

## **Chapter Eight: The Rise and Decline of Krugersdorp as a White Working-class Town, 1910-1918**

### **Introduction**

From Union to the end of the First World War, Krugersdorp was shaped by the reforms introduced by politicised elements of the white working class, particularly, by members of the South African Labour Party (SALP). However, like the local female social activists dealt with in the previous chapter (see Chapter Seven) who unsuccessfully tried to turn Krugersdorp into a 'gynopia', the labourites also failed in their endeavours to mould Krugersdorp in terms of their vision of a white working-class town.

This Chapter explores how and why local labour politicians rose to power in Krugersdorp – in the context of similar developments on the Rand and at the provincial and national levels – reached a peak by 1914-1915, carried out a number of significant reforms that affected Krugersdorp, and then declined in influence. As in the case of women's organisations, the 'war effort ideology' had a negative impact upon support for Labour, although this was not as severe as labour historians have believed. Indeed it is contended that Labour enjoyed far more consistent levels of support at a local level than national and provincial election statistics suggested. Labour's sustained popularity – although it waxed and waned to a modest extent – was due to its genuine concern about the ordinary white working-class men and women. It is contended that the labourite focus on municipal socialism and its vision of a white working class town appealed to a large segment of the municipal electorate and this shaped Krugersdorp in important ways by defining and championing white working-class interests in the face of exploitative capitalism and competition for jobs as well as other resources from the black working class.

This Chapter will briefly consider the writings of urban Marxists and their critics to shed light on the processes that drove white workers to combine trade unionism with municipal politics. It will be contended that while white workers mobilised into increasingly militant trade unions that fought for their rights at the site of production (most notably during the 1907, 1913 and 1914 strikes on the Rand), they also,

increasingly organised politically around the site of consumption by engaging in municipal politics, an area of struggle that remains comparatively under-researched and undervalued by historians. White working-class candidates were successfully elected onto the Krugersdorp Town Council – as they were across the Rand – and used their influence to introduce a variety of reforms that amounted to a form of municipal socialism adapted to advance the interests of white workers. It is these changes, it will be contended, which modified Krugersdorp along the lines of a vision of a white working-class town.

These municipal reforms were achieved at the expense of both black labourers (who were excluded from certain kinds of municipal work, for example) and the local white middle class (who were faced with meeting the heavy costs incurred by these experiments in municipal socialism, through increased property rates). The white working-class town was, in this sense, the inscription of white labourism into the built environment of Krugersdorp. By 1917, however, the labourites' star was on the wane and by 1918 many aspects of the white working-class town were under attack by the middle class who began to steer the town in a new direction (see Chapter Nine). Labourites in the Town Council did not give up their vision of a white working-class town without a fight, however, and by 1918 were still fighting a rearguard action to defend white workers' rights with some success.

### **Municipal Politics and the Rise of the Labour Party in South Africa up to 1910**

The rise of the Labour Party in South Africa and its involvement in local politics was firmly rooted in experiences of workers in Britain and contemporary British socialist ideas that were transplanted to South Africa, via Cornwall, Canada and Australia in the second half of the nineteenth century. Hyslop has recently argued that there was a high degree of mobility of white English-speaking workers, who regularly circulated between Britain, Canada, Australia and South Africa.<sup>1</sup> This meant that these workers constituted an 'imperial working class [that] produced and disseminated a common ideology of

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<sup>1</sup> J. Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist: J.T. Bain: A Scottish Rebel in Colonial South Africa*, (*The Notorious Syndicalist*), Jacana, Johannesburg, 2004, p. 10.

White Labourism'.<sup>2</sup> The miners on the Rand who hailed from Britain and the Dominions formed their own new trade unions in Kimberley and the Rand by drawing upon their experience of trade unionism and political organisation in other countries which they then adapted to the specific conditions found in towns like Krugersdorp.

