. It is therefore the purpose of this dissertation to highlight African views as a contribution to an all-inclusive history of South Africa wherein the indigenous population is recognised for its part in the events of the past and not merely offering a decorative background. By setting Africans in the foreground of the picture, an attempt is being made to give unity to a span of a hundred years, bringing the past within sight. A hope is cherished that present day problems of land restoration can be understood in the context of the attachment to land that Africans had shown at the start of the twentieth century.

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[21]Jonathan Crush, Alan Jeeves + David Yudelman (eds), South Africa`s labour empire; a history of black migrancy to the gold mines (Cape Town, David Philip, 1991).

[22] Alan Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour on the South African gold mines in the era of Kruger and Milner", Journal of Southern African Studies, vol 11(1975).

[23] DJN Denoon, "The Transvaal labour crisis, 1901 – 6" Journal of South African History, vol8 no 3 (1967).

2. BRITISH ADMINISTRATION OF THE TRANSVAAL AND THE APPOINTMENT OF TWO COMMISSIONS IN 1903

The outbreak of the South African War in October 1899 brought the entire economy of the Witwatersrand to a sudden halt. Thousands of Uitlanders packed into trains that transported them to the coastal towns of Natal and the Cape. About a hundred thousand African labourers also fled, trying to reach their homes on foot.[1] Mining operations were suspended and for a variety of reasons, many Africans took up employment with the British army. The employment of Africans by the army was favoured by the Randlords since it halted the further dispersal of workers back to their rural homes.[2] Not long thereafter, both sides had Africans in their service, for Africans also joined the Boers in the field. This was a "decisive historical moment"[3] not only for the belligerents, but also for the hordes of African workers in the mining centres of the Transvaal.

Many whites at that time believed that Africans had taken up jobs in the British army solely for the high wages offered. But Thompson has argued that Africans in the former Boer republics "had reason to expect that their lives would improve under British administration since British propaganda had repeatedly criticised the republican governments for their treatment of Africans."[4] When the forty-three thousand men of Roberts's Grand Army took over Johannesburg and Pretoria in May and June 1900, the Africans were jubilant.[5] The raising of

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[1]Godfrey Wheatcroft, The Randlords (London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1985), p 209.

[2]Warwick, Black people, p 137.

[3]Jeremy Krikler, Revolution from above, rebellion from below: the agrarian Transvaal at the turn of the century (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993), p v.

[4]Thompson, A history of South Africa, p 144.

[5]Thomas Pakenham, The Boer War (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1993), p 216.

the Union Jack generated among them "a mood of optimism that a new future was dawning."[6]

Roberts proclaimed British sovereignty over the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal Colony on 24 May and 1 September 1900 respectively. Soon enough, Africans discovered that their celebration of Roberts's victory had been premature. The British had no intention of changing the Transvaal's laws affecting the Africans. Indeed, these laws were now "to be applied with an efficiency exceeding anything that the Boers had ever managed."[7] The men who were to administer Johannesburg now were not interested in reforms. They were Uitlanders and their aim was to take full political and economic control of the country. But one reform they had always said was absolutely vital: to cut African wages. The Randlords were confident that the new administration would enforce the pass law and the contract system thereby forcing blacks to accept low wages when the mines started functioning again. The deep level mining of the low grade ore depended on the availability of large numbers of low – paid labourers if profits were to be realized at all.[8]

One by one the mines reopened but the African labour force was not forthcoming and no white immigrants arrived. Milner had expected a huge flow of British immigrants into the country and everyone hoped for a large influx of Africans needing employment. Mine owners and shareholders were keen to return to pre-war production levels and to expand. They complained that they could not carry on their task "until they had recovered the native workers

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[6]Warwick, Black people, p 163.

[7]DJN Denoon, A grand illusion: the failure of imperial policy in the Transvaal Colony during the period of reconstruction 1900 – 1905 (London, Longman, 1973), pp 117 – 119.

[8]Donald Denoon, "Capital and capitalists in the Transvaal in the 1980s and 1990s", The Historical Journal, vol 23, 1(1980), p 120.

dispersed by the war."[9] The returning Uitlanders were impatient with Milner. "They tended to think that the war had been fought exclusively for their benefit; as victors they considered themselves entitled to the spoils, including those of office."[10] That was the first direct challenge to Milner's administration.

Milner with the help of Godfrey Lagden concluded a modus vivendi with Portugal in 1901 as a first step towards assisting the mines to obtain the labour they needed. The modus vivendi "guaranteed a certain proportion of railway traffic for the line to Lourenco Marques (Maputo), and the Portuguese permitted industrial labour recruiting on payment of a per capita recruiting fee".[11] Initially, however, the modus vivendi was a failure. The 80 000 Portuguese Africans that Lagden had promised the mine owners were not forthcoming.[12]

The Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) which had been formed in 1900 aimed at providing "an efficient co-operative monopolistic labour recruiting agency for the mines."[13] Milner and Lagden aimed at giving the WNLA full support "in meeting the needs of the mines and preventing inter-mine rivalry over labour recruitment".[14] The WNLA was not a success. Burton has argued that Lagden has been unfairly blamed for the failure of the WNLA to supply labour to the mines.[15] Warwick`s view of the WNLA`s unconventional methods of recruiting in Mozambique led to a situation in which many "workers seem to have migrated independently

[9]CW De Kiewiet, A history of South Africa: social and economic (London, Oxford University Press, 1975), p 145.

[10]GHL Le May, British supremacy in South Africa 1899 - 1907 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965), p 155.

[11] Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 49.

[12]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 50.

[13]*Ibid*, p50.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Ibid.

and clandestinely to avoid WNLA recruitment" agents.[16] Burton contends also that a constant complaint from African workers and Native Affairs officials was that of agent deceit. Seemingly, agents in their endeavour to recruit workers, "often misled Africans about wages and conditions of service".[17] In short Africans avoided mine labour for a number of reasons, though it would be extremely difficult to determine the relative importance of each of them. Africans, from their underdog position, were not generally able to voice their grievances openly. They could only discuss some of these matters with their immediate chiefs and headmen in the villages.

Many Africans had returned to their rural homes and Milner was faced with a problem of Africans who had occupied white farms during the war. According to Warwick, Africans believed that "the object of the war had been to return them to their old lands".[18] He argued that in those farms occupied by Africans a great deal of economic activity had taken place, especially in those areas where the "scorched earth" policy had not been applied. Indeed, Africans were proving to be agriculturally very industrious. This is in agreement with the testimony given by Rev Creux before SANAC, that given land tenure, Africans could work very hard and effectively.[19] It was this success in agriculture that the TLC found threatening because "if it continues it will gradually withdraw the Natives from (industries outside their own areas), it will also bring them into competition with white agricultural producers".[20] This was a situation which needed to be avoided.

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[16]Warwick, Black people, p 171.

[17]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 59.

[18]Warwick, Black people, p 165.

[19]SANAC, IV, Evidence of Rev. E Creux, p 615.

[20]Transvaal Labour Commission, Report, p 40.

The resettlement of the ex-commandos back on their farms and government expenditure on the rebuilding of houses and equipment did not guarantee prosperity for the ex-republics. A severe drought in 1902 "drew painful attention to the poverty of the soil and the backwardness of its population."[21] Even for these natural disasters, the blame was laid squarely at Milner's door mainly by the Uitlander community who held high expectations after the war.[22] Milner looked to the mines for economic growth. The mining companies on the other hand, protested that they could not operate successfully without a rapid increase in the cheap African labour supply. Mr. F.H.P. Cresswell, a mine manager and later leader of the Labour Party of South Africa, suggested that white labour be used instead of African labour. Mine owners disagreed with Cresswell, fearing that white labour was too expensive and also difficult to manage.[23] The Randlords were adamant for economic and political reasons that unskilled work was to be done by Africans because they would provide a cheaper and more servile labour force.[24] As the Africans were unable to meet the demand, the Chamber of Mines decided to import Chinese labour as a matter of urgency.

From 1901, there was a serious debate about the importation of Chinese labour. During 1902 the idea gained so much support that the Chamber of Mines began to promote it among officials of the government. Except for the Pretoria News, which was owned by Milner, all the other English-language newspapers were owned by mine magnates.[25] It was therefore logical that they would trumpet the cause of the Chamber of Mines. The relations between the

[21]De Kiewiet, A history of South Africa, p 145.

[22]Denoon, A grand illusion, p 96.

[23]Denoon, "The Transvaal Labour Crisis", p 489

[24] Ibid.

[25]DJN Denoon, "Capitalist influence and the Transvaal government during the crown colony period, 1900 - 1906" The Historical Journal, XI, 2 (1968), p 322. Denoon discusses press ownership in his thesis "Reconstruction in the Transvaal, 1900 – 1905" (Cambridge, 1965).

Chamber of Mines and Milner's government has been a subject of much controversy and research.[26] Jeeves has argued that Milner's needs were similar to those of the Chamber of Mines and therefore it was natural for them to work together.[27] Denoon, on the other hand, has stated that Milner was essentially the tool of the Chamber of Mines, endorsing the magnates view.[28]

Milner faced a difficult situation. The modus vivendi with Mozambique had failed to supply enough labour. The WNLA was unsuccessful in opening up new labour sources elsewhere in Africa even though the British Foreign Office had been persuaded into permitting a trial employment of 1 000 men from Central Africa.[29] Alternative sources of labour had to be investigated, and in July 1903 Milner and the Lieutenant-Governor of the Transvaal, Sir Arthur Lawley, appointed the Transvaal Labour Commission. It was to be headed by Mr A Mackie Niven, a Rand financier.[30]

Niven was one of the men who had dominated Uitlander reform politics before the war and who, during the war, had tried to lead the refugees - the "sheep without a shepherd", as they

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[26]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 46.

[27]Alan Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour on the South African gold mines in the era of Kruger and Milner", Journal of Southern African Studies, no II, 1975, p 4.

[28]DJN Denoon, "The Transvaal labour crisis", p 487.

[29]Ibid, p 485.

[30]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 63.

were sometimes called.[31] Diana Cammack has made an intensive study of Niven's career and explains that as a member of the Uitlander Council he became chairman of the Uitlander refugee committee of Durban during the war. After the war, Niven was among the leaders who were thought fit to be advisers to Milner.[32] Milner himself appointed him and St. John Carr along with Sam Evans and William Wybergh, to serve as a committee for Transvaal municipal affairs. Niven subsequently became a member of the Johannesburg Town Council in 1902 - a council whose members shared similar political and economic views. Combined with Milner's support, town councillors were to "implement policies designed to create on the Rand a society that would assist in the industry's growth while anglicizing the Transvaal".[33]

It must have come as no surprise that a man who had strong ties with both Milner and the 'Eckstein group' was appointed chairman of the Transvaal Labour Commission. Among the most prominent of the commissioners was JW Quinn, a leading baker and confectioner in Johannesburg who was also chairman of the African Labour League.[34] He had served with Niven in the pre-war Uitlander Council and was one of Milner's first appointees to the town council of Johannesburg in 1901 - a council dominated by former reformers in pre-war Uitlander politics.[35]

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[31]Diana Cammack, The Rand at war 1899 – 1902: the Witwatersrand & the Anglo Boer War (London, James Currey, 1990), p 122.

[32]Cammack, The Rand at war, p 135.

[33] Ibid, p 187.

[34]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 68.

