

**Introduction to  
“Imperialism, Settler Identities and Colonial Capitalism:  
The Hundred Year Origins of the 1899 South African War”**

In this paper, written as a chapter for the forthcoming *Cambridge History of South Africa*, Stanley Trapido puts forward an interpretation of the causes of the South African War that integrates context with agency. In the course of emphasising the struggle’s long and short-term contexts (the title’s echo of Smuts’ *Century of Wrong* is quite deliberate), it seeks to infuse motive with context, so as to give meaning to the responsibility for war assiduously sought by generations of liberal historians. With exquisite subtlety, Trapido traces the making, and establishes the meanings of “*Krugerism*”, even as he stresses the pivotal role of the Selborne Memorandum, a document as often misrepresented as misunderstood by historians, as well as the key part played by Percy Fitzpatrick in overcoming the inertia and caution characteristic of much mining house behaviour. Such were the overlapping ideological complexities of the moment that Trapido is moved to question those identities and interests previously assumed to be fixed:

If we examine the claims of those who believed themselves to be in an empire imperilled by *Krugerism* alongside the claims of those perceiving themselves as the victims of “a century’s wrong”, do we arrive at conclusions which are more than the sum of two sets of assertions? Moreover, if there was a threat to Empire in South Africa, was it only Afrikaners who made that threat? We know that it did not come from those Cape Afrikaners who were loyalists, asserting that they spoke the “Queens’s Dutch”. Nor can we confidently say that all British “Afrikanders” were loyal to the empire. So what impact did these sometimes blurred loyalties have on either *Krugerism* or imperialism?

For Trapido, it was the British “Afrikander”, Fitzpatrick, who helped to set the stage on which Milner acted. Yet the setting was highly contingent and unlikely to last. It is an argument whose overall conclusions attempt to avoid the polarised positions adopted by so many accounts of the causes of the war. Rather than having us choose between a political and strategic set of explanations on the one hand, or the economic determinism of gold and gold mining’s imperatives on the other, Stanley Trapido argues for the convergence of both, particularly in the decisive period between 1895 and 1899.

***Ian Phimister***  
***University of Sheffield***

**Imperialism, Settler Identities and Colonial Capitalism:  
The Hundred Year Origins of the 1899 South African War**

*Stanley Trapido*

The South African War of 1899-1902 was the culmination – if not inevitably so – of a hundred years of British domination of the region. That domination began with the seizure of the Cape of Good Hope from the Dutch in 1795, beginning an economic, ideological as well as political hegemony. Britain's presence in South Africa followed from strategic assumptions born of its need to defend Indian Ocean interests. Strategic considerations meant that the British, like the Dutch before them, had to provision the Indian Ocean's naval and mercantile fleets. Settler expansion into more and more distant hinterlands – to secure ecological zones where crops or stock could be raised – not only had to be allowed but had to be furthered with Imperial troops. British rule in South Africa, with Downing Street's power and Whitehall's administration, willy-nilly, turned social structures in the Cape, and beyond, into a series of new and changing collaborations, alliances, oppositions, and identities. Expansion required conquering African territories and, thereafter, the distribution of African land and labour. This was a process which mostly favoured British merchants and traders at the expense of Dutch-Afrikaner settlers in the interior. Eventually local ethnic and regional groupings were provoked into a new assertiveness and began to acquire objectives of their own. In this way sub-imperialisms emerged. Then, in the last quarter of the century, the region was further transformed by the discovery of diamonds and thereafter, gold. Out of these latter discoveries came a powerful and confident mining capitalism embedded in South Africa but linked to the world's major financial centre which was the City of London. Determining how these transformations took place and how interactions between the Imperial state, settler ambitions and capitalist enclaves eventually erupted into war is the major purpose of this chapter. The analysis and the narrative which traces these developments have a well-known and considerable, if contentious, literature. It stretches from the contemporary observers of empire and imperialism to the analysts and the analysis operating before and after the South African War. The first section of what follows examines the many forces shaping the political economy of southern Africa in the period up to the mid-1890s. Section two concentrates on the tumultuous years between circa 1895 and 1899, from the moment when the discovery of "deep levels" of gold underneath the first Rand caused the pace of events to quicken throughout the region.

**I**

**The Cape Colony**

European colonisation of the Cape – the Dutch between 1652 and 1795, the British occupation beginning in the nineteenth century – was secured to further Britain's strategic-cum-mercantile preoccupations in India and east Asia. These strategic objectives led the colonising power to hold not only the region's coastline and safe harbours but to secure inland agricultural lands. To reduce costs they found collaborators who would help secure their primary purpose, guarding the Cape against

the designs of other European powers. Although indigenous Khoi peoples were employed in military roles, Britain chose its own settlers, and the inaccurately named Cape Dutch, as its principal collaborators. In practice, however, British settlers immediately became a strategic liability and they required additional military intervention to ensure their security. But in addition to the military support which Britain gave its settlers, it bestowed upon them economic, political and ideological power. Settlers, old and new, building on this authority, rapidly acquired additional aspirations of their own and several settler identities, associated with separate economic and partisan objectives, emerged. These settlers came to be known as Afrikaners – either Dutch or British – each with interests of their own and varying degrees of antagonism to the imperial power.

To begin with Dutch-Afrikaner society in the western Cape, settled since the mid-seventeenth century – included prosperous landowners and an urban population of administrators, lawyers, other professionals, as well as merchants, Reformed Church clergymen and newspaper editors. Also encapsulated within this wider society was a population drawn in part from freed and manumitted slaves, some of whom were craftsmen, as well as petty traders and labouring poor of various ethnic origins. Those nearest the rising harbour-cum-town were involved in the cultivation of arable land, the wealthiest among them being slave and land-owners. Landowners enclosed tenants and servants to establish settled existences. Property and wealth defined these stratified communities and gave rise to administrative and church focused villages such as Stellenbosch and Paarl. Credit was rooted in community and the worst effects of economic cycles of depression and expansion were contained by ensuring that landed property did not pass to outsiders. This was a moral economy which underpinned the commercial and social activities of Dutch-Afrikaner society.

#### **British occupation and settler economics**

As the British occupation began, the Dutch-speaking elite of Cape Town were on the verge of a cultural transformation. They created a theatre, together with historical, intellectual and linguistic associations which sought to advance a new colonial Dutch identity. These activities, combined with an agitation for self-rule, kindled a Cape Dutch nationalism in the 1830s although that was not a name which stemmed from that identity. At first the West's affluent Dutch-Afrikaners, styled a gentry by some, seemed to be developing an anti-British identity but by the 1840s they began to develop a pragmatic loyalty to the British regime which was to last for most of the nineteenth century. Beyond the arable western lands were districts made up mostly of impoverished pastoralists although those with connections to the monopolists and traders of Cape Town acquired a degree of prosperity. By the end of the eighteenth century these several populations had developed diverging identities and patois in separate parts of the settlement.

The arrival of the British saw the establishment not only of an Imperial administrative-cum-military cast attached to Britain but a merchant circle gradually developing local roots and interests. This was followed by the fostering of additional settler communities, evolving their own social and political identities. British settlers not only obeyed the laws of the market but attached themselves to imperial strategic objectives although they quickly sought to ensure that these helped foster their own

material well being. The strategic imperatives of British policy makers, we have noted, might have confined the occupation of the Cape to such coastal havens as the subcontinent offered. Those policy makers had, however, to recognise - as their Dutch counterparts had done before them - that the region's ecology required cattle be reared at a considerable distance from the colony's only major town and harbour, Kabo turned into Cape Town. At the same time we should not underestimate the economic importance of the colony's provisioning role. The early nineteenth century Cape may not have exported tropical crops to Europe as other colonies were doing but its exports were consumed on board ship without ever needing to be off-loaded.

An eastward and a northern movement of colonists was condoned and even encouraged, and colonial settlement was propelled further and further inland. So much so that one of the earliest decisions taken by the new Imperial authorities in 1819 was to introduce four thousand British settlers into territory seized from Xhosa occupants. These British newcomers were meant to defend the region against recently dispossessed Khoisan and Xhosa clans in an eastern district known for its pasturage. It was called the Zuurveld by Dutch-Afrikanders and then Albany by the latest (British) occupiers. These latter settlers were supposed to act as a first line of defence against African polities but they were also seen as a means of assimilating old colonists into a British political culture.

In the 1820s and 1830s two related ideological quests nourished and sustained that British culture in its colonial setting. The first of these emerged from the evangelical movement which announced that "providence" was "marking out" Britain to be the "great mother of Empires". Britons had displaced the original inhabitants of the land but that was God's will. The second great ideological venture was, inevitably, the anti-slavery movement. British settlers in Cape Town and Albany held public dinners to celebrate the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. They were not only doing God's work but they must have brought discomfort to Dutch-Afrikanders, the only legal slave-owners in South Africa. British settlers were forbidden slaves from the beginning of their settlement. It is claimed that British employers supported the abolition of the other serfdom which controlled the lives of Cape Khoisan because it freed workers for equally harsh wage labour for which they sought a remorseless vagrancy law.<sup>5</sup>

Settlers could, of course, only come by the territory they occupied by plundering the land and the cattle of the people whom they conquered. There were some who saw that such despoliation must lead to bitter resistance. For a moment, in the mid-1830s, Andries Stockenström the Cape born Lieutenant Governor, and the Evangelical "Saints" in the British Parliament, recognised the vicious circle which was created by conquest and resistance. They set about persuading the British government to reverse aspects of its Cape frontier policy. As a result some land was returned to the Xhosa and diplomatic negotiations replaced retribution. But the majority of Albany's settlers vehemently opposed such changes and the British army's officer corps, and a part of the colonial administration, sabotaged efforts at liberal transformation. Policy reverted to its earlier course and the circle of despoliation,

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5. S. Newton King, 'The Labour Market of the Cape Colony, 1807-1828', in S. Marks & A. Atmore (eds), *Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa* (Longman, London & New York, 1980).

retaliation and counter-retaliation continued. Now as the pillaged and the plundered tried to defend themselves they became the murderers and the destroyers. The victims had become the source of their own victimhood and this became a central feature of settler ideology. For the rest of the century most of Albion's settlers concurred in Britain's frontier policy, strategic and economic, both proclaiming that they were serving the others' interests.