Krugersdorp's miners joined the Witwatersrand Mine Employees and Mechanics Union, formed in 1892 and later replaced by the Transvaal Miners' Association (TMA).<sup>3</sup> In 1897 the disgruntled miners at Randfontein formed the short-lived Rand Mine Workers' Union after a strike on J.B. Robinson's Randfontein mines.<sup>4</sup> A Trades and Labour Council (T&LC) was formed in Johannesburg in 1893 and put up candidates in the Johannesburg Sanitary Board elections. They called for a fair wage clause to be inserted in the Board's contracts, an eight-hour day for the Board's employees and the 'municipalisation of all essential public services'.<sup>5</sup> J. T. Bain formed the International Independent Labour Party (IILP) in 1898 in Johannesburg and published a newspaper, *The Johannesburg Witness*, that served as its mouthpiece.<sup>6</sup> The IILP advocated the

...municipalisation of all those works which are of their nature a public necessity, and which can be controlled and carried on by publicly elected bodies with greater economy than by private companies.<sup>7</sup>

A number of other similar political groups emerged after the South African War and pursued related aims. The Political Labour League (PLL), formed in 1905 in Johannesburg, called for adult suffrage in municipal elections, municipal taxes on unimproved land, an eight-hour day for municipal employees and the payment of Town Councillors. The PLL also called for the municipalisation of 'all community enterprises' including tramways, lighting and water supply, the provision of municipal housing, baths and wash-houses as well as the laying out of a municipal park where 'municipal

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<sup>2</sup> J. Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class Makes Itself 'White': White Labourism in Britain, Australia and South Africa before the First World War', Seminar Paper, Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of the Witwatersrand, 1999, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> See E. Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy: A History of White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913*, (A Trade Union Aristocracy), Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> D. Tickin, 'The Origins of the South African Labour Party, 1888–1910' ('Origins'), vol. 1, PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1973, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, p. 123.

concerts' would be held.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the seeds for municipal socialism were sown in the political soil of the Rand to bloom, especially after Union.

While no explicitly labourite candidate contested Krugersdorp's Sanitary Committee elections in the 1890s nor its Town Council elections in the immediate post-war period, white workers in the town were likely to have been influenced by the example of Johannesburg's elections. This may explain why, in 1905, James L. Williams, the proprietor of the Champ d'Or boarding house, stood as a representative of 'working men' in the Krugersdorp municipal elections and defeated a local mine manager for a seat on the Town Council.<sup>9</sup> Williams promised, upon his victory, to 'trouble his head about nothing else but the interests of working men' and was carried shoulder high to a smoking concert in Luipaardsvlei suburb by the miners from the French Rand and Champ d'Or.<sup>10</sup>

Over time the political campaigns of the Rand's working-class candidates became more explicit and narrow, influenced by a range of broadly socialist ideas espoused by trade unions and early labourite political parties that developed in Britain in the 1800s. These included Charles Kingsley's Christian Socialism,<sup>11</sup> 'gas-and-water' socialism introduced by the Birmingham Radicals under Joseph Chamberlain and Henry Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation. Keir Hardie's Independent Labour Party with its 'evolutionist' philosophy<sup>12</sup> and the Fabian Society's incremental approach to socialism nurtured a uniquely British form of socialism that influenced working-class municipal activism among white workers in Australia, Canada and South Africa.

All these 'streams' of thought constituted the intellectual seeds for a political labour movement in Britain and its Dominions that, in time, spread to the Rand. The 'spark' for the formation of Labour Parties in Britain, Australia and South Africa varied according to specific historical conditions in each country. One common factor, however, was the need for labour movements to engage defensively in political activity in order to protect

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<sup>7</sup> Ticktin, 'Origins', p. 94.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 2, Appendix, p. 520.

<sup>9</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 28 October 1905, 'The Municipal Elections'.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> K. de Schweinitz, *England's Road to Social Security*, Perpetua, South Brunswick, 1972, p. 172.

workers from political actions that threatened to reverse the gains already made through trade union activity.

In Britain, the British Labour Party was formed to campaign against the Taff Vale judgement in 1901 that held that trade unions could be sued for damages incurred during strikes. This 'entirely new and unexpected interpretation of the Act of 1871...struck at the very heart of Trade Union action'<sup>13</sup> as it would render strike action prohibitively expensive and would bankrupt trade unions. It, thus, had to be resisted politically by electing working-class representatives to the legislature. In Australia, it was the Great Maritime Strike of 1890 that prompted the formation of its labour party.<sup>14</sup>

In South Africa it was Milner's decision in 1903 to import indentured Chinese labourers to work on the mines of the Rand that set into motion the process that produced the SALP.<sup>15</sup> Denoon argues that white workers feared that Chinese miners would ultimately be used to undercut white miners' wages and lead to the loss of white workers' jobs.<sup>16</sup> Another formative experience that coincided with the 'anti-Chinese agitation', was the 1907 white miners' strike which was directed at mine owners' attempts to weaken white labour's bargaining position. The strike coincided with the granting of Responsible Government in the Transvaal and elections later that year, and the juxtaposition of these two events offered a particularly fertile ground for the development of a political party that addressed the concerns of the white working class.