[35]Cammack, The Rand at war, p 186.

Another significant commissioner was P Whiteside, a man described by Mawby as the "most militant Labour and trade union leader of the day".[36] Whiteside was the president of the. Witwatersrand Trade and Labour Council from 1902 until 1904. He was also the general-secretary of the South African Engine Driver's and Firemen's Association from 1902 to 1919.[37]

There was also Sir George Farrar, who had gained notoriety as a member of the Reform Committee who became involved with Cecil Rhodes in planning the Jameson Raid of 1895. The plan ended in a fiasco when the raiders were forced to surrender to Cronje's commando at Doornkop on 2 January 1896.[38] Farrar was imprisoned by Kruger's government for his part in the plot, and as DW Krüger expressed it: "Die lede van die Reform Committee, 64 in getal, en hulle vernaamste mondstukke, Lionel Phillips, John Hays Hammond, Frank Rhodes en George Farrar, is in hegtenis geneem en in die gevangenis te Pretoria opgesluit om hulle verhoor op 'n aanklag van hoogverraad af te wag. Die vier hoofaangeklaagdes het skuldig gepleit en op 27 April 1896 is hulle kragtens die Romeins-Hollandse reg ter dood veroordeel".[39] President Kruger commuted the sentence to a fine of 25 000 pounds each and the fines were paid by Cecil Rhodes.[40] As Farrar was the man who enthusiastically opened the campaign for

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[36]AA Mawby, "Capital, government and politics in the Transvaal, 1900 – 1907: a revision and a reversion", The Historical Journal, XVII, 2 (1974), p 414.

[37]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 68.

[38]TRH Davenport, South Africa, p 207.

[39]DW Kruger, Paul Kruger, Deel II 1883 – 1904 (Johannesburg, Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel, 1963), p 167.

[40]CFJ Muller (ed), 500 years: a history of South Africa (Cape Town, Academica, 1988), p 292.

Chinese labour, his appointment to the Commission appears to be a continuation of his activities both for Milner and for the Chamber of Mines in pursuit of that idea.[41] It seems that the Commission would be set up in order to prove that local labour was unobtainable and that it was inevitable that alternative imported sources should be exploited. Farrar and George Goch, another commissioner, were expected to lead the argument as Goch was also a personal friend of Milner's.[42]

As a former mayor of Johannesburg, Goch had also worked with ex-members of the Reform Committee who were all given responsible positions in the post – war administration. The other commissioners were JC Brink, J Donaldson, S Evans, D Forbes, E Perrow, JW Phillips, CFB Tainton and the secretary PC MacDonell – all of them had had relations with the Chamber of Mines. It was strictly a Transvaal commission , and all the proceedings were to be conducted in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Buildings in Johannesburg. It was a central place, according to Niven.[43] It was noticeable, however that no Boer was appointed as a commissioner.

The only Africans who were called upon to give evidence before the TLC were Nathaniel Cyril Umhalla and Thomas Zwedala. Nathaniel Umhalla was a chief of the Ndlambe tribe in the district of King Williams Town while Thomas Zwedala was a headman in Glen Grey in the district of Lady Frere. At the time of the TLC the two men were in Johannesburg with Mr WT Brownlee, the Resident Magistrate of Butterworth, who also testified before the Commission.

[41]Eric A Walker, A history of southern African (London, Longmans, 1962), p 510.

[42]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 77.

[43]Transvaal Labour Commission, address by chairman, Mackie A Niven, p1.

They had come to Johannesburg to find out at first hand what the conditions in the mine compounds were and why these apparently deterred Transkei Africans from coming to the mines to work.[44] Complaints of ill-treatment from those labourers who were returning from Johannesburg had been reported to the chiefs and headmen in the Transkei. The chiefs in turn informed Mr Brownlee.[45] As a result of the widespread advertisement of the commission, Brownlee indicated to the commission his willingness to testify. He then invited the Africans.[46]

Milner and Lagden were aware of the value of African labour to the mines and the connection between prosperous mining and the rest of South Africa. As a consequence of the dissatisfaction caused by the modus vivendi with Portugal in the coastal colonies of Natal and the Cape, Milner organised a conference at Bloemfontein in March 1903, to discuss customs dues between the colonies and High Commission Territories in southern Africa. The decision to include 'native affairs' on the agenda prompted Milner to include Lagden, his Native Affairs Commissioner, in the Transvaal delegation.[47]

It was at this conference that a resolution was taken to appoint the second commission that is discussed in this dissertation – the South African Native Affairs Commission (SANAC) which would enquire into the whole question of native policy and administration. It was tasked with making recommendations to the various colonial governments "with the object of arriving at a common understanding" in preparation for the day when South African federation would be finally achieved.[48] There were twelve commissioners chosen for their areas of expertise and

[44]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of NC Umhalla, pp 599 – 601.

[45]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of W T Brownlee, p 568.

[46]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of N C Umhalla, p 601.

[47]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 71.

[48]Davenport, South Africa, p 229.

for their regional diversity. There were two from each colony, one from Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and one from Basutoland (Lesotho). HM Taberer, the Native Commissioner for the Central District of Pretoria was appointed secretary and Lagden was appointed chairman of this "almost exclusively English-speaking body".[49]

Lagden was a man of considerable experience in colonial affairs. He had worked in the Transvaal (1879 – 1881), West Africa (1883) and in Swaziland (1892 – 1893). He was Resident Commissioner of Basutoland from 1893 until 1901 when Milner called him to the Transvaal.[50] At the time, Milner was working hard to restore the gold industry and decided to call Lagden to come and "improve the recruiting machinery, simplify the burdensome pass system, and cause anguish to the illicit liquor sellers".[51] Burton has indicated that Lagden would attempt to stimulate migrant labour by "endeavouring to create conditions similar to those prevailing in Basutoland, namely, a shortage of land, and efficient administration capable of prompt and efficient tax collection, and an increase in the needs of civilized African society through educational and missionary influence".[52] According to Walker by 1903 "the economic situation in South Africa was threatening".[53] Meanwhile the majority of the TLC reported a labour shortage of 129 000 Africans.[54] These factors subsequently received attention from SANAC.

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[49]Davenport, South Africa, p 229.

[50]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 26.

[51]Walker, A history of southern Africa, p 499.

[52]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 27.

[53]Walker, A history of Southern Africa, p 510.

[54]Transvaal Labour Commission, Report, p 41.

Burton also argues that "before Lagden accepted Milner's offer of the Native Commissionership, he had met, on Milner's advice, a delegation of the mining magnates in Cape Town in late 1900. It would appear that there was broad agreement on the need for the new state and the mines to work together."[55] Denoon feels that Milner overestimated Lagden who was "intellectually feeble and temperamentally unstable: through assiduous flattery, the members of the chamber persuaded... and helped him draft his policies".[56] It therefore came as no surprise that Lagden, with Milner's approval, specifically supported the Chamber of Mines' decision to create a labour recruiting organization, the future WNLA.

JC Krogh was the only Boer representative on SANAC. Prominent Boer leaders such as Louis Botha, Koos De la Rey and Schalk Burger were for various reasons not prepared to serve on SANAC.[57] It is pertinent to note, however, that the traditional Boer attitude towards African labour had always been that blacks must be forced by law to work for whites.[58] Krogh was respected and liked by Lagden and also by the Boer community at large. Although in 1910 he became a senator representing Africans, the African press regarded the appointment as "unfortunate" because of Krogh`s insensitive attitude towards blacks.[59] Krogh had served the Transvaal administration since the 1870's and had been The Transvaal's Special Commissioner responsible for Swaziland since 1896. He was known to the Swazis as "Nkoseluhlaza" –meaning a predator. While in Swaziland he had worked with GR von Wielligh and N da Silva to complete the boundary between Swaziland and Mozambique.

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[55]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 27.

[56]Denoon, "Capitalist influence", p 308.

[57]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 27.

[58]SANAC, iv , evidence of G G Munnik, pp 476 – 490.

[59]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 76.

He was also responsible for the evacuation of Europeans from Swaziland when the war broke out in 1899.[60] A strong supporter of Botha who, with De la Rey, represented the majority view that continuing "a hopeless fight might weaken their bargaining position in the long run".[61] He was also on the Transvaal delegation that met and discussed with the Free State burghers at Klerksdorp in April 1902, and agreed finally to meet Lord Kitchener in a move that led to the signing of The Peace of Vereeniging the following month.[62] After 1902 he was appointed Assistant Resident Magistrate at Belfast.[63] As a commissioner, Krogh was very likely to advocate an extreme "right wing" view of African labourers, especially as he was the only Boer on the commission.

The choice of JA Hamilton as the second representative from the Transvaal was significant because the Minority Report of the Transvaal Labour Commission had disagreed with Hamilton's evidence that "the depression in the Transvaal in general, and mining in particular was solely the result of the labour shortage".[64] However, in the absence of the former mayor of Johannesburg, George Goch (a member of the TLC), Hamilton was considered a suitable candidate. In 1903 Hamilton became an "independent" member of the Johannesburg Town Council. He was a financier and manager of the Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Company who had served on several finance committees of the Chamber of Mines. He was

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[60]JSM Matsebula, A history of Swaziland (Cape Town, Longmans, 1987), p 137.

[61]Davenport, South Africa, p 222.

[62]Meintjes, General Louis Botha, p 97.

[63]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 76.

[64] Ibid, p 77.

also a director of the Barnato Group and in view of this history it was likely that he would do his utmost to convince the commission of the need to stimulate labour supplies.[65]

As for the other commissioners, perhaps the most experienced and capable among them was Col. WE Stanford of the Cape, whose entire career had been devoted to 'native affairs'. Bundy cited a glowing report that Stanford wrote on the progress made by peasants in the eastern Transkei while he was Resident Magistrate in Engcobo.[66] By 1897 Stanford had risen to Under Secretary for Native Affairs and in 1902 he became the Chief Magistrate for Transkei. He is quoted as having been "sensitive to the Bantu's desire for political development, economic security and just administration. Tireless in the defence of their rights, he was nevertheless aware of the political realities and consistently practical in his approach."[67] Some people, however, among them Sol Plaatje, did not hold Stanford in high esteem. In 1915 Plaatje criticised Stanford for supporting the Natives Land Act of 1913. Burton considered that Stanford was a "colonial administrator with all the associated attitudes and prejudices such as the belief in the dignity of labour and the need for evolutionary civilizing policies being adopted to mould African society".[68] Eventually the SANAC report was to reveal some of these attitudes very clearly.

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[65]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 77.

[66]Bundy, The rise and fall, p 89.

[67]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 77.

[68]*Ibid*, p 78.

The second representative of the Cape was FR "Matabele" Thompson, "a former associate of Cecil Rhodes and a fluent Bantu linguist".[69] He began life in the diamond fields and then went farming in the northern frontier. He gave up his career when his father was killed by Africans. He was living in Bechuanaland when Rhodes asked him to organise the compound system in Kimberley. After moving to Johannesburg he was chosen by Rhodes, on account of his influence with "the natives", to visit Lobengula, from whom he secured the historic concession on which the Charter of the British South Africa Company was based. It also earned him the nickname "Matabele". After spending two years in Bulawayo he moved to the Cape and from 1895 to 1903 he was a member of the Cape parliament.[70]

The representative for Basutoland was HC Stoley, who had started working for the Basutoland administration in 1884. In the execution of his duties, he was apparently able to gain the love and confidence of the Basotho people and in 1901 when Lagden was called to the Transvaal, he succeeded him as Resident Commissioner. Before becoming a SANAC commissioner, Stoley gave evidence before the TLC and stated that "one of the great objections of the Basotos to coming to the Rand to work was the six months contract."[71] In essence he was telling the Transvaal mines that they could not expect migrant labourers from Basotoland. The Revd R H Dyke, in his evidence before the TLC, largely confirmed what Stoley had indicated, that the Basotho would rather work nearer home.[72]

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[69]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 78.