### **The Dutch Afrikanders**

By contrast, in the 1830s and 1840s, in the eastern and northern districts of the Colony, a far less affluent class of Dutch-Afrikander notables, sustained by their moral economy, presided over communities of landless and impoverished clients. British rule, their leaders concluded, could not alleviate their land shortage nor allow them to control their labour. They could only hope to prosper by breaking away from Imperial control. These notables reinforced other dissatisfactions among their dependents, intensifying an urge among them to break completely with British rule. Those leading this break came to seek not only a political but a mercantile and diplomatic independence from Britain. The Colonial Office allowed internal independence to two such Dutch-Afrikander settler groups – the *Oranje Vrystaat (OVS)* and the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR)* – but almost immediately it regretted this decision. Thereafter, external connections, whether diplomatic or commercial were prevented because they were seen as a threat to Britain's purpose and presence in South Africa. It also became British policy to prevent the Dutch-Afrikander polities gaining access to economic activities which would generate fiscal resources and allow them to challenge British power. This undoubtedly lay behind the exclusion of both the ZAR and the OVS from oversight of the diamond fields in the 1870s. The effect of this action was to inhibit the economic growth of the ZAR but not without spurring its leadership to make a number of attempts to break out of this imperial grip. From the earliest beginnings of these Afrikander states, therefore, attempts were made to acquire outlets to the sea and to build either a substantial wagon road or, from the 1870s, a railway which would connect the ZAR to the sea.

But it was not only the Imperial government whose actions inhibited the economic well being of the citizens, the *burghers*, of the ZAR. The intrusion into the ZAR and OVS of British merchants, traders and even peddlers, rapidly led to them dominating the economy of these fledgling Dutch-Afrikander states. These traders were directly linked to the commercial houses of the Cape and Natal and had access to credit and information which played a considerable part in restricting the growth of an Afrikander trading class. So great was this coastal-merchant domination that the villages and towns of the republican states were largely English-speaking enclaves. Moreover, absentee land speculators from Britain and the two British Colonies rapidly bought up sizeable tracts of land in the two Republics. And this despite statutory attempts by the ZAR to prohibit the presence of foreign traders and landowners within its state.

Whilst some citizens of the ZAR employed land consigned to them to raise crops, and they used its water for their stock, much of the land claimed by the ZAR was occupied by African inhabitants. Often, those with titles to land could not enforce occupation and, at best, they might be able to claim rent from their "farms". There was, however, a speculative market in land and those holding rights to land were able to sell holdings at a profit in the belief that minerals or other resources

might increase the value of their property. The products of the hunt were another source of income and increasingly those with land title refused to allow outsiders, even burghers, to hunt on their property. Increasingly impoverishment was associated with the presence of land speculators and they were identified with English-speakers.

British hegemony in South Africa was not, of course, universally to the disadvantage of Dutch-Afrikaners. The Cape's economy grew briskly and many of the Colony's Dutch-Afrikaners, prospered under British rule. The vast increase in British commercial and naval – Asia bound – ocean traffic added substantially to the colonial provisioning trade. But Cape agriculture began to expand beyond that trade, however successful it might be. At mid-century entrepreneurial activities of its merchants began to bind the colony to the metropolitan economy. This was so even when its merchant houses were not British in origin. The appeal of the manufacturers or traders of Liverpool or Glasgow made them identify with Britain's ever-growing economic and political power. By the 1840s a family of recently established merchants began to build a trading infrastructure for a new South African pastoral industry, wool farming. The Cape's land-owning capitalists, encouraged by the Jewish-German brothers Mosenthal, completed the conversion from fat-tailed mutton sheep into the far more profitable wool bearing breeds. In 1839 and 1840 the brothers Joseph and Adolph Mosenthal arrived in Cape Town from Germany, initially as clerks to a Frankfurt-am-Main firm. They soon set themselves up as general merchants in their own right and seeing the need for marketing facilities for the colony's primary products – wool, hides and skins, ostrich feathers, established a succession of trading-posts at district centres throughout the Colony.

Port Elizabeth became the focus of their activities and as early as 1856 they had opened offices in London. The prosperity of the Mosenthals paralleled the growth of the Colony's trade. Between 1822 and 1855 Cape wool exported to Britain grew from 20 000 lbs valued at £2 000 to 15 million lbs valued at £643 000. It exceeded a £1 000 000 by 1860 and £2 000 000 by 1866. There was however, another conversion taking place, as significant as the move from fat-tail to Merino sheep or Angora goats which the firm brought to the Colony. With their major market in Britain some of the second generation of Mosenthals began to associate themselves with a British loyalism which led them to London's West End and the country house in the Home Counties. Such a route was to be taken by others of continental European origin as their economic activities brought them closer and closer to the wool merchants of Bradford but also to the financial markets of the City of London. By the 1870s one branch of the Mosenthal family became involved in a new enterprise, diamonds. This was to lead Harry Mosenthal into a partnership with the likes of Rhodes, the Beits, and Julius Wernher (see below). The Cape was generating its own class of "millionaires".

The ZAR, by contrast, we have seen was descending into further and further impoverishment and economic backwardness. With a limit on land, and on labour, Dutch-Afrikaners turned to coercing African peoples living in the regions they were attempting to occupy.<sup>6</sup> Such compulsion strained relationships between the ZAR and the contiguous African societies and ultimately led to an unsuccessful war with the

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6. S. Trapido, "Land, Office and Wealth in the South African Republic", in Marks & Atmore, *Economy and Society*, p 358.

Pedi. Unsurprisingly, the Imperial authorities were alarmed by the disruptive effects of this Dutch-Afrikander behaviour and it was to become a justification for British intervention in the ZAR. Moreover, it was not only the inhabitants of societies contiguous to the ZAR that suffered from such raiding. It also became a practice for officials of the ZAR to waylay Africans moving between their homes in distant polities and the plantations of the Natal Colony and the diamond fields of the territory which became known as Griqualand West. Such behaviour brought the ZAR into conflict with colonial merchants, plantation owners, mining prospectors and the Imperial and colonial governments because it drastically diminished the labour available to them. African clansmen from independent polities complied with their role as workers – partly because decisions were mostly made for them by superiors and rulers – and they travelled from all over the subcontinent to work on the diamond fields. A similar outcome awaited those who moved through Mozambique and the Zulu polity placing further obstacles to labour reaching the British colonies.

#### **Colonial policy and diamond economics**

This assault on the sources of mining and plantation labour was to transform the behaviour of British policy makers concerned with South Africa. Between 1850 and 1870 Britain limited itself to reacting to the specific actions of the Afrikander republics. If these disturbed Britain's Indian Ocean strategy or destabilised the Southern African continent's interior then they were likely to be forced to restore the status quo. But no new policy was created. Then, in the mid-1870s, that procedure changed and the Colonial Office in London and its South African assistants began to devise a strategy which would initiate proceedings and anticipate events. In part this was the result of the growing importance to Britain of the South African economy. The Indian Ocean provisioning trade played some part in that increased importance but, as we have noted, Cape agriculture began to expand independently of that trade. At that moment came the discovery of diamonds in the region which was to become Griqualand-West and the new mining centre that took its name from a Colonial Secretary, Kimberley. What followed was Britain's determination to ensure that the fiscal potential of the diamond fields would not facilitate the efforts of the Dutch-Afrikander states to break free of the imperial grip.

The Imperial annexation of diamond fields was far from welcomed by the immigrant and settler-pro prospector population who flocked to Kimberley. These were the diggers, the mainly British or colonial hopefuls – but there were also Europeans and Americans in their number. They had come to the fields in what would be the vain hope that they would restore fortunes which the new structures of world capitalism was in the process of denying them. This ragbag of humanity would have preferred the less effective control of the Dutch-Afrikander states. They favoured the indifferent administrative capacity of the republican states with their inherent opposition to African diggers. However, if the diamond output was to be sustained as a profitable enterprise the production and sale of gems needed to be controlled but this required a degree of cooperation for which the initially anarchic social relations of the diamond fields did not allow. Instead the racism of white diggers, traders, entrepreneurs and the vast array of those living by their wits, turned upon African and Coloured prospectors and workers. The latter group were accused of supplying diamonds illegally to unauthorised dealers.

Hostility to African and Coloured prospectors led the white diamond fields population to form populist mobs which attacked the source of their anger and they attempted to coerce the colony's lieutenant governor, Richard Southey, into denying digger's licences to African and Coloured men. The social unrest which followed led the imperial authorities to send a military detachment to the diamond fields to make it plain that ultimate British authority could not be challenged. Nevertheless, Southey, who had supported a non-racial prospecting class was recalled and the right to prospect was withdrawn from African and Coloured men. White diggers, workers and the traders counted Southey's removal as a triumph but it was to be a pyrrhic victory.<sup>7</sup> The new administration altered the rules determining the number of "claims", or diggings, individual prospectors could hold.

The resulting structure of ownership was now determined by parallel geological and financial considerations. Geology determined that the search and excavation of diamonds could not be continued by the existing exploration of discrete, single, "claims". Not only did prospectors spread into each other's ground but unresolvable problems were created as the walls of "diggings" began to collapse into each other, threatening life and limb. If the search for diamonds was not to be limited to scratching the surface, underground mining would have to take place. Not only would mining boundaries have to far exceed the single claim but shafts had to be sunk, tunnels excavated, waste disposed of, flooding prevented and all the other tasks associated with mining at depth, undertaken. It followed, therefore, that if the structure of ownership had to take note of the geological features of the fields these were also going to impose financial characteristics upon diamond mining.

New economic organisations had to be brought into being. To be effective these had to be consolidated, requiring the most successful of the "diggers", as well as their financial collaborators – usually diamond buyers, increasingly with City of London connections – to combine in acquiring substantial numbers of claims. Financial as well as engineering skills had, therefore, to be united and these had to be merged with managerial and administrative capacities. This returns us to the earliest problem associated with the search for diamonds. We have seen that diamonds were so easily unearthed that mining them could not be left to supply and demand. Abundance meant that a "true" market price would hardly make mining profitable. Large scale excavators and vendors of diamonds set out, therefore, to create an artificial scarcity.

From the outset of the rush to find diamonds attempts were made to limit their sale and purchase to a small and exclusive coterie. At first this was barely successful. Transactions outside this group were made illegal but were nevertheless widespread. Illegal sales were initiated by both immigrant diggers and African labourers alike. The former group was inhibited by the imprisonment which followed a conviction for participating in illegal transactions. Attempts were made to search white miners but their resistance prevented employers from imposing such intimate and personal examinations. African miners, already subjected to imprisonment, were in addition, placed in closed compounds to prevent them from becoming unsanctioned vendors. In

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7. R. Turrell, "Kimberley: Labour and Compounds, 1871-1888", in S. Marks and R. Rathbone, *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa* (Longman, New York, 1982), pp 45-76.



addition to inhibiting illegal diamond sales these closed compounds limited the capacity of African workers to challenge their employers. White workers, with experience of political participation and trade union membership, were less restrained than their African counterparts, but they were constantly undermined by the mine-owners' economic and political rule of Kimberly-town. Every aspect of the mineworkers' lives was controlled by his employer so that the ability to resist mine-owners' regulation was increasingly whittled away. Moreover, between mining conditions which imposed the consolidation of diamond claims and marketing circumstances which determined diamond sales, the industry evolved from chaotic individual holdings to joint stock companies to a cartel, known as the De Beers Company.