The strike began in the East Rand on 1 May 1907, when white miners protested against the added burden of supervision which resulted from two to three rock-drilling machines, a reduction in contract rates from 70 shillings to 60 shillings per fathom drilled and the growing number of deaths of white miners due to phthisis. The strike spread quickly across the Rand, reaching some Krugersdorp mines, and bringing out a total of six thousand white miners. A notable exception were the miners at Randfontein

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>13</sup> G.M. Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century and After: 1782–1919*, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1965, p. 420.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> D. Denoon, 'The Transvaal Labour Crisis, 1901–6', *Journal of African History*, 7, 3, 1967, pp. 481–522.

who did not come out on strike, perhaps because the owner of the Randfontein Estates, the famously maverick J.B. Robinson (see Chapter One), openly sympathised with the strikers and donated two thousand pounds to their strike fund.<sup>17</sup>

The mine owners employed thousands of indigent Afrikaners as scab labour and the strike was slowly suffocated until it was officially called off on the 28<sup>th</sup> July. It was a shattering defeat and the miners who were re-employed had to do so under strict conditions and reduced wages. The strike, nonetheless, helped to bring the disparate and factionalist trade unions on the Rand closer together and highlighted the need for an explicitly working-class political party.<sup>18</sup>

However, it would take some time before this resentment would be translated into support for labour candidates. Workers were still fearful of their employers and beholden to them to the extent that they would vote for mine managers and mine owners who stood as candidates in municipal elections in towns such as Krugersdorp. Workers still focused on the workplace as a site of struggle, mobilised through trade unions and campaigned for higher wages rather than engaging with urban issues. They were worried about employment and afraid of losing their jobs by challenging the mine owners in the political sphere.<sup>19</sup> Yet, by Union, workers began to focus on their living space as much as their working space as a site of struggle. To understand why this happened, requires a brief diversion into theoretical literature, especially the works of urban Marxists and their critics.

### **Working Class Municipal Politics**

In the early 1970s, Marxist urban geographers began to examine the working class in terms of the two key concepts of 'working class consciousness' and 'spatiality'. In the process they drew heavily upon Antonio Gramsci's writing on the relatively neglected

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<sup>17</sup> Ticktin, 'Origins', p. 249.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>19</sup> Such concerns were not limited to Krugersdorp or even the Rand. Hyslop noted how J.T. Bain stood as a labourite candidate for the Pretoria North seat in the 1910 parliamentary elections against his own employer, Tom Cullinan, the mining magnate, and yet 'Bain did, for the moment, keep his job'. See also Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, p. 189.

aspects of the 'superstructure' of politics, law, culture, ideology and religion<sup>20</sup> to explore how the working class interacted with the urban environment. This required Marxists to engage with spatiality, a concept that did not 'fit' easily into either the base or the superstructure of the traditional Marxist theoretical model.

Levebre was one of the first Marxists to recognise the importance of spatiality that beyond the merely 'built-environmental', asserting that it constituted a 'force of production' and an 'object of consumption'. He claimed that space had been alienated from workers by the capitalist system and advocated the 're-appropriation' of space for human purposes as an important socialist aim.<sup>21</sup> Levebre's contribution is important but, according to Castells, he reified space to a point of 'spatial fetishism'.<sup>22</sup>

Castells, a leading urban Marxist, attempted to adapt Marxism to the realities of the urban lived environment, without going as far as to privilege spatiality as Levebre had done. Castells devised, instead, the notion of the 'means of collective consumption' that incorporated a spatial dimension into workers' struggles around urban issues. For Castells, the city was a 'distinctive domain of consumption, reproduction and collective action' within the capitalist system.<sup>23</sup> Castells explained that the reproduction of the capitalist system required the physical reproduction of workers who needed to be fed, clothed, housed and educated. Capitalists were, however, loathe to meet the costs involved in the provision of these basic needs and left this responsibility to the state. This, in turn, produced a 'direct, unmediated linkage between urban dwellers and the state' and this meant that the state itself became the target of urban social movements where workers were one of several interest groups fighting to secure a greater proportion of resources controlled by the state.<sup>24</sup>