[70]Eric Rosenthal, Encyclopedia of southern Africa (London, Frederich Warne, 1973), pp 358 – 359.

[71]Transvaal Labour Commission, Report, p 21.

[72]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Revd R H Dyke, pp 3 – 10.

During the preliminaries to the formation of Union, Stoley's name was mentioned several times by Africans who regarded him as a suitable candidate to represent them in the Senate.[73] His appointment to SANAC therefore, held the promise that he would be able to make a vital contribution, especially with regard to Basotho migrant workers.

A former Prime Minister of the Cape and chairman of the South African Mutual Life Assurance Society, TC Scanlen, represented Southern Rhodesia on SANAC. He was transferred to Southern Rhodesia when he became the legal adviser to the British South Africa Company in 1894. As Prime Minister of the Cape from 1881 to 1884, Scanlen "enjoyed the backing of the Bond until it went against his plans by encouraging the imperial government to take control of the Transkei, Basutoland and Bechuanaland in 1883-1884."[74] The Cape government under Scanlen had to deal with the illegal settlement of white squatters who had taken part in suppressing the emigrant Thembu rebellion in the Xalanga district. Davenport considers that Scanlen "handled the squatters with tactful firmness, thus restoring some of the British confidence in the Cape's capacity to govern".[75] A man of Scanlen's experience would be of great value to the Commission.

The Under-Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal, SO Samuelson and Sir Marshall Campbell, a leading sugar farmer, represented the colony of Natal. In describing Samuelson, Shula Marks

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[73]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 80.

[74]Davenport, South Africa, p 139.

[75]Ibid. p139.

said that Samuelson was "a man of forceful character or intellect" who could have been "able to influence his changing political masters"[76] His nickname "Vumazonke" was however misinterpreted by Burton as the "one who agrees to sell" when in fact it should be "one who agrees to everything." Natal Africans or Zulus could not have given a name like that to a man of sterling character. Marks was correct to state that "although he had an excellent knowledge of the Zulu language and a certain understanding of African customary law, he seldom expressed an original thought on the problems of African administration".[77]

Apparently the Christian Express discovered and published the exact sources of what Samuelson claimed were his own ideas.[78] Surprisingly Burton does not seem to emphasize these "borrowings", but says that Samuelson was a firm believer in "separate development" or progress along parallel lines. Because he was a man who could not face up to or solve problems, he "objected to regular communication between Magistrates and Chiefs on the grounds that it would lead to complaints from farmers".[79] It seems that little could be expected from Samuelson to enlighten the Commission about Africans, but Marshall Campbell was to be a far better commissioner in that he was expected to make a valuable contribution. Since the commission was investigating an employment problem concerning Africans, it was necessary to have people like Campbell with experience in the work habits of blacks as well as their social and economic needs.

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[76]Marks quoted in Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 79.

[77]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 79. (my underlining)

[78]Ibid, p 80.

[79]Ibid

Campbell was a director of the Natal Mercury and "a strong protagonist of South African rather than imported labour". Burton argues that he was "convinced that the British government had mishandled the Africans of Natal because it had failed to teach them the habit of regular work and industry".[80] Besides employing Africans on his sugarcane farms, Campbell had started the "Rickshaw" business for the Zulus in Natal. He was a strong advocate of African education and also held the philosophy of the dignity of labour as a starting point for African upliftment. According to Cambell, academic education should follow industrial training. It seems that Campbell, with his experience with the Zulus in Durban, was in a good position to advise the Commission about Africans.

The Orange River Colony was represented by another member of Lagden's Native Affairs Department. Captain Quayle Dickson, who became the Commissioner for Native Affairs in the colony when the British occupied the territory during the war. Dickson had been a farmer in the Eastern Cape before being appointed to the Orange River Colony.[81] He testified before the TLC where he gave a complete breakdown statistics of the native population in each of the 23 districts of the OR Colony. With regard to labour, he indicated that the colony had no labour to give away. The railways being closer to home, many Africans preferred the railways as a result.[82] JB de la Harpe was the second delegate from the Orange River Colony. He was, according to Burton, a prominent farmer in the district of Ficksburg.[83]

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[80]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 80.

[81]Ibid, p 81.

[82]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of J Q Dickson, p 509.

[83]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 81 – 82,

The secretary of SANAC, HM Taberer, had worked in the civil service in Zululand and Southern Rhodesia where he had been the Chief Native Commissioner appointed by Cecil Rhodes. He moved to the Transvaal in 1901 when he was appointed Native Commissioner for the Central District of Pretoria. "It was in this capacity that Lagden had come to know and respect Taberer. Later in his career, Taberer established the Government Native Labour Bureau and in December 1908 when he left government service he became general manager of the Native Recruiting Corporation Ltd".[84] E Rosenthal described him as "one of the greatest authorities in South Africa on the Bantu."[85]

Unlike the TLC which was confined to the Transvaal and conducted all its sessions in Johannesburg, SANAC toured all the South African colonies including Bechuanaland (Botswana), Basutoland (Lesotho) and Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). In all these areas African witnesses were called in to give evidence. Among them were farmers, religious ministers, missionaries, newspaper editors, court interpreters, chiefs and headmen. There was hope that these representatives of the people would be heard. However, their grievances were largely overlooked.

The reason why SANAC ignored their grievances was that the majority of the commissioners were Native Affairs officials. The perception that pervaded their work environment was that

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[84]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, pp 81 – 82.

[85]E Rosenthal quoted on Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 82.

Africans were centuries behind Europeans in civilization and that it would take many years for them to be modernized enough so that they could share the franchise and the economic priviliges enjoyed by whites. As a result Lagden rejected the black voices, played down the strength of feeling that existed and blamed the "half educated" Africans who he said did not represent Africans in general.[86]

The importance of SANAC, Burton has warned, should not be underestimated for, before and after Union, its report continued to be consulted in the formulation of regulations that were intended to be used to keep Africans where they belonged, that is, in a position of inferiority as "hewers of wood and drawers of water".[87] Rhodes's dictum of 'equal rights for all civilized men' had no place in South Africa after SANAC had presented its report in April 1905.

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[86]Andrè Odendaal. Vukani Bantu: the beginnings of black protest politics in South Africa to 1912 (Cape Town, David Philip, 1984), p 72.

[87]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 184.

3. EVIDENCE PRESENTED TO THE TWO COMMISSIONS

3.1 THE URBAN AREAS: INDUSTRY AND MINING

The task of the TLC was "To enquire what amount of labour is necessary for the requirements of the Agricultural, Mining and other Industries of the Transvaal, and to obtain an adequate supply of labour to meet such requirements from Central and Southern Africa".[1] From the outset, the commission did not offer any hope of providing a solution to the problem of labour. It would be difficult, firstly, to determine the amount of labour needed while the Randlords were giving exaggerated figures for future expansion. And, secondly, the absence of Africans in the composition of the commission would render the commission unable to get to the root cause of African discontent. It is also true that gold mining and the whole industrialization process faced unique social and economic problems in the immediate post-war years in South Africa.

In his opening address, the chairman, Mackie Niven, explained that everybody had anticipated a large influx of Africans into the Witwatersrand for the various industrial pursuits after the South African War and that this had not been the case. Niven said that on the question of why there was a scarcity of labour, the Transvaal white community was divided. One group believed that having failed to obtain labourers, this was sufficient evidence that there were simply not enough African workers to meet the labour demand. The other group felt that if proper measures were taken to bring the available supply to work, the labour force would prove to be sufficient to meet the demand. Because only a few people were capable of forming a sound opinion on the information available at the time, the government had set up the commission to enquire into the labour problem. Witnesses who could give reliable information would be approached to give evidence.[2]

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[1]Transvaal Labour Commission, Report, p 3.

[2]Ibid, p 33.

Undoubtedly, the people who had "reliable information" at that time were members of the Chamber of Mines. From the first years of Milner's regime, several of the Randlords were themselves involved in various official and administrative jobs and many others with mining company experience were employed by the government. This was particularly the case in the inspectorate of the Native Affairs Department whose task it was to police the living and working conditions on the mines, to check violations of the pass law, and to act as "protectors" of Africans. According to Jeeves, this was tantamount "to setting the wolf to guard the flock".[3] Jeeves was correct, seeing that Lagden, and his Secretary of Native Affairs, W Windham, met frequently with officials of the Chamber of Mines, and were openly sympathetic towards Chamber interests.

Warwick has stressed that "From the outset Britain planned to reconstruct the Transvaal in order that the interests of mining capital and the state were harmonised".[4] The mine bosses took advantage of the situation and, through the Chamber of Mines, made it clear that the economic growth of the country depended upon the expansion of the mining industry. Thus, when the TLC was appointed and when it conducted its proceedings, the Chamber of Mines remained a dominant factor and the most interested party as the largest employer of labour. The Chamber of Mines "was enormously aided in that it had a near monopoly of the information needed to assess the highly technical problems of Rand mining".[5] The TLC therefore, "had little choice but to rely upon Chamber data and even Chamber expertise in

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[3]Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour", p 14.

[4]Warwick, Black people, p 164.

[5]Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour", p 6.

conducting their investigation".[6] Besides the technical aspects, the human element in the equation, that is, the Africans themselves, had been neglected. Jeeves goes further to state that Milner's administration did not have "the capacity to look critically at the mining industry" and also that at that time it does not seem likely that it desired to do so.[7]

African opinion was wary of the Chamber of Mines and its undue influence over government. A clarion call had been sounded even before the war was over. In a series of articles written by the African elite and published in the newspaper, Ipepa lo Hlanga, a "warning against the excessive influence exercised by leaders of the Transvaal industry" was made.[8] Warwick also quoted the newspaper, Izwi labantu, warning that "the pressure from industrialists and financiers may preclude reforms" and work to "undermine the stability of governments, and to dictate the policies of States".[9]

Burton asserted that the TLC "approached its task with preconceived ideas and employed a dubious and selective approach in analysing the evidence presented".[10] As a result there was disagreement among the members of the TLC so that at the conclusion of its investigation, members were divided into two groups: the majority group and the minority group. The minority members, JW Quinn and P Whiteside both of whom represented organised labour, refused to accept the evidence presented by the experts from the Chamber of Mines.

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[6]Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour", p 7.

[7]Ibid

[8]Warwick, Black people, p 172.

[9]Ibid

[10]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, pp 64 – 65.