This cartel was sanctioned by the Cape government in 1889. The Cape Colony had succeeded the Imperial government in administering the diamond fields in 1880. As Cape rule came into operation on the diamond fields it began, increasingly, to be influenced, and then dominated, by a prime mover in the diamonds saga, Cecil Rhodes. But Rhodes was only the most visible of a new class of mining capitalists who were to over shadow the South African economic and political landscape for the next half century and more. Nevertheless, Rhodes was unique in the way he combined his economic, ideological and political roles. In the decade after 1880 he played a significant but local role in the politics of the diamond fields and its contingent territories. Since these extended into modern day Botswana and beyond, into Central Africa, he began securing this region for the joint hegemony of his capitalist conferees and his imperialist allies. All the while he was developing a naive but astonishing ideology of empire creating a unique role for what he called the "English race". As we shall see, however, Rhodes was above all a pragmatist and an opportunist, transferring his allegiances from imperial to settler interests and back again. He, and his diamond fields colleagues even more so, moved from Kimberley to the new stage that was to become Johannesburg and then to London and then to the colonial world once more. With the ability of Kimberley workers – white and black – to organise and bargain for better conditions largely overwhelmed, the greater part of the white working class sought every opportunity to break away from the diamond cartel's influence. Many mineworkers deserting Kimberley made their way to the new mining districts of Lydenburg, Barberton and above all the Witwatersrand. These migrants took with them a deep mistrust of both centralised capitalism and imperial and colonial power.

Events on the diamond fields created radically new classes and new identities and these were to transform the dynamics of economy and society/polity in South Africa. But even where the influence of the diamond fields was excluded, as in the case of the ZAR, there were consequences and repercussions. The endless poverty of the ZAR, and its frustration at being excluded from the diamond fields, was accompanied by the constant efforts of its notables to break out of that poverty. Above all they made incessant efforts to search for what was their great chimera; they wanted a port of their own to which they would construct an all-weather road from their land locked republic to the ocean. In the 1860s the ZAR's president, M.W. Pretorius, attempted to annex half the east coast of southern Africa as well as trying to acquire the legendary Tati gold fields. He succeeded in mobilising the hostility of Natal's merchants and intensifying the antipathy of the British government but he achieved nothing else. And he was outwitted by British agents when he

attempted to claim the diamond fields for the ZAR. The search began, therefore, among Dutch-Afrikander notables, for a different kind of leader whose experience and understanding of the outside world might enable him to deal, not only with settler societies and the imperial power, but also with leading politicians and bankers in continental Europe.

### **ZAR politics and policy**

The first choice of the ZAR's notables was J.H. Brand, the President of the OVS and scion of a progressive Cape Dutch-Afrikander family. The ZAR's leadership wanted Brand to establish a federal union between the two republics but he was unwilling to take on that dual post. Instead, he recommended Thomas Francois Burgers – a Cape Dutch Reformed (NGK) minister and also a member of a leading Graaff-Reinet family – as president of the ZAR, Burger was taught in English at his Graaff-Reinet school in the 1850s. He was then a student at the University of Utrecht, where he came under the influence of a liberal theologian. Burgers came away rejecting a literal interpretation of the scriptures, doubting the resurrection and original sin and was convinced of the perfectibility of human nature. He returned to the Cape to become the NGK minister at Hanover in the Karoo in 1859 but his liberal theology led him into conflict with his congregation and the Cape Synod. In 1862 Burgers was found guilty of heresy.

Although the Privy Council overthrew this verdict Burgers was an improbable presidential candidate to find favour among a population largely committed to the literal interpretation of the Old Testament as well as having a complete conviction in the doctrine of the resurrection. While Burgers had the support of some clergymen, most were opposed to him as were such notables as the acting President D.J. Erasmus and the Commandant-General, S.J.P. Kruger, the latter a leading landowner and a key figure in the most fundamentalist wing of the Reformed Church, the so-called “*Doppers*”. This circle nominated William Robinson, the son of an 1820 settler as their candidate but factional politics played an essential part in his defeat and Burgers' election. The view that the presidency should go to a candidate who could be described as “learned” was of considerable importance to the unofficial electoral college of the ZAR. Burgers, in accepting the nomination which would allow him to run for office in the ZAR, asserted that he would awaken

... the patriotism of the nation as a whole to its great destiny, and to attain for the South African Republic an honourable place among the States of South Africa to enable her to play an important role in the union of the South African people and to enter into an honourable Federation or federal relationship with the Sister Republic whose interests are identical to those of the Transvaal.

Once he was elected, Burgers set about expounding a radical economic, political and even ideological programme intended to modernise the ZAR.<sup>8</sup> Early on he proposed that the ZAR should raise capital in Europe with which to build a rail link to Delagoa Bay. This was a scheme with deep political as well as economic objectives and he feared that the British would try to purchase or annexe the Bay in

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8. C.W. de Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa a Study in Politics and Economics* (Cass, London, 1965), pp 94-95.

order to frustrate the ZAR's objectives. He therefore entered into negotiations with the OVS to begin mobilising an international opposition to Britain. His modernising design, he also recognised, would need a cadre of educated non-British and Dutch-speaking administrators and it was he who began the pivotal process of recruiting men from the Netherlands to serve the ZAR's state. In similar fashion he also began to create an educational system, not only by establishing the Republic's first secondary school, but by again turning to the Netherlands to recruit instructors. In 1873 – to advance his modernising ambition – he launched the first newspaper in the ZAR, the *De Volksstem*. He also recognised that if the economy was to make headway it was necessary to transform the state's currency by underwriting its value. Burgers, therefore, negotiated a bank loan by borrowing £60 000 from the Cape Commercial Bank. Moreover, under his aegis the first South African coins were minted from gold extracted from the recently opened diggings at Lydenburg. In addition, the five hundred English-speaking prospectors at that diggings were brought into the ZAR's political system by granting them two *Volksraad* seats. Unfortunately, his ambitious economic and constitutional objectives took him away from the everyday factional politics of his adopted state making him vulnerable to their conspiracies. However, what was to undo Burgers was the ZAR's relationship with the Pedi state. In the clash between the two polities Burgers was deserted by his militia and he had to retreat in disarray. At this point the Imperial power chose to intervene. But this was the occasion rather than the cause of this intervention.

### Shepstone and the annexation of the ZAR

The annexation of the ZAR had long been proposed as the solution to the problems it created and was favoured by both Natal's merchants and its colonial administrators. De Kiewiet observed that as early as 1866 the *Natal Mercury* reported "We have got into the way of looking upon the vast states of the interior, as being almost part of ourselves. They rank amongst the mainstays of our prosperity."<sup>9</sup> Equally, interference with its labour supplies (and its trade) had repeatedly moved Natal officials to urge that the Republic be annexed by Britain. Others could find philanthropic and magnanimous motives for wanting to extend British power. Such an extension, wrote Natal's Lieutenant Governor R.W. Keate, would ensure "the advancement of civilization, enlightenment and good government in this part of the world."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, from the mid-1860s Colonial Secretaries and High Commissioners also began to claim, in private, that South Africa would be better governed under a British dominated state. As High Commissioner Wodehouse asserted, Britain must be the "paramount power" in South Africa.<sup>11</sup> For the next ten years, however, it was neither appropriate nor propitious for federation to become explicit imperial policy. That moment came in 1876 when the political economy and an array of Imperial developments, cabinet and parliamentary opportunities and opportunisms, as well as settler interests and ambitions combined to allow federalism to be acknowledged as Britain's design for South Africa.<sup>12</sup> This combination allowed

9. *Natal Mercury*, 24 October 1866, cited in C.W. de Kiewiet, *British Colonial Policy and the South African Republics, 1848-1872* (Longmans, Green, New York, 1929), p 258.

10. *British Blue Book* 4140, pp 123-127.

11. De Kiewiet, *British Colonial Policy*, p 161.

12. R.E. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians the Official Mind of Imperialism* (William Blackwood & Sons, London, 1961), pp 61-62.

federalism to be officially promulgated as policy for the first time and the work of Richard Cope and Norman Etherington has demonstrated that it was the labour supply of the region, rather than strategic concerns, which prompted Imperial policy.<sup>13</sup>

The Natal government created the occasion which brought federalism to life when it sent Theophilus Shepstone to London to counter claims being made that its militia had been guilty of atrocities in the Colony. Shepstone took advantage of his ready access to the Colonial Secretary to put forward a proposal which would advance long held ambitions. This was the overthrow of Dutch-Afrikander rule in the ZAR to promote a grand economic project which would have an unimpaired labour supply. Shepstone was best able to advocate this proposal because he combined being a diplomatic agent with the role of continent wide labour recruiter. In addition he and his family had their own commercial interests in imposing British rule in the interior of the continent. Lord Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary, with his own designs already formulated, listened with interest to Shepstone's views on the obstacles which the ZAR placed in the way of economic growth in South Africa. Shepstone's additional warning, made on the basis of information collected by his agents, that there was a strong possibility that the independent African kingdoms were planning their own confederation in order to wage war against the settler societies, would also have encouraged British interference in the affairs of those states. Carnarvon found all this information conveniently suited his already designed purpose and Shepstone was at last given permission to annexe the Afrikander republic. Finally he had found a Colonial Secretary who was willing to advance a federal blueprint drawn up to his own specifications.

Nevertheless, Carnarvon's policy has often been seen as part of a purely strategic programme. The lawlessness and turbulence of the region and the insecurity it generated prompted the Colonial Secretary to propose building a "loyal Dominion behind the bastion of Simon's Bay." Or so said C.F. Goodfellow, the most recent historian of Confederation to argue that this British policy was prompted by purely strategic considerations.<sup>14</sup> Others have found different motives. R.L. Cope pointed to the memorandum drawn up by Robert Herbert, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Colonial Office (and Carnarvon's cousin). Herbert's memorandum was not published but circulated instead to explain "easily" to the Cabinet the "leading questions now existing in South Africa." Central to Herbert's scheme was the necessity to replace "small and isolated governments, whose financial solvency [was] questionable, and where there [was] no adequate security for property or confidence in prudent legislation". Instead of those impotent governments Britain should install an efficiently administered state capable of attracting capital and immigrants which were necessary to develop the country. But Herbert's policy went beyond bringing law and order to the ZAR. There was, he noted, the need "to train the natives to the ways of civilized industry." In this respect the policy of the Dutch-Afrikander states should get Britain's "attentive consideration." There could be no doubt, Herbert informed the Cabinet, that "a Kafir should be compelled, as the Dutch compel him, to work". A

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13. R.L. Cope, "Strategic and Socio-economic explanations for Carnarvon's South African Confederation Policy", *History in Africa*, 13, 1986, pp 13-34; N.A. Etherington, "Labour Supply and the Genesis of South African Confederation in the 1870s", *Journal of African History*, 20, 1979, pp 235-253.
  14. C.F. Goodfellow, *Great Britain and South African Federation, 1870-1881* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1966), p 70.

less senior official added the supposedly mitigating minute: "The problem is how to make him work, and yet to make him work so that his work shall be of profit to himself and not solely of profit to his white masters." Herbert's memorandum also pointed to the "precarious position of civilization and British rule in Natal", the equal "native danger" in the Transvaal, and the urgent need for unity to break the power of the Chiefs and disarm Africans generally to ensure the power of several Colonial and republican states. More broadly the memorandum pointed to the establishment of "a great South African Dominion" which would help "advance ... civilization in Africa and the general interests of the Empire."<sup>15</sup>

Shepstone returned to South Africa with his commission from Carnarvon to annex the ZAR. He assembled a staff of twelve, which included a representative of the Standard Bank, and together with twenty-five mounted police he eventually rode into Pretoria.<sup>16</sup> He immediately declared the purpose of his visit to President Burgers, that he had come to promulgate Britain's annexation of the ZAR. To begin with he sought to persuade the president and various factions within the republic to agree to annexation. Shepstone found virtually no support for his proposal but nor was there an organised opposition. He parlayed for four months before he decided to act without local backing and then had a proclamation read which announced that the ZAR, which would henceforth be known as the Transvaal, was to be a British colony. Shepstone had assured Carnarvon that the Afrikaner state would readily submit to British rule and to begin with it looked as if he might not be altogether wrong.