Castells, thus, incorporated spatiality into urban struggles as an object of human

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<sup>20</sup> N. Bobbio, 'Gramsci and the Conception of Civil Society' in C. Mouffe (ed.), *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979, cited in I. Katznelson, *Marxism and the City*, (*Marxism and the City*), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 114. This is the argument taken up in M. Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*, Edward Arnold, London, 1977.

agency rather than as a force in its own right, as Levebre implied. Castells did not, however, suggest a distinctive working-class consciousness in his discussion of urban struggles between urban residents and the state for control over aspects of the 'means of consumption'. Rather, he tended to conflate workers' struggles into a general 'urban' consciousness composed of a myriad of interest groups which included feminists, gay activists and environmentalists. Harvey criticised Castells' approach and argued for a distinct link between urban structural conditions and working class consciousness.

Harvey proposed that an 'urban consciousness' emerged among urban working-class residents out of the 'complexity of its actors and their positions in space and in spatially defined relations with political authorities'.<sup>25</sup> In his view, however, these relationships were 'fictitious' as the only 'irreducible social relations in a capitalist mode of production are those of capital and labour'.<sup>26</sup> For Harvey, the city should be understood not in terms of Castells' 'means of consumption' but in terms that privilege productive forces because it was

...built by labour employed within a temporal process of circulation of capital...nourished out of the metabolism of capitalist production for exchange on the world market and supported out of a highly sophisticated system of production and distribution organized within its confines...<sup>27</sup>

Politically, for Harvey, the city was ruled by a 'coalition of class forces segmented into distinctive communities of social production and organised as a discontinuous but spatially contiguous labour market'.<sup>28</sup> The political struggles of workers in the city were not imbued with 'false consciousness' as they had a 'real material basis in daily urban life'. They were, nonetheless, fetishistic as they were concerned only with surface experience.<sup>29</sup> Katznelson took issue with this viewpoint, and contended that Harvey failed to transcend 'reflectionism' which posited a crude 'correspondence between structure and meaning where trade union consciousness reflected the capitalist

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<sup>25</sup> Katznelson, *Marxism and the City*, pp. 121–2.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> D. Harvey, *Studies in the Theory of Capitalist Urbanization*, vol. II, *Consciousness and the Urban Experience*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1985, p. 250.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Katznelson, *Marxism and the City*, pp. 121–2.

workplace and urban consciousness reflected the capitalist residential community'.<sup>30</sup>

Katznelson claimed that capitalism was experienced in 'particular locations at particular times' and proposed a theoretical model of class that incorporated 'features of the organisation of social existence' both 'at work and off work'.<sup>31</sup> In his model, Katznelson theorised that the workplace constituted the first level of class analysis and residence the second level. The third level, which helped to bridge these two sites, he saw as the process by which the workers conceived both places in terms of 'cognitive mapping'.

Capitalist cities constitute concrete lived worlds both at work and at home and working people learnt to 'construct maps of their social terrain in both domains'.<sup>32</sup> Cognitive mapping bridged social being and social consciousness as an 'urban-centred engagement' with capitalism which constituted the working class as 'social actors' and it was this process which, in turn, constituted working-class consciousness. In this way, 'space and place' served as a 'mediating element' between large-scale social processes and social consciousness.<sup>33</sup>

Katznelson's concept of cognitive mapping drew on Bourdieu's 'habitus' which Katznelson understood as the way that people come to 'represent their lived experience' which, in turn, became a 'normative guide to action'.<sup>34</sup> Importantly, though, the 'class dispositions' that resulted from these representations were not merely 'mirrors or reflections of class realities' but rather 'plausible and meaningful responses to circumstances'.<sup>35</sup>

This concept enabled Katznelson to develop his fourth and final 'level' of 'collective action' where working-class members 'act self-consciously through movements and organisations to affect society and the position of the class inside of it', that is, the point at which working-class consciousness was attained through praxis or experience in the

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 204–5.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 208–9. Katznelson draws on P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984.