They claimed that the Chamber of Mines did not have the interests of the country at heart but that of "the foreign investor, who is entitled to nothing more than good interest upon the capital he invests".[11] Quinn and Whiteside accepted that there was a shortage of labour but believed that it had been exaggerated by the majority group so as to enable Milner to import Chinese labourers. Also, they were convinced that higher wages would have gone a long way to solving the problem.[12]

Addressing the first post-war meeting of the Chamber of Mines, the president announced as a matter of fact that there would be enormous savings through the "better organization of the recruitment of labour, proper application of local laws and especially the enforcement of the liquor law".[13] This was partly the view held by the minority group who insisted that "there is sufficient labour in Central and Southern Africa for present requirements, although effort will be required to obtain it".[14] The Ndlambe chief, Nathaniel Umhalla supported this view. The England-educated Umhalla stated before the TLC that many young men were willing to come out to work but were deterred by reports of ill-treatment circulated by men who had been to Johannesburg. He said that the ill-feeling and the unsympathetic attitude of the managers towards their labourers were so bad that the men "think that the white people have a secret society which meets every night in which they are induced to hate the natives".[15] Though this was a bit exaggerated, Africans were baffled by the behaviour of whites.

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[11]Transvaal Labour Commission, Minority Report, p 57.

[12]Ibid

[13]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 86.

[14]Transvaal labour Commission, Minority Report, p 57.

[15]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of NC Umhalla, p 599.

When SANAC visited the Cape Colony, in response to questions regarding the same issues, Nathaniel Umhalla told SANAC that young men were willing to go out to work and "needed no measure of persuasion". But there were still many of them who remained behind who were available for the labour market. He said that the principal complaint was that they were contracted to go to a certain mine at a particular wage but when they got to Johannesburg, they were claimed by mines other than those for which they were intended.[16] This kind of complaint was widespread and was said to be responsible for the frequent desertions by African workers from the compounds, thus leading to the shortage of labourers.

Many of the sufferings under the migrant labour system have not been recorded. At the time of the commissions, the "traditional view of the migrant portrayed him as a raw but willing peasant attracted by city lights, eager to prove himself, save enough money to acquire cattle and land, and on his return, marry and start a family".[17] There are many who believe that although this view held some truth, it nevertheless concealed "a darker reality of dispossession, social dislocation, disease and death".[18] It is difficult to glean this information from African evidence before the TLC and SANAC but some of it comes from whites who appeared before the commissions.

For example, the annexure to Mr F Perry's (chairman WNLA) evidence to the TLC states that the Portuguese authorities in Mozambique were aware that the recruiting of Africans led to

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[16]SANAC, IV, evidence of NC Umhalla, p 514.

[17]Crush, South Africa's Labour empire, p 3.

[18]Ibid

"abuses, and even encouraging the recruiters to do acts which are on a par with those punishable by law".[19] Some of the 'touts' fell into the practice of bribing chiefs to send their tribesmen to the mines and subsequently the practice became even worse as brother sold brother, father sold son, and so on. This became almost a slave trade which brought a lot of bitterness to African society. Marwick, the Natal official who was acting superintendent of Native Affairs during the South African War, asserted that chiefs were even bribed to coerce their subjects to enter mining employment. He claimed that the recruiting methods were generally so corrupt that they created mistrust in the minds of potential recruits. He concluded that "the traffic in native labourers has become almost as disgraceful as the slave trade".[20]

It is hardly surprising that such methods led to unproductive or scarce labour. Thomas Zwedala testifying before the TLC confirmed the hardships that migrants had to endure. He related a story that he had heard from some 40 Africans at Sterkstroom, that "the 'cat-o-nine tails' (a kind of sjambok) was placed on a fellow's back every day without being taken before the Magistrate".[21] Once en route to the Rand, the work seekers would typically pass through the hands of two or three labour 'touts' before they reached their destination. In effect they were often sold as many as two or three times. Those who managed to arrive at the mines at all, "having run a gauntlet of avaricious labour agents, government officials" and farmers, met a new set of horrors on the Rand".[22]

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[19]Transvaal Labour Commission, annexure to evidence of Perry, p 59.

[20]Denoon, A grand illusion, p 128.

[21]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of T Zwedala, p 601.

[22]Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour", p 16.

On arrival at the Rand, Africans "had to get a pass authorizing them to get employment within three days and when they found work, the employer took possession of the pass and kept it until the worker was discharged".[23] The abuse of African workers by employers centred around the pass from then onwards, making this the most hated document in the history of South African race relations. James Mama, in his evidence before SANAC, stressed that the pass was a burden to Africans and did not help to ensure their labour. Africans had to find work in a short time and were "not allowed to leave their master until they had completed the time that was fixed in the pass. That is where the danger to us Natives who come to work is. It is in the pass".[24]

John Tengo Jabavu told SANAC that Africans moving into the urban areas experienced untold hardships caused by the pass. Migrants often said that "a person is better off without it than with it." Jabavu said that they objected to the array of oppressive laws involving such things as travelling in cars, walking on pavements, riding bicycles and the ringing of the curfew bell which signalled that Africans should be out of town at a particular hour.[25] Jabavu was not the only one to listen to these stories from urban Johannesburg. William Nquameko Seti, the clerk in the special Magistrate's office in King William's Town, said: "I hear all these stories about bad treatment in Johannesburg, since I have the fine opportunity of working in the head office. All these returnees call in and I hear the news".[26]

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[23]Thompson, A history of South Africa, p121.

[24]SANAC, IV, evidence of James Mama, p 645.

[25]SANAC, II, evidence of JT Jabavu, pp 735 – 736.

[26]SANAC, II, evidence of WN Seti, p 565.

Paulos Molatje of the Basuto Committee of Johannesburg together with eight other members of the committee appeared before SANAC to say that "there are many things which [they could] speak about to the Commission. There is the way in which we live in this town of Johnnesburg." Molatje expressed the wishes of his committee that Africans be granted the right to purchase land on which they could live peacefully. He said that his people were unhappy with the practice of being moved from place to place. "We people", he said, "are very poor and cannot afford to be shifted about every time". He also complained about the constant harassment by the police in the location and in town due to the pass, and appealed to the Commission to "see some other way to give a pass to the Native people; [because] the way we have [it] now is very heavy".[27] Saul Msane, a compound manager, agreed with every statement made by Molatje and added that as an individual he wished that "the English should admit civilised Natives to the franchise".[28]

Although both Molatje and Msane stressed an African preference for free labour choices, many thought that events on the Witwatersrand during the war provided the key to the fact that African labour vanished thereafter. According to Denoon they certainly provide "sufficient provocation to have put wind into the sails of a protest movement".[29] When the war ended and forced labour continued, despair set in and the workers resisted.[30] African attitudes towards

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[27]SANAC, IV, evidence of Paulos Molatje, pp 853 – 854.

[28]SANAC, IV, evidence of Saul Msane, p 854.

[29]Denoon, A grand illusion, p 14.

[30]Denoon, "The Transvaal labour crisis", p 487.

the British government began to harden. Furthermore, another worrying circumstance was the decision by the mine magnates, through the Chamber of Mines, to bring down the rate of wages of unskilled labour. "This was hardly the philanthropic and kindly and uplifting treatment" which British spokesmen like Joseph Chamberlain had encouraged Africans to expect.[31]

Jeeves argued that Africans were unwilling to work underground in the mines.[32] George T Moshesh, a Basuto chief stated categorically before SANAC that Africans "are doing heavy work, and not being paid according to the work they are doing". He then elaborated on the difficult working conditions underground and grumbled that "their wages are less than those who are standing there on one side, and saying 'do that'".[33] Many African witnesses testified to the fact that the wages were less than they used to be before the war.[34] Chief Moeketsi of the Bakwena tribe told SANAC that "the only reason people object to going to Johannesburg is because they do not like the pay. They say it is very small... Previously they had good wages, although the treatment was not good".[35] Mark Samuel Radebe, a Lovedale educated Pietermaritzburg newspaper publisher, summed up the wages matter thus: "What encourages a man to work more? The wages encourage them, and the attaining to the highest point of whatever the man may take up as a trade".[36] Another newspaper editor, F Z Peregrino of the

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[31]Denoon, A grand illusion, pp 14 – 15.

[32]Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour", p 4.

[33]SANAC, II, evidence of George T. Moshesh, p 1236.

[34]*Denoon gives the ff. statistic: a wage rate of 30 – 35s was imposed thinly disguised as an increase on the war-*time rates of 20s, but actually a reduction of the 1899 rate of 50s per month, "Transvaal Labour crisis'", p 484.

[35]SANAC, II, evidence of Chief Moeketsi, p 1259.

[36]SANAC, III, evidence of Mark Samuel Radebe, p 537.

South African Spectator, suggested that "it would stimulate industry if they are encouraged to raise the standard of their wants so that they may have to gratify those wants by working."[37]

The Randlords believed that better recruitment of African labour would reduce the wages and the real cost of unskilled labour and that the strict enforcement of the laws prohibiting the sale of liquor to Africans would help bolster their productivity. The majority of Africans who testified before both the TLC and SANAC were vehemently against the sale of liquor to their brethren for different reasons. For example, Joseph Tele, a headsman of the Gqunukwebe said liquor was spoiling the country[38] while Peregrino spoke of the "beneficent effects of the liquor law".[39] But John Makue, a butcher from Marabastad in Pretoria, saw matters differently. Giving evidence before SANAC, Makue pointed out that "the liquor law, I think it is better to throw it open, not to prohibit liquor to the Natives. There are so many that drink, and so many that do not drink, and they are both good." He also told the commission that he doubted whether they understood him when he said that the whites cannot distinguish between a good black man and a bad one. They look upon black people as equally backward and bad, even the decent ones.[40] What Makue was saying in essence was that over regulating the lives of Africans would not benefit the government in the long run, like making them available for labour on the mines. In other words Makue argued for a free, not a coerced labour supply.

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[37]SANAC, II, evidence of F Z Peregrino, p 320.

[38]SANAC, II, evidence of Joseph Tele, p 719.

[39] SANAC, II, evidence of F Z Peregrino, p 321.

[40]SANAC, IV, evidence of John Makue, p 647.

Yet despite this opinion, the control and regulation of African labour was to be one of the foremost characteristics of the Milner government. The enforcement of the pass law was a priority and all else hinged on it. By extending the powers of the pass department and introducing a fingerprint register of all mine employees, it was hoped to curb desertions among African workers. It is pertinent to note that "the desertions, often the only avenue open to the ill-treated and cheated workers, was now going to be made far more difficult."[41] An even greater hardship was that "the Native, if he deserts without cause, can be compelled, in addition to any punishment inflicted upon him for desertion, to return and complete the period of service for which he was contracted."[42]

African industrial workers became more and more convinced that the Milner government was undoubtedly behind the employers. Not only were the pass laws harsh, but so too were the Masters and Servants laws which enforced labour contracts that favoured the masters. "Any strike action taken by industrial workers was regarded as breach of contract and speedily dealt with by the police."[43] Certainly the TLC did not attempt to see the problem of the shortage of labour in the context of the war or the position of the African labourers. It almost totally ignored all evidence that suggested that the mines and the Chamber of Mines might themselves be responsible for the crisis. "The major concern was the falling profitability of the mines"[44] which

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[41]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 32.

[42]Ibid

[43]Warwick quoted in Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 34.