The ZAR was in disarray. Taxes were not being collected, the Pedi had defeated the President's forces, largely because his men had deserted him. And because Shepstone put it about that the Zulu state was massing on the ZAR's border intent on invading the Afrikaner Republic, and there was anxiety about the Pedi, there was some relief that Britain would provide protection if such an attack took place. Shepstone promised financial support for the bankrupt state and some looked on waiting to see what he would dispense. Little was forthcoming but circumstances changed as the British army took on the Pedi and then the Zulu and ultimately defeated both African states. Ironically, this may have freed those who resented the British take over of the ZAR and allowed them to grow bolder since they were no longer threatened by African adversaries. Gradually, Burgers was abandoned by the majority of his countrymen and a triumvirate, consisting of S.J.P. Kruger, E.J.P. Jorissen and Piet Joubert, emerged to lead them. Under their aegis a series of mass meetings was called. There were four of these, one in 1878, two in 1879 the last in 1880.

#### **The ZAR's return to independence and the Transvaal British**

Yet the leadership was circumspect. Four years had passed since Shepstone's arrival in the Afrikaner republic and although there had been much in the way of petitions and deputations there was as yet no outright resistance to British annexation. The triumvirate was reluctant to challenge the British head-on. The most important of the Afrikaner leaders was Kruger who saw the dangers of rallying supporters into an immediate and direct confrontation with the British state. Rather, he and his fellows sought to temper their supporters, seeking to persuade the Colonial Secretary that there was no popular endorsement for British rule. Moreover, Gladstone and the

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15. Cope, *Carnarvon's South African Confederation Policy*, p 11.

16. De Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor*, p 113.

Liberal Party let it be known that they were opposed to the annexation. When the Liberals defeated the Conservatives at the 1880 election Kruger and his followers assumed that their independence would be restored. But Gladstone then claimed that what had been done could not be undone but he offered Dutch Afrikanders self-government within a British dominated federation. The triumvirate would not accept Gladstone's compromise and as they began to rally their supporters events overtook them. Kruger could see that whilst there were those who wanted immediate action there were equally some who were hesitant and against precipitous action. Kruger, the adroit political leader was determined to keep the two wings of the population united in the face of the old opponent. Then circumstance determined the course of events.

In November 1880 Shepstone's permissive administration was replaced by that of the more financially disciplinarian Sir Owen Lanyon.<sup>17</sup> He insisted that burghers must pay taxes or have their property seized. The court sheriffs of Potchefstroom, therefore, chose to seize the property of a defaulter. A wagon was expropriated to meet a tax bill of £28-10s. In response an armed posse of Afrikanders, led by a burgher named Piet Cronje, seized the wagon and returned it to its owner. Cronje had forced the hand of the triumvirate. The meeting scheduled for Paardekraal on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1880, took the decision to restore the Republic four years after it had been annexed.<sup>18</sup> The old executive council was restored as was the 1877 legislature, the *Volksraad*; the flag of the ZAR – the *Vierkleur* – was hoisted above them. Independence was proclaimed and the small British garrisons in the English-speaking towns were all besieged. At the same time the main military force under Joubert was sent to the Natal border to prevent the British army from relieving the towns. The story of the disastrous campaign fought by the British army is well-known. The effect of the annexation and its overthrow was to create a Dutch-Afrikander confidence and a nationalism in the ZAR which had not been there before and this was to effect the politics of South Africa up to and beyond the War of 1899-1902.<sup>19</sup>

But it was not only the Dutch-Afrikanders whose identity had changed because of the annexation and the recession. The British-Afrikanders whose trading and commercial activities brought them to the ZAR were to suffer the consequences of Britain's bungled annexation and the recession. British settlers had been equivocal about the original annexation of the ZAR and not all of them had favoured it. Once there was an armed conflict between the Imperial government and the Afrikander republic they mostly rallied to British troops and garrisons in their region. In the process they accepted assurances that once a British presence had been established it would be permanently maintained. Yet Britain had withdrawn asserting the useless promise that its suzerainty would safeguard their interests. But as Sarah Heckford noted in her popular memoir, *A Lady Trader in the Transvaal* many of the ZAR's British-Afrikanders, were "destined henceforth to be subject to the men whom we, by our promises, had tempted ... to turn from friendly neighbours into enemies."<sup>20</sup>

The harassment of "friendly neighbours" meant that some British settlers felt it necessary to flee the once more independent ZAR. But whether they stayed or

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17. De Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor*, pp 241-242.

18. De Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor*, p 274.

19. Robinson & Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, p 72.

20. S. Heckford, *A Lady Trader in the Transvaal* (Sampson Low, London, 1882), p 398.

withdrew, self-styled Transvaal Loyalists came to portray themselves as having been abandoned to the mercies of a vengeful Boer state and society by a perfidious and ungrateful Imperial government. Moreover, Gladstone's talk of "magnanimity" in "restoring a brave little (Dutch-Afrikander) nation to freedom" enraged these Loyalists. Their secretary, C. K. White, mocked the "tender care" given to the "Boers". He contrasted it with the "very little care and very little sympathy" shown to Loyalists who had "borne sorrow and suffering", doing their duty against the enemy. Many of them had been critical of the policy which had led to annexation but they had buried their political differences when they saw "English troops attacked". They accepted the "call of the imperial authorities to fight and some, alas! to die, for the maintenance of British supremacy". They had trusted the "inviolable word of England" but now they found they had "trusted in vain". So enraged, it was said, were the Loyalists of Pretoria that when the 1881 Convention was signed they interred a Union Jack in a coffin which they duly buried.<sup>21</sup> The story has the ring of the apocryphal but whether it was authentic or not the old British settlers knew that their property and their livelihood was not as secure as it had been.

In the next decade the Transvaal British, when they sought to advance their political rights, did so by first announcing themselves as republicans, albeit "true" republicans. This probably allowed them to distance themselves – and their wish for reform – from the accusation that their call for political rights was merely a cloak for once more inviting British intervention. Nor should this conceal from us the growing belief among British settlers in the ZAR that they would be better off without having to owe allegiance to an untrustworthy Imperial state which would always put its own interest above theirs. British-republicanism emerged in the ZAR's newly established mining town of Barberton, the site of an 1886 gold discovery. From among Barberton's population of prospectors, traders and speculators were some who had moved on from Kimberley. From their number a small group of political activists emerged to found the Transvaal Republican Union. The organisation they created modelled itself, they said, on the Cape's Afrikaner Bond and the purpose of their strategy was to place themselves beyond Dutch-Afrikander and Imperial power. Their programme was signalled by a local newspaper, the *Barberton Herald* and their methods of achieving their ends emerged in the rowdy demonstration which greeted the visit to the town of Paul Kruger, President of the ZAR, in 1887. For Kruger these were ominous events yet for those who felt the impact of the British annexation Kruger was not necessarily the enemy.<sup>22</sup>

#### **Kruger's economic policy**

If gold mining at Barberton hinted at new opportunities (and turbulences), discoveries on the Witwatersrand offered a far greater set of possibilities. But none could have anticipated the change in fortune which would come to those who shared the aspirations of the Paul Kruger. We have noted that Kruger was the latest of the Presidents of the

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21. D.M. Schreuder, *Gladstone and Kruger Liberal Government and Colonial "Home Rule", 1880-1885* (Routledge & Paul, London, 1969), p 199.

22. These Barberton-British were not, in any event, the first British republicans of the middle years of Victoria's reign. It should be noted that the South African expression of the British political movement had far more to do with colonial hostility to Imperial rule than to a rejection of a hereditary monarchy. There would, however, have been a rejection of the class hierarchy with which it was associated.

ZAR who had taken upon himself to attempt the break from the economic and diplomatic straight jacket which a succession of British pro-consuls had imposed upon the Afrikaner republic. After his election in 1883 Kruger announced what contemporary parlance would call a development strategy. He proposed erecting local monopolies to encourage the creation of manufactured goods and using the language of the eighteenth century Dutch mercantile company, the VOC, he called these *konsensies*, concessions. These concessions, he proposed would lead to “the development of the resources of the country”.<sup>23</sup> The country needed, he said, to reduce imports and increase exports. Local raw materials such as wool, hides, fruits and grains should be processed locally and could be sold more cheaply than expensively priced foreign manufactures. Ambitiously, Kruger talked of factories “being erected to manufacture our own gunpowder and ammunition, our sugar and strong drink.”

Kruger, like his predecessors had long hankered for an economic strategy for the republic, and he was fortunate to find a fellow enthusiast for economic development through manufacturing. Alois Hugo Nellmapius, a Hungarian-born but Dutch trained civil engineer came to the Afrikaner state in 1874 and his skills allowed the building of the first substantial road from the eastern ZAR into Mozambique. Kruger was much impressed by Nellmapius’ vision and energy and together the two men embarked upon the ZAR’s first industrial project outside Pretoria, on the latter’s Hatherley farm, which they called *Het Eerste Fabrieken* (HEF). Although it was to be known primarily for the distillation of liquor HEF also included a glass works and a cooperage and it began an elementary smelting works. The partnership of Lewis and Marks replaced Nellmapius during the decade and their firm was to provide Kruger with the engineering and entrepreneurial skills, and sometimes the capital, for his ventures.<sup>24</sup> However, even if the activities of HEF may have been encouraging to Kruger, it was hardly likely to set the ZAR free of Britain’s economic grip. The massive Witwatersrand gold discovery of 1887 increased the long term prospects of the ZAR’s capacity to become an economic actor and it made two major attempts to turn the new found wealth to its advantage in a spectacular if not highly successful way. The Kruger government’s economic policy was best known for its dynamite monopoly and the railway franchise it gave the German-Dutch Company to build a rail link between Delagoa Bay and Pretoria. There were many other monopolies or sought after monopolies and there were hundreds of concessions which became mere speculative licences.