<sup>35</sup> Katznelson, *Marxism and the City*, pp. 208–9.

struggles of workers in the work place and around their places of residence.<sup>36</sup> Class formation, then, was a 'conditional but not random process of [problematical] connection between the four levels of class', which varies from society to society.<sup>37</sup>

Katznelson, thus, draws on postmodernism's concerns with 'cognitive and linguistic dispositions'<sup>38</sup> to explain how working-class experiences at work and at home have been 'mapped' by workers into a normative guide that 'conditions' a self-conscious collective action by workers in pursuit of its interests as a class. Katznelson inserts both spatiality and the state into Marxist analysis and provides the means to explain workers' participation in urban politics through the nomination and election of their own municipal candidates and the introduction of reforms that could improve workers' living conditions in the town. The works of the above urban Marxists, especially the writings of Katznelson, help to provide a framework for understanding white working-class participation in municipal politics in Krugersdorp, particularly why white workers pursued simultaneously the parallel struggles in both the workplace and in the place of residence in the town.<sup>39</sup>

### **White Workers as Candidates in Municipal Elections**

An important milestone in the advance of white working-class municipal politics was the formation of the Labour Representative Council (LRC) in 1907. This party contested some municipal constituencies on the Rand, winning a number in Johannesburg and the East Rand. An LRC candidate also contested the Roodepoort-Maraisburg municipal elections but he failed to be elected.<sup>40</sup> This example of an explicitly labourite political party taking part in municipal elections in its nearest neighbour, was bound eventually to influence Krugersdorp's more politicised white working-class elements to follow suit.

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<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 244.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 204–5.

<sup>39</sup> Desai correctly notes that the study of the interaction between reproduction and production, and the link between the home and workplace, has long been a staple of feminist labour historians, see R. Desai, 'Race, Gender and Class in the National Union of Distributive Workers 1937–53', ('Race, Gender and Class'), MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 1997, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> Tickin, 'Origins', p. 275.

The LRC candidates, however, suffered a major setback in 1908 and only one was elected on the whole Rand.<sup>41</sup> This may explain why Krugersdorp's white working class refrained, for another year at least, to put forward an explicitly pro-Labour candidate for its own municipal elections. The introduction of a proportional representation voting system in the Johannesburg municipal elections in 1909, however, helped to boost the chances of Labour candidates.<sup>42</sup> Krugersdorp still used the 'Wards' System making it more difficult for labourites to win a seat in municipal elections but Walter Holmes, who stood as a candidate for the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (ASE)<sup>43</sup> and C.B. Mussared, decided, nonetheless, to contest the elections.

Mussared proclaimed that he wanted the Krugersdorp Town Council to become a 'collective landlord on a large scale and build healthy houses' which would be let at low rents to workers (he pointed out that many workers paid up to a third of their wages on rent).<sup>44</sup> He also promoted the payment of Town Councillors and the holding of meetings in the evenings that would enable white working-class men to serve on the Town Council.<sup>45</sup>

The South African Labour Party was launched in the middle of the municipal election month, in October 1909.<sup>46</sup> A branch was soon established in Randfontein in November while the West Rand branch of the Independent Labour Party, a political party formed around the same time as the LRC, resolved to turn itself into the Krugersdorp branch of the SALP in January 1910.<sup>47</sup> Despite the effectiveness of Labour organisation and the publicity boost that labourite candidates received during the launch of the SALP, Holmes and Mussared were narrowly defeated.<sup>48</sup>

The SALP was dominated by trade unions and more than half of its membership was drawn from the ASE and TMA. The Party also attracted moderate professional men like

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<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>43</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 16 October 1909, 'Randfontein Municipal Elections'.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* Unfortunately there is no information on Mussared's background but these demands suggest that he was a wage worker.

<sup>46</sup> Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, p. 181.

<sup>47</sup> Tickin, 'Origins', 425–6. There are no records to indicate when this ILP branch was formed.

<sup>48</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 30 October 1909, 'Election Week'.

Cresswell and Wybergh as leaders who sympathised with the ordinary white workers but who were reformists rather than socialists. According to Ticktin, the professional elite in the leadership ranks wielded considerable influence over the SALP and watered down its socialist aims.<sup>49</sup> The Party attracted people with a variety of views which left it vulnerable to schisms and splits as will become clear later in this chapter.