[44]Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour", p 6.

had to be prevented by coercive measures to force Africans back to the mines despite fears expressed by people like Enock Mamba who told SANAC that he did not "believe in forcing them by law, which would cause general dissatisfaction and have the tinge of slavery".[45]

With regard to the labour issue, there was not much difference in approach between the TLC and SANAC. Both perceived Africans as unskilled labourers serving the needs of the white community.[46] Giving evidence before SANAC, Richard Kelsey Loveday, a member of the Transvaal Legislative Council and formerly the Master and Registrar of the High Court under the interim government, stated that the aim was "to make it impossible for the African to lead an idle life".[47] This could be done by removing Africans from locations and placing them on white farms so that they would learn profitable and progressive agriculture. "Location life", Loveday contended, "is life of idleness".[48] The idea that Africans did not "work" was anathema to many whites who found it difficult to believe that the government and the WNLA could be serious in recruiting labour, since the number of recruits was disappointing. Africans on the other hand could not understand why the whites could not leave them in peace – on the land. Revd Edward Tsewu strongly expressed this desire by Africans while giving evidence to SANAC.[49]

Everywhere, from Bulawayo to Cape Town, from the townships to the rural areas, black people indicated to SANAC that they were in favour of individual land tenure. Many Africans wanted

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[45]SANAC, II, evidence of Enock Mamba, p 1038.

[46]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 85.

[47]SANAC, IV, evidence of RK Loveday, pp 491 – 495.

[48]Ibid, p 491.

[49]SANAC, iv, evidence of Revd Edward Tsewu, pp 787 – 788.

to practise independent agriculture on the land or follow their own chosen trades. In Cape Town's Ndabeni Location, SANAC called in Revd Elijah Mdolomba with William Sipika, Ebenezer Makubalo and William Tsefu as "an educated body representing those enlightened Natives in this colony". What came out of the evidence of these men was that they disagreed with the assumption that individual tenure would disrupt the tribal system and assured the Commission that chieftainship, which was a very useful institution, would survive under the new system of land ownership, and "...the chief will be just like a Mayor of a town or city, because men are all on their plots".[50] These men were an example of the new crop of Africans in the townships men who wanted to be self-employed and free to practise their trades on their own plots in the townships. For example, they were engaged in transport with their carts, selling wood and baking and selling bread. In short, Africans wanted to be independent of the white man whom they could no longer fully trust.

Many Africans agreed that traditional practices that retarded progress were to be gradually abandoned and that they were happy that polygamy was on the decrease. Umhalla said that it was "an expensive thing".[51] Denoon has said that "despite the poverty of the parents and the absolute lack of foreign subsidy, African independent schools attracted more pupils than did Afrikaner CNE (Christian National Education) schools".[52] This goes amply to demonstrate the

[50]SANAC, II, evidence of Revd E Mdolomba, p 280.

[51]SANAC, II, evidence of NC Umhalla, p 591.

[52]Denoon, A grand illusion, p 101.

determination of Africans to maintain their independence. While a large section of white opinion in the Transvaal favoured the coercion of Africans into employment, blacks showed a determined refusal to submit to further exploitation. They "voted with their feet" and "left the Rand..., discouraged their kinsmen from going there, and themselves returned only when starved into submission to the new economic conditions."[53] Many came back to alternative employment in the kitchens, the municipality and to other industries. The president of the Chamber of Mines observed that: "we have to compete in our quest with the farmer, the merchant, the railways, harbours and the general requirements of the towns."[54]

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[53]Denoon, A grand illsion, p 136

[54]FA Johnstone, Class, race and gold: a study of class relations and racial discrimination in South Africa (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1976), p 29.

3.2. CONDITIONS ON THE MINES: A DETERRENT TO WORKERS.

The Randlords, in search of African labour, gradually built up a recruiting empire that extended over the length and breadth of southern Africa. In this region, there was and still is regular traffic in African labour for the mines.[55] The system of migrant labour, first to the diamond fields and then to the gold mines, and the accompanying pass laws have shaped South Africa's political history every bit as much as its economic history. The constant ability of the capitalists and the government to expand the limits of the geographic pool from whence the migrants could be drawn, enabled employers to keep wages low. This has been so for the better part of the history especially of gold mining in South Africa.[56]

The story of mine migrancy is not a pleasant one. The origins of institutionalised racism in South Africa are closely linked to the migrant labour system. Mr Howard Pim, a chartered accountant who for fifteen years had studied and written extensively on African affairs, addressed the British Association at the invitation of Sir Godfrey Lagden in 1905, and explained the reserve-based segregation strategy in these terms: "The reserve is a sanatorium where they [the mining companies] can recruit; if they [the labourers] are disabled they remain there. Their own tribal system keeps them under discipline, and if they became criminals there is not the slightest difficulty in bringing them to justice. All this absolutely without cost to the white community."[57]

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[55]Crush, South Africa's labour empire, p 1.

[56]Ibid

[57]Saul Dubow, "The elaboration of segregationist ideology" in Beinart, W & Delius, P (eds) Putting a plough to the ground: accumulation dispossession in rural South Africa 1850 – 1930 (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1986), p 148.

Indeed, migrant workers were compelled to live a double life. For six months the migrant worker was contracted to work with machines among strangers, both black and white, often in a hostile atmosphere where his dignity or even his humanity did not matter. One mine boss called them "mere muscular machines" that were meant to produce wealth for their masters.[58] In the compounds there was no privacy anywhere. The lavatories were open, long benches with holes where twenty or so men could relieve themselves at the same time.[59] It is against African custom that a son should see his father naked on a toilet seat.[60] However minor this may have seemed to the whites, it was a matter of grave concern to Africans. Washing was also done in public which led to many neglecting it, which prompted Dr LG Irvine, the mine medical officer, to remark that "the Chinese are ever so much cleaner in their habits than the Kafirs are".[61] Men had to dress and undress in full view of the others and lights were kept on throughout the night.

When the contract expired he moved back to the reserve to live with his family at home on the land where he was a son or a respected husband and father. He helped in tilling of the soil or in harvesting the fields while young boys looked after cattle. In the evenings, around the home fires, he would tell stories of the harsh realities of Johannesburg to a wide-eyed audience of the young and old, male and female.[62]

[58]Callinicos, Gold and workers, p 28.

[59]Ibid

[60]*Note* that *in African custom any man your father's age is your father and deserves* to be accorded the same respect.

[61]SANAC, IV, evidence of Dr LG Irvine, p 726.

[62]Stephen Taylor, Shaka`s children: a history of the Zulu people (London, Harper – Collins, 1994), p 268.

Even under tribal conditions in the reserves, on economic grounds, Africans were compelled to enter the labour market.[63] "Dispossessed of his land, needing money to pay taxes, brought to the mines by the WNLA and made to stay there by the pass and the contract, the worker found himself a virtual prisoner in the compound".[64] On arrival at the mines the workers found themselves in "a world of grey barracks and black mineshafts and gaslamps and dynamite – a hard and dangerous world, they worked all day in the bowels of the earth and at night they came up and went to their bleak all-male hostel".[65] The compounds were usually wood and iron shacks, nothing more than camps, and living conditions were over crowded, dirty and extremely unhealthy; there was nothing about them to attract labourers. Both the TLC and SANAC listened to evidence relating to the appalling conditions that deterred Africans from working on the mines.

Without exception, all those who were subjected to life in these compounds testified to the grotesque situation which prevailed particularly before the South African War.[66] Jeeves has analysed the evidence that was given to the TLC by witnesses who had direct experience of the conditions in the compounds before and after the war, and referred to a former compound

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[63]Dubow, "The elaboration of segregationist ideology", pp 148-149.

[64]Callinicos, Gold and workers, p 43.

[65]Taylor, Shaka's children, p 268.

[66]Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour", p 16.

manager at the Crown Reef mine who had spoken of the "drink sodden condition, want of discipline and general moral decay", of the Africans on the mines.[67] On the very first day of the proceedings of the TLC, the Revd E Creux, a missionary of the Swiss Society, told the commission that: "I saw the compounds then, and knowing what the natives told us and how they spoke to us, found that the housing of the natives leads to fearful corruption and contamination and the spread of a great many sicknesses." [68]

The Revd Creux also testified before SANAC in October 1904 and said that many African labourers have work which is certainly not conducive to health, in the mines as well as in the towns. "There are many who are obliged to go back home sick – a large proportion of them are syphilitic".[69] The Revd F Suter, a missionary from Durban, asserted that "principally the sleeping quarters are bad".[70] Even Thomas Maxwell, a general mining contractor and former compound manager was persuaded to point out that "greater attention to these things than was given before the war would make it more attractive" for Africans.[71] The message to the commission even from white informants was that the conditions in the compounds were responsible for keeping the workers away. Not only was mine accommodation appalling, but so was the food. The provision of rations was part of the cost calculation and one of the

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[67]Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour", p 16.

[68]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Rev E Creux, p 8.

[69]SANAC, IV, evidence of Rev E Creux, p 616.

[70]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Revd F Suter, p 17.

[71]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Thomas Maxwell, p 20.

reasons why African workers were paid such low wages. The Chamber of Mines had stipulated "a ration of 5 lbs of mealie meal and 2 lbs of meat a week to save costs".[72] This was very meagre for a worker doing ten or more hours of physical labour in a shift. It is reported that many of the workers spent half their wages on additional food. The Revd Suter told the TLC that "many people seem to be under the impression that the native, in his natural life, lives exclusively on mealie meal porridge...they certainly mix pumpkin and other fruits...they have beans, and nuts, and different kinds of roots, a kind of potato, sweet stuffs and Kaffir corn...and with such a variety they grumble at being kept constantly on mealie meal porridge, and nothing else." [73]

Often the food in the compounds was not fit for human consumption. According to WN Seti, a clerk in the office of the Special Magistrate at King William's Town, who had an excellent rapport with returnees from the mines, the good treatment that Africans expected included "good food, good attendance; to know that he is a man and not a beast; to attend to him when he is sick; and to let him know you have an interest in him – because if you have an interest in him he will have an interest in you".[74] The food issue also came out in a government report of 1903 in which it was reported that rotten food was served in number of compounds, where "small mielies, most discoloured, purple and brown in parts...majority of the corns contained weevils. Very disagreeable and musty smell" was found.[75]

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[72]Callinicos, Gold and workers, p 45.

[73]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Revd F Suter, p 17.

[74]SANAC, II, evidence of W N Seti, p 557.

[75]Callinicos, Gold and workers, p 45.

Food was also used as a means of controlling labour. Only men who could show their stamped ticket were given meat and bread. A stamped ticket was supposed to show that the worker had done the work assigned to him for that shift.[76] Often they were so tired after a shift underground that they simply spent their time sleeping between shifts. Mine workers had very little spare time, no wonder "they fell ill constantly".[77] Dr Irvine told SANAC that enteric fever dysentery and diarrhoea accounted for 23.8 per cent of total deaths in the compounds and that pneumonia was the largest single factor in the death rate.[78] He also admitted that in some mines nothing was done to purify the water that was supplied to African workers, but not the one supplied to the whites, though the mine bosses knew that the "water in the mine workings is certainly liable to be tainted with infection".[79] With so much disease and death, Africans became reluctant to work on the mines.

Conditions for mine workers in the compounds were extremely unpleasant. Denoon states that the mortality rate during 1903 rose to 79.8 per thousand per annum, with a peak of 113.2 during the coldest months.[80] Mr Douglas H Fraser, a resident of Wepener in the Free State told the TLC that from what he had heard from returning mine workers, he "considered the [mortality] rate too high".[81] Even the chiefs in the rural areas became concerned as the number of deaths increased. One Sotho chief is reported to have said: "We do not like our

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[76]Callinicos, Gold and workers p 45.

[77]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Revd E Creux, p 8.