If these monopolies had the immediate impact which Kruger intended for them, explaining his political economy would be a simple matter. But they did not. The holders of the dynamite concession did not go about manufacturing their product in the ZAR but for over a decade they imported its ingredients from Europe and sold it at grossly exorbitant prices to the increasing irritation of the mining industry because, they claimed, these excessive returns threatened the profits of their mining ventures. Kruger was resolute in his defence of the dynamite concession in spite of criticisms from significant parts of his “own” Afrikaner population who saw it as holding up economic growth and the result of corrupt practices.

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23. C.T. Gordon, *The Growth of Boer Opposition to Kruger 1890-1895* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1970), p 36.
24. I.R. Smith, *The Origins of the South African War 1899-1902* (Longman, London & New York, 1996), p 53.



Similarly, his railway policy was extremely unpopular, not only to the mining industry, but to various sections of the burgher population. Such was the hostility to these aspects of his policy that he came close to losing the 1893 election to Piet Joubert. These policies were seen as the result of corruption which, on occasion, they were. They were also seen to result in gross inefficiency and they provoked difficulties for him at every point on the political compass. The British government, the Chamber of Mines and the self-styled progressive Afrikaners all attacked him for his concessions policy. Yet he stubbornly persisted with them. Why? Did the owners of the concessions buy his support? The dynamite concessionaires undoubtedly bought influence but there is no evidence of Kruger's corruption although some in his entourage, such as his son-in-law, may have been. But the policies persisted for reasons that extend beyond the simple need for patronage.

If there were Dutch-Afrikaner critics of Kruger then those who stood out side of those circles could hardly contain themselves. The mining industry and the Colonial Office, for overlapping reasons, saw Kruger as denying good government, encouraging corrupt practices and holding up economic growth. Kruger and the political philosophy which was said to emanate from him, *Krugerism*, extolled an anti-modernist social and economic order. Whether we report the political observations of Lionel Phillips or the historical claims of Percy Fitzpatrick, the propaganda of *The Times* newspaper, the sociological observations of the Fabian Society or of George Bernard Shaw, or even the sympathetic assertions of Olive Schreiner, we get the same picture of the *kommandant* of a medieval oligarchy.<sup>25</sup> Kruger was hemmed in by the "hurrying tide of civilization", leaving him and his following "rooted in the 'seventeenth century'". All this led Lionel Phillips to give currency to the myth that "Kruger seems to think that too many people and too much capital is coming in here and that this must be checked!!" If Kruger's perception prevailed it would mean "our interests might be affected frightfully by oppressive legislation or political complications". Above all, Lionel Phillips contended, Kruger was "untractable and oblivious to all argument".<sup>26</sup>

## II

The concept of modernisation and the modernising state are deeply embedded in the ideology, politics and class structures of particular societies. Yet as we have seen, Kruger and his circle had long sought to break out of Britain's economic and political grip in an attempt to lay the foundations of a modern society. And modern historians J.S. Marais, H.J. and R.E. Simons and Charles van Onselen have all attested to the modernising achievements of the ZAR's notables.<sup>27</sup> Undoubtedly, Kruger emerged

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25. L. Phillips, *All That Glittered selected correspondence of Lionel Phillips, 1890-1924* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town & New York, 1977), pp 83-85; L. Phillips, *Some Reminiscences* (Hutchinson, London, 1924), pp 68, 136-139; P. Fitzpatrick, *The Transvaal from within a private record of public affairs* (Heinemann, London, 1900).
  26. Number 49, Phillips – Beit, LA 670, Johannesburg, 16 June 1894, page 78.
  27. J.S. Marais, *The Fall of Kruger's Republic* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961), pp 23-27; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950* (International Defence & Aid Fund, London, 1983), p 59; C. van Onselen, *Studies in the Social Economic History of the Witwatersrand New Babylon*, (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1982), pp 12-17.

with a diametrically different vision of the modern to that held by imperial pro-consuls, their political masters in London, and their sometime allies, the Randlords. Kruger and his associates sought both to enhance the economic standing of their own Dutch-Afrikaner notables and to extend welfare of its increasingly landless poor. By his 1898 inauguration speech Kruger to his legislature, the *Volksraad*, sought to widen his appeal to those in the ZAR who were buffeted by economic depression, the result of capitalist cycles and the speculative chicanery of mine owners, stock jobbers and banks calling in mortgages. He also held out a hand to the white miners. The latter, he claimed, had been deceived about the cost of living on the Witwatersrand, faced poverty created by the limits of existing wages and were forced to work in dangerous and unpleasant conditions. And those miners lived with the fear that the Randlords would create a Kimberley-like monopoly which would reduce wages and undermine their political and social conditions by creating again a company town. For their part, the mine owners denied that this was one of their objectives, but this belief always coloured the relationship between Randlords and mineworkers.

### **The Randlords and rebellion**

What the Randlords wanted was to reduce the wages of the white mineworkers to ensure the profitability of their mines. The wages of the European and colonial mineworkers was, however, only a part of a much larger problem faced by the mine-owners. As the mining economy of the Witwatersrand grew more complex the owners found themselves confronted by a set of administrative, economic and social problems over which they only had limited control. On the diamond fields, the owners had direct charge over the relevant institutions, or their relationship with the officers of the state meant that solutions were quickly found with relatively minimal costs. The magnates became political actors and achieved a very nearly complete control of the state in Griqualand West. Ensuring the same degree of control over the ZAR was far more difficult. Cecil Rhodes played an increasingly important political role in the 1880s, ensuring the annexation of Tswana and then Ndebele and Shona polities.<sup>28</sup> Rhodes became so involved in colonial politics that he became Prime Minister of the Cape Colony in 1890. By 1894 to 1895, in the ZAR the major Randlords, Rhodes included, came to believe that the policies of the Afrikaner state threatened to reduce profitability significantly. This was not only because of its effect on white wages, but because its administrative and social policies added significantly to mining costs. Rhodes, and his Randlord colleagues, encouraged in 1894 by the High Commissioner, Lord Loch (who was, however, acting beyond his brief), began creating an insurrectionary coterie set on transforming the ZAR's state.

Although they had the tacit support of the imperial government, which intended to step in once their rebellion was successful, tactical considerations made these capitalist rebels distance themselves from the suggestion that their insurrection was intended to achieve British colonial rule. Partly this was to neutralise the anti-imperialists emerging among Kruger's adversaries, that is the so-called "progressive" Afrikaners, American mining engineers and others. Partly because to have revealed pro-imperialist sympathies would have alienated sections of the white working class. Confusion about the insurrection's aims may have contributed to its overall failure early in 1896. At the same time the Colonial Office became increasingly anxious of a

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28. Robinson & Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, pp 221-250.

“cosmopolitanism”, or a British republicanism, threatening imperial power. Both, moreover, were seen to threaten British interests to an even greater extent than the Kruger state was thought to be doing.

Thereafter, the Imperial authorities determined to reassert direct British supremacy in South Africa and at the same time there were avowals of loyalty from the British settlers of the eastern Cape and from the Cape Dutch. The new High Commissioner, Alfred Milner, appointed in 1897, was determined to force a definition of allegiance upon these Cape loyalists which was bound to disconcert them. Milner’s timing was not without interest. In part it was nothing more than a signal to British South Africans that he was about to strengthen resistance to any challenge to Imperial supremacy in southern Africa. By rejecting Cape Dutch declarations of loyalty as little more than deceit, he was announcing that the imperial power had acquired a new determination and could now be depended upon in any conflict with Afrikaner power. Nevertheless, denying the validity of Afrikaner loyalty ran the risk of alienating the colonial Dutch while leaving British interests no better off than they had been to begin with. All the while, counterbalancing this attempt to summon a British nationalism – *jingoism* was the contemporary term – was the republicanism of the ZAR as well as that voiced by the alienated British among the miners of the Witwatersrand. Both republicanism were seen as defying British political supremacy but they were also challenges to the economic power of mining capitalists.

To recapitulate, for the most part, British administrators in South Africa always saw economic independence as closely connected to political independence and wherever they could they attempted to hinder the emergence of economic autonomy. However, British trader-merchants, whose own movements paralleled Afrikaner migrations into the interior, had sufficient commercial and financial strength to overwhelm would-be competitors without needing to calling upon direct assistance from the imperial state. Under these circumstances newly evolving and sometimes competing ethnic alliances were brought together in nineteenth century South Africa. While some of these alliances challenged British rule, loyalists were just as likely to emerge as were anti-imperialists, and, by the 1880s, loyalists could very well be Afrikaners, whilst anti-imperialists were sometimes ethnically British. And as these various movements of loyalists and anti-imperialists were emerging, corresponding mining capitalists and white workers were also arriving on the South African stage. Such movements materialised first in the newly uncovered diamond fields of the 1870s and then in the gold fields of the 1880s and 1890s – and with these movements, came new class antagonisms and newly intensified nationalist perceptions.

#### **The origins of the South African War: old and new explanations**

Out of these several complex processes, have come conflicting portrayals of the origins of the South African War. There is the account, provided by J.C. Smuts and others, of the hundred-year long assault by Britain on an essential Afrikaner essence, famously depicted as *A Century of Wrong*.<sup>29</sup> Then, by contrast, there is the imperial representation of a Britain defending its empire against a republican Afrikaner polity

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29. F.W. Reitz, *n Eeu van Onreg* (Nasionale Pers, Kaapstad, 1939), was probably written by J.C. Smuts and J. de V. Roos. Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, p 427.

bent upon opposing Albion's institutions of liberty and progress. Out of these representations came alternative depictions of the route to war. In the first explication of the war's origins, we see ruthless economic processes and imperial acquisitiveness at work, which are ultimately frustrated by the rise of an Afrikaner spirit of resistance. In the second, the war's origins are understood almost entirely in political and ideological terms and its context is given no significance whatever – so much so that, in this historiography, “context” has become an improper term.

This second view, advanced most impressively by the liberal South African J.S. Marais, as well as by later imperial historians, Andrew Porter, Ian Smith and Arthur Mawby, has recently been revived and it is very influential in British academic circles.<sup>30</sup> The question which Marais and others have set out to answer ultimately revolves around establishing liability, within British circles, for the outbreak of war. There is therefore a concern with discovering which particular politicians or high administrators were most responsible for decisions which ultimately can be said to have led to the war. This historiography is dismissive of an earlier body of work which held that gold lay at the heart of the crisis that resulted in war.<sup>31</sup> But this historiography is not entirely ruled by the evidence. Insisting that mining capitalists played no part in forcing the crisis, the role of the magnates in financing and disseminating opposition to Kruger, as well as in making reforms politically impossible, is minimised or even overlooked. Yet in 1898 and 1899 the major mining magnates, recipients of a stream of intelligence reports which sought to establish that the ZAR was incapable of being reformed, sent these on to the Colonial Office.