### **The SALP Contests Parliamentary and Provincial Elections in 1910**

In 1910 the SALP, just a few months old, contested both the parliamentary and Provincial Council elections. The SALP's main election rival was the Unionist Party which was supported by the mining industry and which supported a strongly pro-British ideology of loyalty to the British Empire. The SALP entered an election pact with the South African Party that was dominated by moderate Afrikaners, Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, who sought reconciliation between English- and Dutch-speaking whites. As a result of this pact, J.W.S. Langerman, the SAP candidate, engaged in a straight fight with the Unionist Sir Abe Bailey in the parliamentary elections for the Krugersdorp seat, while W.G. Holmes, a labourite, faced a Unionist candidate for the Provincial Council seat. The Labour Party throughout denied such a pact, but Ticktin believes that 'constituency bargaining was most obvious in Krugersdorp'.<sup>50</sup> A Krugersdorp newspaper depicted the white workers of Krugersdorp rejecting Bailey at the polls but he was elected as M.P. for Randfontein not long afterwards.

The results suggest that the election pact had some effect in helping the Labour Party to obtain a foothold in national politics. The SALP won two Provincial Council seats, one by W.G. Holmes in the Krugersdorp constituency, and another in the neighbouring constituency of Roodepoort-Maraisburg (the candidate there officially stood as an Independent but his political allegiance was sufficiently well known for his victory to be construed as broadly supportive of labour principles).<sup>51</sup> These results strongly suggest that Labour had uniquely secured a solid support base on the West Rand at an early stage which, as suggested earlier, may be attributed to the presence of relatively large

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 443.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 455. See also *Star*, 10 August 1910, 'Filius Populi' and see also 'Correspondence', letter to the Editor by 'J.L.'. See also *Transvaal Leader*, 18 December, 1909, untitled.

numbers of white workers in an area where the local mining industry was particularly vulnerable (see Chapter One).

Although the Party's debut was reasonably successful, Ticktin was of the opinion that overall the SALP's performance was dismal. He blamed it on its 'extremely limited appeal' as it 'appeared to represent little more than the political mouthpiece of Transvaal craft unions and a few professional men'.<sup>52</sup> Katz also referred to Labour's 'failure' in the 1910 elections and she believed that it 'caused trade unions to turn away from political action and to concentrate on Industrial action' in the next few years.<sup>53</sup> Both Ticktin and Katz are unduly harsh and should credit a fledgling party with a respectable result on its first outing, having formed literally months before the elections.

### **Labourites Contest Krugersdorp's Municipal Elections, 1911–1912**

Certainly Holmes felt sufficiently buoyed by his success to attempt to leverage his Provincial seat into a Town Council berth. He decided to contest the municipal elections in Krugersdorp in October 1911, hoping to ride what he saw as the wave of popularity that he experienced in 1910 and propel himself into local government as well.<sup>54</sup> He was defeated, suggesting that it was not his personality alone that secured his Provincial seat. Indeed, it was probably his behaviour that sealed his defeat: he competed against a director of the Randfontein Estates for the 'Mines Ward' but, at the last moment, switched to Ward I to run against E.J. Adcock, a popular local chemist.<sup>55</sup> Holmes, thus, possibly may have been 'punished' by working-class supporters for his apparent arrogance in switching seats so late and apparently lacking the political courage to take on local mining industry's representative. There were also many middle-class voters in this ward and the local newspaper clearly indicated the antipathy that the middle class felt for Labour and its vision of municipal socialism by warning that Holmes would

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<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Ticktin, 'Origins', p. 475.

<sup>53</sup> E. Katz, 'The Origins and Early Development of Trade Unionism in the Transvaal, 1902–1913' ('Trade Unionism'), MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1973, p. 159. Katz cites R.K. Cope, *Comrade Bill: The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader*, Stewart Printing, Cape Town, 1940, p. 117.

<sup>54</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 14 October, 1911, 'Municipal Elections'.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*

...not find many supporters in an intelligent Ward where ratepayers will not swallow the Tub-in-the-park hash which the professional Labour agitator dishes out.<sup>56</sup>

Holmes blamed his defeat on the absence of a municipal franchise for women (see Chapter Seven) and predicted victory in the future, once Labour had introduced this important reform:

...the day is coming, and it is not far distant when every woman will have a vote... it is time that we had adult suffrage.<sup>57</sup>

Labourites had called for women's suffrage for some years and Holmes may have been correct in attributing his defeat to the lack of a women's vote, but women were hardly well represented in the Party itself and only a single female delegate, Mary Fitzgerald, a representative from Johannesburg, attended the SALP's founding national conference.<sup>58</sup> The SALP also failed to put up many female candidates from 1914 when women were given the municipal vote and no female Labour candidates were ever proposed for Krugersdorp so Holmes' comments need to be treated with some reserve.