[78]SANAC, iv, evidence of Dr L G Irvine, p 723.

[79]Ibid

[80]Denoon, "The Transvaal labour crisis", p 482.

[81]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of DH Fraser, p 148.

men to go to Johannesburg because they go there to die".[82] Naturally many young men were discouraged by their elders in the villages from embarking on an unpredictable journey to the mines. Even Dr Irvine, who seemed prepared to protect the Chamber of Mines, agreed that a death rate that reached "80 per thousand is quite sufficient to give the Kaffirs in their kraals the impression that this is a highly dangerous occupation and so deter them from going out to work".[83]

During the tour by SANAC in the Cape Colony in 1904, to try and get as wide a range of witnesses as possible, Africans were already aware that the high mortality rate was being reduced and improved medical facilities were being introduced, but even then they were discouraged by the "ill-feeling between black and white" which was known to be common in the mines."[84] It is this ill-feeling that Nathaniel Umhalla said was worse than the "ill-treatment, the kicking and bullying" that went on in the mines.[85] The Revd Suter warned the TLC that: "if it is at the expense of their health Africans will not come".[86]

The fragmentation of the workforce into ethnic groups resulted in great anger and bitterness between the groups who were forever suspicious of each other. The Revd Creux had indicated that these people "are very clannish and when they come to any place, they like to go where they know that they may find others of their own tribe".[87] Disregard of this truth led to open

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[82]Callinicos, Gold and workers, p 49.

[83]SANAC, iv, evidence of Dr LG Irvine, p 728.

[84]Denoon, "The Transvaal labour crisis", p 482.

[85]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of NC Umhalla, p 599.

[86]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Rev F Suter, p 20.

[87]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Revd E Creux, p 8.

battles which were inevitable in the harsh compound situation dominated by stress and frustration, poor food and medical care, dangerous work underground and the escalating number of deaths.

And, to add to the horrors of mine labourers, African workers were also frequently assaulted by Europeans, especially underground. "Europeans, many of them of no high standard of education or ethics, are in practically unchecked control of several members of the subservient race. As a rule, neither the master nor the servant understands the other's language, yet the master has to give directions and the servant to obey them." [88] In a situation like this, conflict was inevitable and the master would resort to brutal measures to stamp his authority. Seti told SANAC that returnees reported to him that the treatment in Johannesburg was just as bad as it was before the South African war, and that "there was very much indiscriminate flogging of labourers".[89] The Revd RH Dyke testified to the same effect before the TLC.[90]

During 1902 and early 1903, the inspectors of the Native Affairs Department "investigated thirteen cases of alleged assault upon black mine workers by their white overseers and twenty eight complaints concerning alleged wage irregularities. In the same period well over 3 000 Africans were disciplined for breach of contract and for other offences against their employers."[91] These figures do reveal that the inspectors acted primarily in the interest of the mine owners.

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[88]Callinicos, Gold and workers, p 45.

[89]SANAC, II, evidence of WN Seti, p 567.

[90]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Revd R H Dyke, p 3.

[91]Jeeves, "The control of migratory labour", p 15.

Stephen Taylor asserted that the divide-and-rule principle was applied in the mines where Zulu were commonly employed as "an irregular militia to keep order among the other groups".[92] This practise was started in Kimberley and later used in the Witwatersrand. Mine managers appointed and armed the Zulu policemen with knobkieries and sjamboks. These policemen used violence on a daily basis. It was one of their duties to punish workers and force them to work harder. Every compound had its detention barracks where workers could be handcuffed and locked up.[93] Zulu as policemen and indunas were hated by the workers because they were appointed by the managers and acted in their interest. Worse still, only a few Zulu worked on the mines since recruiting was prohibited in Natal and Zululand.[94]

Life on the Witwatersrand gold mines was really hard, even the most basic home comforts, including sex and family life were not available. At least the man working on the railways, at the harbour, in industries or in the kitchens could rush home to his family once in a while. As stated earlier these people were "very much attached to their homes".[95] However, the men who worked on the mines, far from their homes and confined to the compounds, had no such opportunity. As a result, homosexuality, previously unknown in African society, began to appear.[96] These aspects came before the TLC and SANAC through the Revd E Creux who suggested to the TLC particularly, that each labourer should have "his own little berth" that could lead to a little more privacy and self-respect.[97]

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[92]Taylor, Shaka's children, p 268.

[93]Callinicos, Gold and workers, p 48.

[94]Transvaal Labour Commission, Report, p 19.

[95]SANAC, I, Report, p 52.

[96]Taylor, Shaka's children, p 268.

[97]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Revd E Creux, p 9.

The Revd Creux showed great insight into the lives of Africans in the northern Transvaal. He gave evidence to both the TLC and SANAC about their habits, grievances and prejudices which they themselves could not present to the commissions. Wallowing in the quagmire of the compounds, robbed of incentive and the hope of advancement, Africans laboured on the mines with the feeling that they were slaves. But these instances of injustice and hardship must have been aggravated by the reduction of wage levels for unskilled labourers leading to the widespread withdrawal. Mr William Grant, the first mine official told the TLC that "the native side of the question" had been ignored, also emphasized the reduction in wages "that tended to alienate labour from the Rand".[98] Though some believed that Africans were inherently lazy, Mr EE Dower of the Cape Native Affairs Department said that the supply of labour would increase "so long as the native is assured of fair treatment and gets a fair rate of wages".[99] Chief Montsioa also said his people "grumble at the wages".[100]

Wages had been cut during the war and the revised wage levels introduced after the war were nowhere near satisfactory. "The new rates compared unfavourably with those earned by every other category of labour except farm workers".[101] The Revd Pambani Mzimba told SANAC that many young men preferred to go to Cape Town and Port Elizabeth and sometimes to Johannesburg for work.[102] Clearly the few that went to Johannesburg must have opted for

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[98]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of William Grant, p 337.

[99]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 89.

[100]SANAC, iv, evidence of Chief Bdirile Montsioa, p 257.

[101]Denoon, "The Transvaal labour crisis", p 482.

[102]SANAC, II, evidence of Revd Pambani Mzimba, p 795.

other employment sectors rather than mining. Revd Creux reiterated that "people have great objection to coming to the mines" since "there are many risks in connection with it...[and they] can get better wages by going after their own employers".[103] Besides the reduction in the rate of wages, something even more confusing and frustrating happened to some of the workers who returned after the war. When they presented their tickets to their previous employers for payment, they were told to go to the WNLA for this money.[104] Grant presented to the TLC a graphic example of this problem and its effect on the African workers who were surprised why a man they had worked for and who had given them tickets, now referred them "to the hills" for their money.[105] This was indeed a classic display of the fact that changes were effected without any due consideration for the feelings of Africans in the mines.

The functions of the WNLA interfered with the relations that were already established between the employer and the employee. Africans valued this relationship so much that they always wished to return to the same employer after their stay at home in the reserves. And that is why they did not object to going back to De Beers, in Kimberley because they got what they were promised.[106] But the WNLA, in order to eliminate inter-mine rivalry, had a new set of conditions to apply, which meant that employees had no choice of employer. This contributed greatly to their reluctance to work on the mines, and many looked for alternative employment elsewhere.

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[103]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Revd Creux, p 9.

[104]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of William Grant, p 337.

[105]Ibid

[106]SANAC, ii, evidence of WN Seti, p 533.

Among those who returned to the mines, many faced the dilemma of being diverted from the mines to which they wished to be sent, and allotted to mines to which they did not wish to go. This system, according to Grant, brought incalculable mischief to the mines.[107] However, not all the mines could be accused of treating African workers badly. Richard von Hernach, the Compound Manager of Crown Deep, singled out his own mine, Langlaagte, Robinson and Bonanza as the mines preferred by African workers. He told the TLC that the workers who left the mines for alternative employment in town often returned to these mines, saying ït is not nice in town".[108]

Harnach said that the happiest were the East Coast Africans, "their hilarious disposition, their playfulness and humour, show a remarkable improvement in the degree of contentedness in comparison to the pre-war days".[109] Only a small portion of African workers were of a morose disposition and these were from the Cape Colony, that is, the Xhosa, Gaika, Mfengu and Mpondo. He said that "though of a higher intellect, they seemed to be saturated with a great amount of hatred and animosity towards the white man; they are habitual grumblers, and always discontented, unfaithful and notorious deserters".[110] It is interesting to note that it was particularly the Cape Africans who complained about the "ill-feeling", the hatred that was evident between blacks and whites on the Witwatersrand.[111]

[107]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of W Grant, p 339.

[108]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of R von Harnach, p 476.

[109]Ibid, p 475.

[110]Ibid

[111]SANAC, ii, evidence of WN Seti, p 567.

Cape Africans enjoyed more social and political rights in that colony than Africans in any other colony and that is why they were aware of the injustices brought to bear upon Africans and were quick to object. The largest number of emerging African intelligentsia was to be found among the peoples of the Eastern Cape. Not surprisingly therefore, that the earliest political organisation along European lines, and the breakaway from white churches was to be found among these people.[112] Brownlee made the TLC aware of a remark that these Africans often made, that "it was what might be expected that we should be ill-treated under a Boer Government, and so we put up with it; but that we should be ill-treated under the Government of the King is what we cannot understand and cannot endure".[113] Perhaps it was this attitude of resistance that the Cape Africans brought to the Witwatersrand goldfields.

With regard to the other African groups, that is, the Transvaal Shangane, Pedi, Sotho, Zulu and Swazi including the Free State Sotho, Mr von Harnach bombarded the TLC with details of incidents on the mines that highlighted their contentment. That they enjoyed taking a bath in the two swimming pools in the compound, "yelling, shouting, laughing like a lot of merry children". That they enjoyed their warm coffee in the change houses that were heated with steam before going down the shaft, to prevent them from catching a cold.[114]

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[112]Odendaal, Vukani Bantu! pp 1 – 29.

[113]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of WT Brownlee, p 587.

[114]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of R von Harnach, p 475.

There is no reason why Mr von Harnach should not be believed. It is only unfortunate that the TLC did not call the Africans themselves to testify. Dr Irvine's report, on the other hand, does not paint such a glossy picture of compound life.[115] And one finds it hard that the TLC could have taken Mr von Harnach seriously when he said that "natives when it comes to meat are insatiable". To prove this assertion, he gave an example of the day when the British army occupied Johannesburg. He said that Africans broke loose from the compounds and looted the slaughter poles and killed some 200 head of cattle, and of course, consumed them in one day. So much for their craving for meat.[116] The significance of Mr von Harnach's evidence is that it highlights the fact that almost all the witnesses who were attached to the Chamber of Mines with its "unhealthy influence over the administration"[117] would find it difficult to reveal the true state of affairs on the mines.

There was another angle of the problem of the shortage of African labour. At the time when Africans were beginning to see the value of education and crying out for opportunities to be made available to them to get an education, mine managers seemed to have been averse to employing "educated" Africans.

[115]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Dr LG Irvine,

[116]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of R von Harnach, p 475,

[117]Denoon, "Capitalist influence", p 304.

They claimed that educated Africans were less trustworthy servants, that they tend to do less work and that the greater part of the criminal classes of Africans were drawn from them. The Revd HS Goodenough brought this view of the mine officials to the attention of the TLC and disputed it as wholly incorrect.[118] But, as a result of their fears, mine officials had kept their African employees locked up in the compounds without access to either night school or church.