The view which emphasised the centrality of gold, is found among a diverse group of authors, foremost among whom is the contemporary observer John A. Hobson, writing in 1900. Then came the eminent liberal South African historian, C.W. de Kiewiet, writing in the nineteen thirties, followed by the modern-day Marxist, the equally distinguished historian Eric Hobsbawm.<sup>32</sup> Latter-day proponents of the belief that gold is at the heart of the conflict, mostly consider this proposition to be so self-evident and obvious, that they have sometimes not bothered to provide adequate supporting evidence for their argument. In dismissing these judgments, Ian Smith and Arthur Mawby have therefore been concerned to claim that they alone support their contentions by rigorous reliance on archival records.<sup>33</sup>

These two writers, and others, are correct to require that the documentary record be given conscientious and meticulous attention. Their work relies on minutes, memoranda and the letters of British cabinet ministers and imperial officials, and to

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30. Marais, *The Fall of Kruger's Republic*; A. Porter, *The Origins of the South African War Joseph Chamberlain and the Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1895-1899* (Manchester University Press, London, 1980); Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, pp 393-428; A.A. Mawby, *Gold Mining and Politics, Johannesburg, 1900-1907 the Origins of the Old South Africa?* (Edwin Mellen, Lewiston NY, 2000).
  31. In this regard, Mawby is particularly critical of Marks and Trapido: “Lord Milner and the South African State”, in M. Twaddle (ed), *Imperialism, the State and the Third World* (British Academic Press, London, 1992).
  32. De Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor*; E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Empire* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1987), p 66.
  33. Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, p 408; Mawby, *Gold Mining and Politics*, pp 3-8.

some degree on similar material from capitalist mine owners, among others, and our understanding of the war's origins are all the richer for these sources. But, because these historians have denied themselves recourse to the context in which their dignitaries operate – and they are mostly dignitaries – their weakness lies in the way these pronouncements are taken at face value.<sup>34</sup> There is little attempt to understand what it was that shaped and influenced the dignitaries and in the end, we the readers, are left to believe that the mine owners, and ultimately the British state wanted nothing more than “good government”. We are given no insight into the social and ideological meaning of that phenomenon. It is enough to believe that Britain would stand up to a corrupt and inefficient economic and administrative order. The government of the ZAR was said to be riddled with corruption and inefficiency – a state of affairs that came to be known, as *Krugerism* in reference to the president of that republic. But in this interpretation, *Krugerism* is allowed to be no more than a shibboleth for a dishonest and wasteful patronage system, built upon a semi-feudal edifice as its contemporary opponents, such as Percy Fitzpatrick, were asserting.<sup>35</sup> But was *Krugerism* little more than corruption and inefficiency? And, if so, is it entirely plausible that imperial civil servants and mining magnates would have disclaimed diplomatic and political solutions to the problems facing them? Neither group was, after all, above buying political and administrative favours. Nor, we must assume, could corruption and inefficiency be sufficient to challenge imperial and mining interests. Moreover, and paradoxically, mining companies were not always enthusiastic about administrative changes/improvements the Kruger government was showing itself willing to make. As Van Onselen has demonstrated, in 1897 and 1898 Kruger had brought reform-minded office holders into his government, but these were not always enthusiastically received by either British administrators or by mining capitalists.<sup>36</sup> The suspicion must exist, therefore, that *Krugerism* was something more substantial than that depiction provided by its adversaries. If we examine the claims of those who believed themselves to be in an empire imperilled by *Krugerism* alongside the claims of those perceiving themselves as the victims of “a century's wrong”, do we arrive at conclusions which are more than the sum of two sets of assertions? Moreover, if there was a threat to Empire in South Africa, was it only Afrikaners who made that threat? We know that it did not come from those Cape Afrikaners who were loyalists, asserting that they spoke the “Queen's Dutch”. Nor can we confidently say that all British *Afrikanders* were loyal to the empire. So what impact did these sometimes blurred loyalties have on either *Krugerism* or imperialism?

And what of that mineral at the heart of the matter, gold? Its production, its exchange and ultimately, its economic function set it aside from other minerals and gave it unique importance. Whilst the costs of mining gold on the Witwatersrand were it was claimed, abnormally high, producers could not raise the price of their commodity. For this reason profits were, dependent on mine-owners cutting expenditure to an exceptional extent. Mine managers needed – since they could not restrict the price of machinery and other stores – to control the price of foodstuffs, transport, and above all, labour. Within the cost structure in which they were working they needed to reduce the price they were paying for African labour. Another way to

34. For example: Smith, *Origins of the South African War*, pp 408-409.

35. Fitzpatrick, *The Transvaal from within*, pp 75, 115, 213-228.

36. Van Onselen, *New Babylon*, pp 12-17.

cut labour costs would have been to reduce the wage bill for the far more expensive European and white settler workers. Although they were far fewer in number than their African counterparts, they were able to command much higher wages because initially they were more skilled and had a greater capacity to defend their interests. But for as long as the mining capitalists needed the white workers as political allies against the Kruger republic, they were going to find it difficult to challenge white workers' pay or jobs. This dilemma brought them up against Kruger's patronage networks, since Kruger needed to ensure welfare for an increasing number of Afrikaners who were being reduced to landlessness and poverty – some of whom were, potentially, part of the white urban working class. In this way, the long term implications of *Krugerism* were easily as important to its adversaries as corruption and inefficiency.

The final question to be asked revolves around gold, its role as the major medium of exchange and the effect, if any, that this had on the making of British government attitudes and policy towards the ZAR. Gold, as we know, was central to the world's trading system, then dominated by the financial and mercantile institutions of the City of London. As world trade grew in the second half of the nineteenth century, so the amount of gold required to underpin it increased enormously. The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand, which became the world's largest producer in little more than a decade, was a tremendous fillip to international trade. This was particularly so since, at much the same time, production in other major gold fields was declining. We must, therefore, ask, why it was that neither the Bank of England nor the City expressed public or private disquiet that a diplomatic crisis, or worse, a war, was brewing between Britain and the world's leading gold producer, the ZAR. Successive Chancellors of the Exchequer had made it clear that they recognised the importance of gold to the Bank of England. The Treasury may not, in the years before the South African War, have formulated an economic doctrine to allow it to theorise about the role of gold in the British economy, but its practice left it in no doubt that gold was absolutely central to the financial system. As the Liberal Chancellor, Sir William Harcourt, observed in 1894 when being exasperated by a supporter of bimetallism:

I desire London to remain what it is, the Metropolis of the Commerce of the World to which all nations resort to settle their business. This I believe and I think all those who have practical knowledge of the money market (with the striking exception of yourself) believe to be owing to the soundness of our monetary system, London being the only place where you can always get gold. It is for that reason that all the exchange business of the world is done in London.<sup>37</sup>

Mining capitalism generated two parallel industrial working classes, one originally unskilled and drawn from the indigenous population, the other migrant and largely drawn from Britain and its settler Empire. Initially both populations were involved in a mass search for diamonds. In the process some "diggers", mostly holding some financial resources, began to accumulate claims. From their number emerged an entrepreneurial class, whilst the majority of diggers became labourers. In this descent into the proletariat, the immigrant white diggers, in an attempt to stave off the prospect, used the state's power to help themselves exclude African diggers from the role of independent claim holders. Yet both African and European diggers were

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37. Harcourt – Henry Hucks Gibbs, pp 72-73.

reduced to proletarians, although white workers – some with mining skills, political rights and a knowledge of syndicalism – clung precariously, and with less and less success, to higher wages and greater social privileges. African workers were reduced to ever lower wages and were held for the duration of their contracts in prison-like compounds. Meanwhile capitalists and their European financiers, aided by the colonial legal system, were consolidating their holdings of diamond bearing ground until they were able to create an enormously rich cartel. As for the remaining number of white workers on the diamond fields, many of them saw their predicament as the result of capitalism and British colonialism. Although the majority of them were British, or British colonials, this experience left them with a greater sympathy for republicanism.

As noted earlier, a similar republicanism had emerged among British settlers in the Afrikaner state annexed by Britain in the late 1870s. This annexation had been part of a scheme to create a South African federation and initially these settlers were reluctant to see a process of British appropriation succeed. Once the annexation had become a *fait accompli*, however, British settlers were won over to accept their obligation to the Imperial state. But, when Britain changed its policy, abandoning the annexation and thereby leaving its own subjects compromised and at the mercy of a hostile Afrikaner society which by now regarded them with suspicion, “old-British settlers” became mistrustful of all Britain’s intentions. While some of them aligned themselves to reform movements in the ZAR, they invariably asserted that they sought merely to reform the Republic’s existing institutions and vigorously opposed proposals to bring the state under imperial control.

### **Mining capital and the Jameson Raid**

The discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 led the British government to regret its earlier decision to withdraw from direct control of the ZAR and it was soon to assert a doctrine of suzerainty as fact. Witwatersrand gold mines were giving Britain an increasingly important economic stake in the Republic, but alarmingly, the wealth that these mines were generating was evidently strengthening the ZAR’s capacity to negotiate with, and distance itself from, the Imperial power. Yet British perceptions of this Afrikaner threat took a most paradoxical form. It became widely believed in Colonial Office circles that Britain’s hold on the territory was threatened, not so much by “Dutch Afrikanders”, as the Boers were called, but by “British Afrikanders” and their cosmopolitan allies. At first glance, the most tangible example of this cosmopolitanism was perceptible in the National Union, an organisation committed to achieving political and economic reforms in the ZAR but which wished to maintain the republican system of government. It was largely supported by the middle classes, if only because trade unionists saw the organisation as an agent of the capitalists. “Cosmopolitan” was a euphemism for non-British capitalist mine-owners, but despite the British government’s suspicion of them, these capitalists looked to London for much of their financial support and for most of their political backing.

The mine-owners varied in the size and scale of their operations. By far the largest of them were now held in the Wernher, Beit & Eckstein (WB&E) group. Wernher and Beit had made their fortunes on the diamond fields. By the end of the 1890s they held two-fifths of the mining property on the Witwatersrand and produced half the country’s gold. Two other mining houses, Rand Mines, with Cecil Rhodes as its managing director, and the property held by George Farrar, were responsible for

half again of the gold sold abroad. By 1894 the mines of these groups were not only about to become the major sources of deep level gold, but the same companies were to remain as the major outcrop miners – a point which can dispose of the argument that it was the distinction between deep level and outcrop mining which generated a major structural division within the goldmining companies.