The African view, on the other hand, as expressed by John Tengo Jabavu, an authority in the field at that time, was that educated Africans were not reluctant to work and that education taught them "industrial habits and general utility".[119] Nathaniel Umhalla said that "they are not afraid of dirtying their hands".[120] Even Dr Alexander Roberts, Acting Principal of Lovedale, confirmed that educated Africans, as a rule, realise "the moral value of work".[121] Progressive mines must have recognised these facts and made elementary school and church service accessible to their African workforce.[122]

[118]SANAC, iv, evidence of Revd HD Goodenough, p 846.

[119]SANAC, ii, evidence of JT Jabavu, p 730.

[120]SANAC, iv, evidence of NC Umhalla, p 515.

[121]SANAC, iv, evidence of Dr Alexander Roberts, p 798.

[122]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of R von Harnach, p 475.

Life in some of the compounds was so bad that those who did not fall ill or die deserted. But not all who deserted were bold enough to go back home and face their families empty-handed. Some of them, as a consequence, turned to crime. They formed gangs of thieves and bandits that terrorised the mine communities of the reef,[123] making the Witwatersrand a fearful place to go to and that added to the scarcity of work-seekers.

[123]Taylor, Shaka's children, p 268.

3.2 LAND AND AGRICULTURE

Having analysed some of the reasons given before the TLC and SANAC about why labourers found working on the Witwatersrand gold mines so unpleasant, and therefore withheld their labour, we now turn to the situation in the rural Transvaal which created a labour shortage in the countryside.

With industrialization the demand for farm produce grew so great that landowners abandoned their traditional dependence on rent from their African tenants as their source of income and started producing for the market. "Integral to this, was a process of eliminating the African peasantry and transforming it into a source of farm labour."[124] However, only a few white landowners could afford to pay wages that were likely to attract sufficient labour to meet their needs.[125] Circumstances at the time of the TLC and SANAC were that white farmers were experiencing a grave shortage of labour.

According to the report of the TLC, "among the witnesses who appeared to give evidence as to this part of the enquiry, there was a striking unanimity on several points".[126] Many of them were of the opinion that the farmers of the Transvaal were unable to obtain an adequate supply of labour. The majority of white witnesses said that of the Africans living on government farms, on unoccupied farms and in locations, very few could be induced to work for white farmers, and that as a result "the farming industry was carried on under the greatest difficulties".[127]

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[124]ML Morris, "The development of capitalism in South African agriculture; class struggle in the countryside", Economy and Society, vol 5, 1976, p 293.

[125]SANAC, iv, evidence of GG Munnik, p 478.

[126]Transvaal Labour Commission, Reports, p 13.

[127]Ibid

In their quest for labour rather than rent-paying tenants, landowners clamoured for restrictive measures to be introduced to increase the African farm labour supply. Unlike the mining industry which was represented by English speakers, Transvaal farmer evidence came from Afrikaners. The Boer general, Piet Cronjé was convinced that there existed "a thick wall of natives living in the outlying districts" who must be compelled by law to come to work.[128] Cronjé argued that the situation had become even worse after the South African War because Africans had occupied white-owned farms during the hostilities. This was true of large areas of the western Transvaal. Chief Lentshwe was able to extend his authority over the Kgatla in the western Transvaal as well as in Bechuanaland. Among the Ngwato of Khama, the war ushered in a period of unprecedented prosperity as the tribesmen made use of extra available land to cultivate more grain that they sold to the British army.[129] The same thing happened in the Lydenburg and Vryheid districts of the erstwhile South African Republic where African communities effectively controlled hundreds of square kilometres of land, keeping out the Boer commandos.[130] While occupying this land a great deal of economic activity had taken place on those farms that had already been developed by their Boer owners. The African occupants displayed their agricultural skill and made good use of the increased area of land under their cultivation. The high prices paid by the British army for their produce ensured their economic prosperity.[131]

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[128]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Piet Cronjé, p 276.

[129]Fransjohan Pretorius, Book review, Peter Warwick, Black people and the South African War, 1899-1902. Kleio, vol 18, 1986, p 25.

[130]Warwick, Black people, p 5.

[131]Bundy, The rise and fall, pp 365.

In the northern districts of the Transvaal away from the conflict where Africans had not been subjected to military upheaval and white influence there was more freedom. In practice "this meant that [Africans] were able to occupy more land, were free from labour demands and could live free from white interference."[132] Some of these land invasions rested on ideas of political benefit after the war, African chiefs believing that this was their chance to regain their sovereignty and that the British were helping them to do so for example, the Pedi ousted the Boer commandos from the area between Steelpoort and Olifants rivers and the Sekkukhune group collaborated with the British in the hope of re-establishing their influence in Pedi-affairs and dramatically extending their land. It was especially the hope of extending land that was frustrated at Vereeniging in May 1902.[133]

In the Vryheid area, Africans there had "a strong feeling that the land ought to revert to them" after the war.[134] They refused to work for the white farmers because, according to General Louis Botha, "they looked down upon the Boers". Some of them, Botha argued, had been promised farms by the British if they assisted in the war.[135] Peasants led by Malekutu prevented Boer movements in the Middelburg District. Those under Dinkwanyane, meanwhile, closed off the Waterfall valley to the Boers. The Boer attack at Holkrans was indeed the most terrifying to Boer society that General Botha used it as an example of the reasons why they should surrender.[136]

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[132]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 35.

[133]Pretorius, Book review, Kleio, 1986, p 125.

[134]Warwick, Black people, p 165.

[135]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Louis Botha, p 501.

[136]Krikler, Revolution from above, p 14.

The Treaty of Vereeniging came as a shock to many Africans when it was made clear to them that they would not gain anything at all. In the Pilanesberg where the Kgatla held sway, white landlords were too scared to return to their farms in 1902. It was only after the government used the South African Constabulary in 1903 that some of them could go back to their farms.[137] In fact, the South African Constabulary was seen as a "rural police force" that became a powerful instrument of labour discipline. It was "to prove crucial to the efficient maintenance of relationships of exploitation".[138] Not only the Constabulary but also the magistrates and Native Affairs Commissioners, using the power at their disposal, could force Africans back to the farms as labourers. Native Affairs Commissioners kept a close watch on workers who flouted the authority of the farmers, such as at the farm Rooikrantz in the Krugersdorp District and at Rustenburg. These offenders were hauled before the local pass officer and charged with contravening the Pass Law and some of them were sentenced to six months in prison.[139]

At the time it was reported that a great many Africans who declined to work were armed to a great extent, which raised the spectre of an African uprising.[140] An example was given of the peasant followers of Mathebe in the Bronkhorstspruit area who violently resisted and successfully prevented the restitution of cattle to a party of Boers. It is said that the imperial authorities became determined to disarm African peasants in the countryside precisely because they "were becoming a positive danger to the Boers returning to... farms".[141]

[137]Krikler, Revolution from above,, p 48.

[138]Ibid

[139]Ibid

[140]Odendaal, Vukani Bantu! P 36.

[141]Krikler, Revolution from above, p 49.

Legally, Africans were restricted from buying land and the number of rent-paying squatters had been limited on Crown land.[142] In practice, however, it seems that the government was unable to enforce these laws. As a result, squatting continued on Crown land, on private land and on land where owners were absent. Making the situation even more complex was the fact that a large number of Africans lived on land that they owned either individually or communally.[143] These black landowners permitted other Africans to squat on their land, and in these areas, squatters were able to make a living out of subsistence and market agriculture and were able to avoid entering the labour market. Many whites, especially the farmers, were bitterly opposed to this arrangement and to squatting in general.[144] General Botha, the future prime minister of South Africa, giving evidence before the TLC, stressed that "the government should not have large centres where Kaffirs are allowed to congregate". He was against Africans occupying farms where they paid rent, insisting that "squatting not only tends to injure the surrounding farms, but also the native himself [because] when too many Africans are together nothing good comes of it".[145]

Africans on the other hand insisted that they be allowed to own land. The Revd E Tsewu was outspoken on this, pressing for the right of Africans to own land because "some of them are

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[142]Morris, "The development of capitalism", p 293.

[143]DR Burton, "Taxation of Africans: Transvaal 1902 – 1907", Kleio, vol 19, 1987, p 51.

[144]Burton, "Taxation of Africans", p 51.

[145]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Louis Botha, p 501.

brought up in cultivating land, and they are quite capable of having land of their own, and using it properly, and supplying the market".[146] General Piet Cronje understood the urge and the general insistence by Africans to get more land, even though he disapproved of it. "If an African could get a farm by paying £15 a year for it, and could earn £30, £40 or £50 out of that farm in a year, then they would see that it is much better for them to remain on a farm under these conditions rather than work for £1 and ten shillings per month".[147] Bundy has quoted a farmer-politician, PGW Grobler, a Member of the Provincial Legislature for Rustenburg, as having said that "the natives of Mabalane hired land all over the place because the land was too small, and in that way they were absolutely independent and not compelled to go and work on a farm. There was no necessity for them to give their labour to the farmer".[148]

Understandably, many African peasants "moved off labour farms on to rent farms" so that they could live by agriculture rather than labour for white farmers.[149] These people, as Jabavu observed, "are ready enough to go on to the land".[150] Solomon Malapan of the Bakgatle community in Makapanstad, Pretoria district testified before SANAC that the land they were living on was bought by the community. Daniel More of the Bakwena group, Rustenburg district as well as August Mokatle of the Bafokeng also testified that the land they were living

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[146]SANAC, IV, evidence of Revd E Tsewu, p 787.

[147]Bundy, The rise and fall, p 210.

[148]Ibid

[149]Ibid, p 211.

[150]SANAC, ii, evidence of JT Jabavu, p 726.

on had been bought by their communities. "We used to collect the money between ourselves and buy the farm from the owner".[151] August Mokatle said. The African peasants on these farms ploughed and produced crops. It was undoubtedly their desire to be given the same rights as whites to buy land and practice agriculture the way they deemed fit and also, under dire conditions, send young men out to work in the industrial centres to supplement the income from the crops that they sold.

David More of the Bakwena community in the Rustenburg district told SANAC about the "hot and heavy" life that they led under the Boer government and that though they had no rights, the Boer authorities used to allow their chiefs to purchase land "...and today... the government we always needed...refuses to allow chiefs to buy land".[152] Clearly Africans had hoped for a post-war improvement in their lives. When Africans were giving evidence before both commissions, they did not make any mention of the Boers as an impediment to the attainment of any of their needs. They addressed the British who were in power. According to More, they as a people had hoped that the big Chief, Sir Godfrey Lagden would address all their grievances relating to land. He also asked that they be given time to think over all the problems that they wish to put forward to the commission. Perhaps Botha was correct to say that Africans "looked down upon the Afrikaners"[153] as a defeated people, just like themselves. Presumably Africans did not want to work for people they despised.

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[151]SANAC, IV, evidence of August Mohatle, p 650.

[152]SANAC, IV, evidence of David More, p 651.

[153]SANAC, IV, evidence of Louis Botha, p 501.

Many Afrikaner farmers told SANAC that there was a great shortage of labour on the farms and that the solution to the crisis was in the strict enforcement of the Plakker's Wet or Squatter's Law, which would mean the forceful placement of Africans on white farms as labour tenants. In the event however, SANAC recommended against any immediate action being taken against the squatters.[154] Lagden maintained that African peasants produced "a considerable amount of cereals, especially mielies, used for consumption in this country".[155] This seems to imply that the white farmers would not be able to produce as much and also that the peasants had a vital role to play in the country's economy, despite the fact as Botha said, that "the British and the Boers are standing together".

Giving evidence before SANAC, GG Munnik said that the African "has no necessity to work when he has two wives because he has everything that he wants, he can go and squat on Government ground, and those two wives work for him. They grow and reap sufficient grain for him every year to keep him in idleness".[156] Burton reiterated that "whites believed that polygamy enabled Africans to avoid paid labour as they could pay their taxes through the efforts of the wives".[157] But Africans did not view the custom of polygamy as a way to avoid work, they saw it as a social institution whereby those who could afford were able to feed those who were less fortunate. But at the time of the Commissions, fortuitous circumstances were

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[154]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 95.

[155]Bundy, The rise and fall, p 209.

[156]SANAC, IV, evidence of GG Munnik, p 477.

[157]DR Burton, "Taxation of Africans: Transvaal 1902 – 1907, Kleio, vol 19, 1987, p 51.

persuading Africans to forgo the practice. The spreading Christian religion was preaching against it, and then too, the unavailability of cattle as a result of the rinderpest epidemic, the added taxation per hut (per wife) and the general economic situation left them no choice.

Jabavu said that the introduction of the plough lessened the labours of women in the field and men took their share in agriculture and raised crops. He also admitted that the custom of polygamy was gradually disappearing,[158] and therefore could not be responsible for holding men from seeking employment in the labour market. Nathaniel Umhalla, Stephen Mine, Samuel Radebe and others spoke against polygamy but none of them indicated that it made men lazy. On the contrary, one would think that it encouraged them to work, as Revd Creux indicated to SANAC that "their wants have increased a great deal, now they want a great many things in the way of clothing, besides their blankets, and the money that they do not give to the Government they spend in the shops. They need much more money now than before".[159]

Sol Plaatje, an African newspaper editor, stated clearly to SANAC that his Barolong people would appreciate more arable land with an extra supply of water to grow crops other than

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[158]SANAC, II, evidence of John Tengo Jabavu, p 733.

[159]SANAC, IV, evidence of Revd E Creux, p 615.

Kaffir corn.[160] Along with his chief, Badirile Montsioa, they argued that the Barolong were already building European-type houses, they went out to work and with their earnings they bought cattle. They said that they were also building schools to educate their children. An example of their attachment to land was shown by their acquisition of farms such as Goedwandrift, Goedewacht and Boschveld.[161]

Even some of the whites realised that Africans were happier when left alone on the land. Douglas Fraser told the TLC that "they are a pastoral and agricultural race essentially, and any extraneous labour they undertake seems with the fixed intention of increasing their flocks, herds and lands."[162]

Bundy has asserted that for a while after the war, the ban on land purchases by Africans was lifted because of losses or deaths during the war, and as a result farms came onto the market, causing a flurry of land purchases by Africans.[163] After that, whites became aware of the dangers to them inherent in success by African agriculturalists, both in terms of labour shortage and of competition. The TLC concluded in 1904 that agricultural production by Africans "would not only withhold labour from industry; but will also bring them into competition with white agricultural producers".[164] This is a valid conclusion indeed.

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[160]SANAC, IV, evidence of Sol Plaatje, p 266.

[161]SANAC, IV, evidence of Bainrile Montsioa, p 257.

[162]Transvaal Labour Commission, evidence of Douglas Fraser, p 147.

[163]Bundy, The rise and fall, p 210.

[164]Ibid

4. CONCLUSION

It becomes clear from the evidence provided before the TLC and SANAC that the British administration in the Transvaal after the South African War was less effective than the Boer republican government had been in mobilising cheap African labour. It is true that Africans viewed the Milner government with great disappointment, seeing it as being worse than the previous one. This came across, in particular, in the African evidence to SANAC. During the Milner era Africans experienced "a series of attacks on their position on society which effectively cut them of from access to full citizenship".[1] They were now living under stricter laws that were more stringently enforced and "the outcome was that Africans deliberately withheld their labour, giving rise to an acute shortage on the mines".[2]

"The labourers, having anticipated substantial social and economic reforms, were faced by a drastic reduction in the rate of wages, immediate and prolonged forced labour, and the full brunt of war without any hope of ultimate advantage."[3] As soon as they found the chance, they left the mines and vowed not to return. Evidence before SANAC testifies to their opting for other employment opportunities rather than the mines or white agriculture.

Any evaluation of African reluctance to take up wage employment must be regarded as being far more than the cold statistics of how many were needed and how many were available. It

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[1]Davenport, South Africa, p 228.

[2]Odendaal, Vukani Bantu! p 39.

[3]Denoon, A grand illusion, p 136.

must be viewed within the full context of the prevailing ideology and politics. Clearly there was a growing importance attached by mine owners, white farmers and businessmen to bringing blacks into the European economic system. They tended to see the African as a labour tenant and as a wage labourer, rather than as a self-sufficient farmer. De Kiewiet argued that "political rightlessness and economic inferiority...seemed the pillars on which white society strove to keep itself aloft".[4] Africans were to be denied the opportunity to compete with Whites economically. Shula Marks and Stan Trapido have, according to Burton, "noted how the Milner administration was primarily concerned to free potential black labour for the gold mines and was determined to transform all black tenants into wage labourers".[5]

After the devastation caused by the war, a great deal of rebuilding had to be done. According to Meintjes this was Milner's "golden hour". The country "lay torn and bleeding at his feet and at least he could throw himself into the Herculean task of repairing the ravages of war and restarting the colonies on a higher plane of civilization".[6] His appointment of the TLC and SANAC was an attempt in that direction. Though dominated by the whites as witnesses, SANAC did call on some blacks from a variety of backgrounds to voice their opinions. It appears that Africans harboured a multiplicity of grievances, ranging from recruitment by the WNLA, the pass system, the contract, compound life, the dangers of mine labour and the high mortality rate.

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[4]CW De Kiewiet, The imperial factor in South Africa: a study in politics and economics (London, Oxford University Press, 1965), p 3.

[5]Burton, SANAC: an analasys and evaluation, p 8.

[6]Meintjes, General Louis Botha, p 247.

All the Transvaal Africans who appeared before SANAC voiced opinions on land. The Revd Edward Tsewu, the most outspoken of them said, as did several chiefs, that Africans "should be allowed to buy property and own property in the shape of land in the Transvaal, in as much as it has been done before".[7] He stressed that lack of land was a great grievance to the Africans. Denoon reiterated that "at almost every meeting with the Native Affairs officials, Africans stressed their interest in gaining permission to purchase land".[8] Africans had hoped that they would be allowed to own land under the British. They had hoped that the British would treat them as "their children". They were also "apathetic towards a commission which only made recommendations and which they felt was not very important to them".[9]

The TLC and SANAC concluded that the reason for the labour shortage was that with more access to land after the South African War, Africans did not need to work any longer.[10] SANAC regarded the land issue as the most important realising that "from it there is a common origin of many serious Native problems".[11] Nevertheless, SANAC rejected the principle of "equality between Africans and whites thus reinforcing majority white opinion and setting important guidelines for future South African policy".[12]

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[7]SANAC, IV, evidence of Revd Edward Tsewu, p 788.

[8]Denoon, A grand illusion, p 109.

[9]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 12.

[10]Ibid, p 89.

[11]Ibid, p 109.

[12]Odendaal, Vukani Bantu! p 65.

Added to the rejection of equality between black and white and the urge to destroy African independence, SANAC also regarded traditional African society as being unsuited to the needs of an industrial state, because its economic and social structures enabled its members to resist labour demands. It was necessary, therefore, according to SANAC, "to mould African society into a condition more attuned to the labour needs of the state".[13] It is recommended that the overwhelming economic and political power of the state and the capitalist sector would be utilised in under-developing the African economy in the reserves so that it could no longer "present any significant competitive threat to white farms." In addition, the reserves should continue the supply of labour-power to the industrial sector.[14] The peculiar feature of this labour force was that it was migrant and temporary; returning to the reserves in between periods of work.[15]

At the time of the commissions, Odendaal claims with justification that Africans had realised "the futility of traditional methods of resistance to white initiative and white expansion and had started to make use of European constitutional methods to protect African interests".[16] In other words, in the Cape where they had the vote, they were seeking to co-operate with liberal whites who were articulating African grievances.

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[13]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 139.

[14]Harold Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power in South Africa: From segregation to apartheid", Economy and Society, vol 1, no 4, 1972, p 433.

[15]Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power", p 433.

[16]Odendaal, Vukani Bantu! p xi.

The changing forms of political control had a marked effect on African politics and significantly influenced its direction. Observing that the British and the Boers were working together made Africans to see the benefits of co-ordinating their own activities across tribal, "regional and parochial barriers".[17] And, realising that South African colonial policy was working towards the restriction of existing African political rights and the permanent exclusion of Africans from mainstream politics, Africans mobilised to challenge this direction in policy. There was a clear deviation from the 19th century participatory and co-operative approach to politics by Africans. The African elite of early 20th century, among others, Sol Plaatje, Martin Luthuli, Nathaniel Umhalla, John Tengo Jabavu and Edward Tsewu, driven by the desire to see political rights being extended "to all qualified British subjects regardless of race, colour or creed",[18] were leading their communities from the front in a move that was obviously separatist and confrontational. More than a dozen political organisations were formed at this time. These fought mainly for the rights of Africans to economic independence. On the subject of education, they drew attention to the need for government to establish non-denominational schools so that all African children can have access to education.[19]

From the African evidence presented before the TLC and SANAC, it became clear that Africans had lost confidence in the "British sense of justice". They felt that Whites were working to break down the power of traditional society and, at the same time, to ensure that the process was implemented in such a way that it did not provoke resistance or effectively challenge white supremacy.[20]

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[17]Odendaal, Vukani Bantu! p 285.

[18]Ibid

[19]SANAC, IV, evidence of Revd E Tsewu, p 791.

[20]Burton, SANAC: an analysis and evaluation, p 139.

The prohibition of African land-ownership outside the demarcated and under-developed reserves was meant to inhibit any peasant economic growth,[21] a measure that would ensure the practical development of an economically powerful white supremacy, while Africans remained "suffocating" in the reserves.

The Chamber of Mines admitted in later years that it was to the advantage of the mines that native labourers should be encouraged to return to their homes after the completion of the ordinary period of service whereby certain security functions would be performed by the extended family in the reserves,[22] that were serving as "a sanatorium", as Howard Pim had expressed it in 1905. Economically, the African migrant's life, "even those that managed to cling to the land, became a fretful going to and fro between the white man's world and their own, each alike in that neither provided them with adequate sustenance or privilege".[23]

Faced with the shortage of cheap African labour, the government and the Chamber of Mines stumbled "into an ill-considered solution for temporary difficulties". They brought Chinese labourers to the Rand with disastrous political consequences.[24] As for the Africans, their boycott of the mines and farms failed to benefit them in the long run, since the government had put everything in place to ensure their perpetual dependence on wage labour.

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[21]Legassick, "South Africa: capital accumulation", p 267.

[22]Wolpe, "Capitalism and cheap labour-power", p 434.

[23]De Kiewiet, The imperial factor, p 3.

[24]Denoon, A grand illusion, p 158.

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