WB&E, Rand Mines and Farar were loud in their complaints about the ZAR, whose tariffs and monopolies were, they claimed, making profitable mining very difficult. Witwatersrand gold mines, we know, had specific problems created by the combination of a very low internationally set price of gold, along with the quantity of gold in the Witwatersrand seams, which again, was low, for all that it was consistent. In addition, the depths from which the gold ore had to be excavated, was becoming ever deeper. The ZAR state was said to be unsympathetic to the industry's difficulties on account of its being ill-informed and unrealistic about the amount of revenue which it could expect to extract from the industry. Patronage and armaments were what drove the ZAR's fiscal policy and from this the mine-owners could see no escape. However, once it appeared that a new and major uncertainty about costs might emerge, when leading republican politicians proposed that the state take over an essential patent to a vital metallurgical process which would have added significantly to mine owner's expenditure – some mining houses had their anxieties about the Boer state greatly increased. All these factors exacerbated the economic malaise which the Witwatersrand was suffering. Coinciding with this, and intensifying it, was a restlessness among the immigrant or *Uitlander* population in the ZAR, a restlessness detected by the visiting British High Commissioner in South Africa and one which his attention seemed likely to aggravate. With Lionel Phillips, Chairman of the recently formed Chamber of Mines, the High Commissioner raised the question of how long a Johannesburg rising, fuelled by this unrest, could hold out. That is, until a British military force could come to intervene on its behalf.

Phillips, who was a director of the WB&E group and head of their Intelligence Department, had already begun to contemplate the possibility of such a Johannesburg uprising as a way of achieving reforms for the mining industry, even before his meeting with the British High Commissioner. And, while discussing the possibility with some of his fellow Johannesburg capitalists and senior managers, Phillips was urged to involve Cecil Rhodes in the conspiracy. Although Rhodes largely left management of Rand Mines to others, he was very much a key actor in southern Africa. As Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, Chairman of the De Beers diamond cartel and Chairman of the British South Africa Company, Rhodes had access to arms and ammunition, troops, the Colonial Office and other influential circles in London. Rhodes' motives – like those of Phillips and Alfred Beit, the senior figure in WB&E – were to ensure the profitability and safety of his investments in the ZAR. Rhodes, as he was reported by Percy Fitzpatrick, a leading publicist and one of the conspirators, wanted to “obtain an amelioration of the conditions such as he was entitled to claim as representing an enormous amount of capital invested in the Transvaal”. Both Beit and Rhodes, Fitzpatrick went on to observe,

... may be regarded as the chiefs to whom the ultimate decision as to whether it was necessary, from the capitalistic point of view, to resort to extreme measures was ... left. Each of these gentlemen controls in person and through his business associates many millions of money invested in the Transvaal;



each of them was, of course, a heavy sufferer under the existing conditions affecting the mining industry, and each as a businessman must have been desirous of reform in the administration.<sup>38</sup>

Rhodes might have been essential to the logistics of a *coup d'état* but he was ultimately incapable of understanding the coup's political needs. The conspiratorial plan, as it evolved, was for an uprising to take place in Johannesburg and for troops to come to the assistance of the would-be rebels.

These troops would be stationed on territory ceded to the British South Africa Company by the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain. Chamberlain, whose political life had begun in the Liberal Party with him as an advocate of social welfare, had broken with that Party over imperialism. Now in the Conservative government, he saw empire as an important buttress to Britain's domestic policy. Almost his first action as Colonial Secretary, his clandestine support for the capitalists' conspiracy was to lead to considerable embarrassment for his new Party. Additionally, he was to impose a policy upon the conspirators which had the unintended consequence of ensuring that their plot came to nothing. Rhodes, in acquiring resources from the Colonial Secretary, had doomed it by acceding to Chamberlain's demand that the Johannesburg conspiracy be undertaken to raise the Union Jack over the ZAR.

In Johannesburg, the plot disintegrated, probably because the majority of Johannesburg conspirators were hostile to the possibility of an imperial take-over and were committed to the idea of a reformed republican system of government. Thus, for example, a week before the rising was to take place, Fitzpatrick had told a public meeting that he would not, in any way, undermine republican government. He and the other reformers knew that they must include "Progressive" Afrikaners and American mine managers in their number if they were to succeed. Yet although the Johannesburg conspirators called for the coup and the Raid to be postponed – and Rhodes supposedly agreed to this – the Raid, nonetheless, went ahead. Rhodes' associate and lieutenant, Starr Leander Jameson, probably with the former's support, cut the telegraph wires, so preventing the receipt of countermanding orders. Jameson and his troop were surrounded and detained by an Afrikaner militia and eventually handed over to the British government. They were then tried for breach of their military oath forbidding them to wage war against a friendly government and they received nominal sentences.

The collapse of the conspiracy greatly strengthened the ZAR, diplomatically, militarily and psychologically. It was able to take advantage of its opponent's embarrassment, welcoming the support it received from continental European powers, and it embarked upon a programme of rearmament. Simultaneously, however, the British government began reformulating policy in the light of this strengthening challenge to its pre-eminence in the region. That reformulation had begun within days of the collapse of the Raid. But it was not Chamberlain – part hero and part embarrassment to the British Government – who led the way here. Rather, it was Arthur Balfour, Leader of the House of Commons and nephew of the Prime Minister, who announced that the "Transvaal is independent as regards internal, but not

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38. Fitzpatrick, *The Transvaal from within*, p 97.

external, relations”.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, to give body to this formulation, William Waldegrave Palmer, otherwise Lord Selborne, Chamberlain’s Under Secretary, and the Prime Ministers Lord Salisbury’s son-in-law, drew up a memorandum in which he laid out the likely prospective changes in the ZAR and the dangers which these would contribute to British objectives.

### The Selborne memorandum

Salisbury was wary of Chamberlain who had compromised the government over the Raid and it was convenient for him to use Selborne to keep him informed of his Colonial Secretary’s activities. For his part, Chamberlain often left Selborne “to make the Colonial Office’s case privately to the Prime Minister,” if only because the domestic arrangements of the latter two men meant that they lived under the same country house roof for much of the year. This allowed Selborne, the go-between, to become the effective policy maker on South African matters, although we must assume that his doing so was sanctioned by Salisbury. Selborne took advantage – or was allowed to take advantage – of being left to deal with South African issues and officials on a daily basis. And as we shall see there were moments when he was to reprimand his supposed overlord.<sup>40</sup>

Possibly the most important policy formulation which followed from this collective view of the threat to British supremacy in South Africa, came soon after the Jameson Raid when Lord Selborne, drew up the well-known, if much less understood memorandum. As Ian Phimister has explained, Selborne’s Memorandum in effect asserted that “Dutch” power in South Africa was only a secondary obstacle to British imperial hegemony.<sup>41</sup> The primary obstacle was likely to be the “cosmopolitan” threat. Selborne’s memoranda, addressed to the Prime Minister, and to the Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, argued:

The worst thing that could happen to us and to South Africa, would be for the English whether in the Transvaal or in the Queen’s dominions to come definitely to the conclusion that the Imperial government had no sympathy for their aspirations and to decide that the Imperial connexion was a barrier to their legitimate hopes.<sup>42</sup>

This, Selborne thought, would be worse than the emergence of a South Africa-wide Afrikaner unity, for, he wrote, “the next worse thing for us would be to unite all the Dutch in South Africa in determined hostility to British rule and the British flag”.<sup>43</sup> Selborne was convinced that the Transvaal was “the richest spot on earth” and that its British inhabitants would inevitably come to be dominant within it. Above all, what worried Selborne was the prospect of a sizable immigration of mostly British

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39. A. Porter, “Lord Salisbury, Mr. Chamberlain And South Africa, 1895-1899”, p 5.

40. Robinson & Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, p 432.

41. I. Phimister, “Empire, Imperialism and the Partition of Africa”, in S. Akita (ed), *Gentlemanly Capitalism, Imperialism and Global History* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2002), pp 75-76.

42. G.D. Boyce (ed), *The Crisis of British Power the imperial and naval papers of the second Earl of Selborne, 1895-1910* (Historians’ Press, London, 1990), pp vii, 438 – hereafter: Selborne Papers, draft memorandum by Lord Selborne, January [1896].

43. Selborne Papers, draft memorandum by Lord Selborne, January [1896].

settlers, who would make their way to the ZAR, and, in consequence, change the political configuration of that state.

Just think what would be the result of 10 or of 20 years of an immigration maintained at one fifth or even one tenth of [the present] rate! Therefore, according to all the experience of history, this country so powerful in its future wealth and population must be a British Republic if it is not a British Colony; and I cannot myself see room for doubt but that a British Republic of such great wealth and of so large a population situated at the geographical centre of political South Africa would assuredly attract to itself all British Colonies in South Africa.<sup>44</sup>

This would mean that the British population of the Transvaal would necessarily settle the destiny of southern Africa and create a federal South Africa. But there were two distinct routes to such a federation. Either it could become a United States of Southern Africa flying a republican flag, or it could follow the Canadian model owing economic and political allegiances to Britain as the Dominion of Southern Africa. However, he also made it clear that the route British settlers in the Transvaal would take would not be entirely in their own hands. The extent to which the imperial government intervened, and the effectiveness of its policy, would determine whether South Africa was to have a New Canada or a New United States.<sup>45</sup>

Without Rhodes' involvement, the real risk of an insurrection in Johannesburg was that it might lead to the creation of a new United States, in the process of forcing through reforms in the gold mining districts of the ZAR while retaining its republican form. The leading Johannesburg conspirators, all of them major figures in the mining industry, agreed that they should not transform the existing state into a British Colony and that it should remain an independent Republic. All conspirators believed that Afrikaners would not resist determined opposition.

In the months immediately after the Raid, Chamberlain, acting on his own initiative, appeared to be trying to reverse the results of the failed coup. At first he toyed with the idea of acquiring a municipal government for Johannesburg. This was to be preferred to independence because it would leave the *Uitlanders* still dependent on the British government. He also tried to cajole Kruger into coming to London where he hoped to brow beat the President into making certain concessions. Then, in November 1896, he attempted to persuade the Cabinet that a show of force against the ZAR would be desirable but the Cabinet, with other international problems to deal with, refused to send reinforcements to South Africa.<sup>46</sup> Early in 1897, an undeterred Chamberlain sent an indiscrete, supposedly hypothetical, question to Lionel Phillips, asking him about the possibility and the likely effect of shutting down the Johannesburg mines. "It has been represented to me" he wrote to Lionel Phillips,

... that the mining magnates of Johannesburg could, if they chose, bring matters to a satisfactory issue by closing the mines, and that in this case the Transvaal Government would be obliged to make concessions in order to secure their revenues.<sup>47</sup>

44. Selborne Papers, Selborne – Marquis of Salisbury, 30 March 1896.

45. Robinson & Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians*, pp 410-461.

46. E. Drus, "Select Documents from the Chamberlain Papers Concerning Anglo-Transvaal Relations, 1896-1899", *BIHR*, 27, 1954, p 164.

47. Drus, "Select Documents", p 165 (Chamberlain – L. Phillips, 1 January 1897).

There were a number of international complications which made it difficult for Britain to act against the ZAR at that particular moment. On several occasions British officials in South Africa were to restrain themselves, or their over-enthusiastic local imperialists, when Britain's other commitments made it impossible to support an agitation within the ZAR.<sup>48</sup> In an apparent attempt to be helpful to the Colonial Office, but one which must be seen as another form of lobbying, WB&E shared information and intelligence with both the British agent in Pretoria, Connyngham Greene, and with Whitehall.

A year after the Raid, some of the gold producers began again to protest against state measures which were seen as inhibiting the growth of the mining industry. To meet these complaints, the ZAR established the *Industrial Commission*. The government was persuaded that such a Commission would show that the industry's complaints were unfounded. All but one of the Commissioners initially appointed by the Government lacked the technical expertise to undertake the inquiry and they therefore accepted the help offered by the mining houses. Five experts, drawn from the Chamber as well as from the Association, were asked to join the panel and they soon became its leading members.

Their report's non-negotiable demands included the cancellation and expropriation of the state's dynamite monopoly, an end to its control over railway tariffs, control of the movement of African labour, prohibition of alcohol sales to Africans, and the eradication of the illegal gold trade. The administration and the enforcement of these demands was to be in the hands of a local board. It was to have a police force independent of the ZAR state and placed under mining house control. These demands not only questioned the sovereignty of the state, but threatened key groups within it with the loss of a major part of their patronage. In short, it was beyond the capacity of the existing ZAR Government to implement the recommendations of the report. When the Government duly declined to implement the Commission's recommendations, it aroused hostility from Alliance entrepreneurs. German and French firms protested to the ZAR government over its failure to effect the recommendations.

#### **Fitzpatrick, Milner and the road to war**

WB&E's Percy Fitzpatrick also sought to influence Alfred Milner, the High Commissioner, knowing full well that there was no constitutional way of achieving his demands. Milner, in endorsing these demands, announced, "There is only one possible settlement - war! It has got to come". They must resolve

... the status of the Courts, the native policy, the franchise, redistribution of seats, language, customs, Railways, Court of Appeal, etc., settled once and forever, so that we may have peace to follow our business and an end to all the South African turmoil and unrest.<sup>49</sup>

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48. Transvaal Archive Depot, Pretoria: BA 18, 175, BA – HC, 24 March 1898; Bodleian Milner papers: MS Milner dep 17, Milner – B. Synge, Morija, Basutoland, 20 April 1898; C. Headlam, *The Milner Papers* (Cassell, Toronto, Melbourne & Sydney, 1933), pp 227-229.

49. NELM: JPF – Beit, 4 March 1898.

By this point Milner was all set to take on the ZAR. When he first arrived in South Africa he did not allow himself to be hurried into revealing his strategy. He waited, instead, for the ZAR to hold its presidential election before deciding on his course. Once that election showed Kruger was not to be challenged, let alone defeated, by the Progressives, he embarked on his own course to determine the future of South Africa. Whether or not he was convinced by Selborne's breakdown of the forces at work in South Africa, he now determined to bring about a new set of parameters around which he expected subjects of the crown would regroup.

But no sooner had Milner committed himself to a policy which must result in a direct confrontation with the ZAR – and he had let Chamberlain know that this was so – then he was reminded by the Colonial Secretary that Britain's immediate foreign policy left no room for such a conflict. He would have to bide his time. "If it had not been for all our troubles elsewhere, I should not have striven ... for a peaceful issue", Milner wrote. He went on:

The Boer Government is too great a curse to all South Africa to be allowed to exist, if we were not too busy to afford the considerable war which alone can pull it down.<sup>50</sup>

If Milner was having to restrain himself because the British Government was elsewhere engaged, Fitzpatrick and the Randlords had similarly to avoid a crucial part of the long term policy of the mining industry when they were addressing the Industrial Commission. The issue was that of white wages. As Fitzpatrick confided to Wernher, when the former was being examined by the Commission, "white wages was the most difficult question to handle in evidence". They could find a way to reduce the wages of white workers, "but it should not be the subject of public discussion or of concerted action". To have allowed white wages to be discussed openly would have been calamitous. "Few things would be more disastrous to us or more acceptable to the Government, than a split between the white labourers and employers at the present juncture".<sup>51</sup> John Hobson noted the importance to the mining industry of the white workers' wages bill. The saving, he noted, "to be effected out of white wages is greater than out of black, for the aggregate of the wages paid to white miners has hitherto been larger than that paid to black, though the numbers of the latter are eight times as large". Hobson could see the mine-owners' predicament. If the alliance of white workers and capitalist was achieved and maintained, then the costs of production must remain high. If white wages could be cut then that alliance would collapse:

White wages have not been reduced in the past, because the Outlanders desired to work together for political salvation, and any attack upon the white labourers pay would have caused a split in the ranks. However, when new conditions prevail, white wages must come down.<sup>52</sup>

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50. MS Milner dep 17, Milner – B. Syngé, Morija, Basutoland, 20 April 1898.

51. NELM: JPF – J. Wernher, 1 May 1897.

52. J.A. Hobson, *The War in South Africa. Its Causes and Effects* (Nisbet, London, 1900), p 240.

By the start of 1899 there was a new mood in the air. Britain had, for the time being, settled its differences with Germany, France and the United States and was free to act in South Africa if it chose to do so. Both the government of the ZAR and its protagonists in South Africa reassessed their positions. Leading figures in the Kruger government set out to offer the Randlords a set of financial and commercial compromises in return for a political settlement. The ZAR would provide the mining houses with tax concessions and allow them to control the *bewaarplaatsen*. This was land originally granted to the mining companies for storage and surface work only but which now lay above the gold reefs as they plunged to the great depths where mining's future lay. WB&E, more than any other mining group, based its future well being on the assumption that it would ultimately be able to acquire these *bewaarplaatsen*. Until that moment the state threatened to give these to its clients but now it was prepared to offer these to the Randlords in return for a settlement which would have them disavow the South African League (SAL), end the anti-Boer tone of *The Star* and accept the continuation of the dynamite monopoly. It also offered to grant the *Uitlanders* the right to vote after five years' residence in the ZAR. They were to urge Britain to concede the republic's right to treat Coloured and Indians as it saw fit.

If implemented this would have gone a considerable way towards meeting the economic demands of the mining houses. At any rate this set of proposals, which came to be known as the Great Deal could have been seen as the basis for negotiations. Fitzpatrick was wary of the offer, partly because the ZAR would not and could not deliver what they were offering. But more than this, if the ZAR did produce the settlement they were offering the mining houses would not achieve the kind of domination which they wanted. Fitzpatrick informed his London Directors of the ZAR's offer and expressed his continuing distrust. Wernher and Beit agreed with him and they organised the support of the major mining houses London.

The Republic now offered the Randlords a new compromise. In addition to the *bewaarplaatsen*, it would resolve the franchise question. In return, the mining industry was to provide the ZAR with a loan, suppress the press, disavow the SAL and *Uitlander* opposition, and oppose the British government's criticism of the ZAR's treatment of Indians. In effect, these proposals were an attempt to divide the capitalists, the SAL and the *Uitlanders* from each other and from British influence. Once again, Fitzpatrick accepted the tactical necessity of examining the ZAR's offer, while ensuring that the mine-owners were persuaded to look beyond their immediate interests.

The WB&E directors believed that, while the outcome of economic negotiations should be to the mine-owners' advantage, these should not be bought at the price of alienating the SAL and the *Uitlanders*. This was a circle which could never be squared. The franchise offer from the ZAR government would still have left considerable numbers of *Uitlanders* without the vote, and, worse, without citizenship for the qualifying period. The London representatives of three major mining houses, Consolidated Gold Fields, WB&E, and Goerz and Co, welcomed the concessions being offered on the *bewaarplaatsen*, but were unwilling to detach this from the franchise settlement.

Eckstein, Wernher and Beit were however alarmed by the prevarications they had encountered in separate visits to the Colonial Office in March 1899. When

Wernher spoke to Chamberlain and Selborne on 8 and 9 March, he was surprised that they recommended a municipality for Johannesburg. When Wernher raised the question of the franchise for the *Uitlanders*, Selborne evaded the query, cautioning that it “was going at once to the point of most resistance”.<sup>53</sup> Once again the major capitalists were concerned at the prevarication of the leading actors in the Colonial Office. Eckstein told the British Vice Agent in Johannesburg that, unless Britain acted decisively against the ZAR, he would not risk all by rejecting the latter’s terms; he would “go to Pretoria and make peace with the [Z]SAR”.<sup>54</sup>

By the spring and summer of 1899, relations between Britain and the South African Republic had begun to deteriorate dangerously, but the City conveyed no particular anxiety. On the contrary the war, when it came, was extremely popular amongst members of the British financial community. And whilst that popularity stemmed, in part, from the end of uncertainty, and, in part, from the jingoism which late Victorian nationalism had spawned, it also stemmed from the assumed interests of these financial communities. To begin with it was widely believed that the intense pressure put upon the government of the ZAR was likely to succeed without Britain’s need of recourse to war. Equally, when war came, there was considerable confidence – although not amongst those few who were closest to the conflict – that Britain would very soon force the Afrikaner republic into submission. Had the Bank of England and the City of London thought that its interests were being endangered by the political and diplomatic policy of the government, these influential spheres of interest would have let their anxieties be known. Whatever doubts remained were anyway swept aside by the final rush to war. Determined to get its blow in first, the ZAR, together with the OVS, issued an ultimatum in October 1899 demanding the recall of British troops on their way to South Africa, and the withdrawal of existing forces from republican borders. Having provoked the ultimatum, Britain “naturally ignored it”<sup>55</sup> and within days the first Boer columns were streaming into Natal and the Cape.

### Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to advance an interpretation of the causes of the South African War which integrates context with agency. By emphasising the struggle’s long and short term contexts, it has tried to give meaning to the responsibility for war so assiduously sought by generations of liberal historians. But in doing so, this chapter has stressed the pivotal role of the Selborne Memorandum, as well as the key part played by Percy Fitzpatrick in overcoming the inertia and caution characteristic of much mining house behaviour. It was Fitzpatrick who helped set the stage on which Milner acted. Overall, the conclusions suggested here have attempted to avoid the polarised positions taken up in so many accounts of the causes of the war. Rather than having to choose between a political and strategic set of explanations on the one hand, or the economic determinism of gold and gold mining’s imperatives on the other, this chapter has argued for the convergence of both, particularly in the decisive period between 1895 and 1899.

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53. CO 417/259, Minute by Selborne & Chamberlain, 8 & 9 March 1899; Marais, *The Fall of Kruger’s Republic*, pp 251-252.

54. MS Milner dep 208, P81, pp 408-409, Her Majesty’s Agent Pretoria – High Commissioner, summary of letter from Vice Consul, Johannesburg, 19 April 1899.

55. D. Judd and K. Surridge, *The Boer War* (John Murray, London, 2002), p 50.