What Holmes' fluctuating political fortunes suggest is that local politics were fluid and unpredictable. Closer analysis, for example, indicates that various unofficial 'pacts' were formed in Krugersdorp between labourites and middle-class candidates who expressed sympathy for workers. Holmes, for example, supported the re-election of H.S. Kingdon, a local merchant, who was popular among workers because of his involvement in local sport.<sup>59</sup> Holmes shared the same stage with Kingdon at a public by-election meeting and endorsed his candidature. Kingdon was opposed by R.F. Thomas, the retired mine manager for the local Windsor gold mine who had served as Deputy-Mayor in 1903–4.<sup>60</sup> Thus, as Holmes learned, local politics was complex and to be successful local candidates required mastery over a range of variables.

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Ticktin, 'Origins', pp. 414–5.

<sup>59</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 27 February, 1909, untitled. Kingdon was the Secretary of the Krugersdorp Wanderers Club.

<sup>60</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 28 October 1905, untitled.

This particular by-election campaign illustrates how fluid labour politics was at this stage because Thomas claimed, rather astonishingly as a former Mine Manager, that he was really a 'labour candidate'. He announced that he had been the 'chairman of a Labour Party' in Krugersdorp in the early 1890s (perhaps a reference to premature attempts to introduce the ILP on the Rand during those years) but he could provide no proof of this. There is nothing in the historical record to confirm his claim. Kingdon asserted that Thomas had 'for the last nineteen years not been connected with the Labour Party in any way'. He also informed his audience that the 'bulk of you gentlemen would not have the vote if Mr. Thomas had his way' as his rival favoured a property qualification for the municipal franchise.<sup>61</sup> When Thomas denied this, Holmes attested as witness that Thomas had made such a statement to him.<sup>62</sup> Kingdon won his seat by a large margin. Holmes then also had a shot at winning his own seat on the Town Council seat in a by-election in 1912, which he easily won.<sup>63</sup>

### **The Vision of Krugersdorp as a White Working-class Town**

What these election results suggest is that Krugersdorp's white workers were becoming sufficiently politicised to put forward Labour candidates and to vote for them in substantial numbers. It seems likely that they were encouraged by the example of municipal candidates standing for early the PLL and LRC in Johannesburg's municipal elections and, more broadly, by the success of the British and Australian Labour parties in parliamentary elections. They may also have realised, like Krugersdorp's white female activists, that only political power could bring about wide-ranging reforms. The women's suffrage campaign in Krugersdorp that began in 1906 (see Chapter Seven) made it clear that the vote mattered. If used tactically, the [male] white worker's municipal vote could, in a few years, enable Labour Town Councillors to seize control over local government and implement pro-Labour reforms, particularly a 'white labour' policy.

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<sup>61</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 27 May 1911, 'Municipal Elections'.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.* Holmes endorsed 'municipal trading' at this meeting which implies that Kingdon also supported the idea of municipally-owned co-operative stores, a municipal socialism project that was proposed from time to time by Labour candidates.

<sup>63</sup> Krugersdorp Public Library (KPL), *Mayor's Minute*, 1911–2, 'Attendance of Councillors', p. 117.

Hyslop explains that 'white labourism' had its origins on the west coast of North America and in Australia where 'Asian and European workers encountered each other, and politics often took on the form of a vicious, racialised contest for access to jobs'.<sup>64</sup>

Hyslop pointed out that White Labourism on the Rand was part of an Empire-wide phenomenon and was not necessarily determined solely by local conditions. White Australian workers, faced with highly competitive labour markets, also sought economic protection from the state against cheaper Chinese labour that undercut white workers' wages and the 'White Australia' policy was the result.<sup>65</sup>

Many Australian trade unionists migrated to South Africa during the economic depression in Australia's mining industry in the 1890s<sup>66</sup> and brought with them the concept of the job 'colour bar' that resonated with the experiences and perceived needs of South African miners. In addition, skilled Cornish tin miners spread out over the British Empire during the depression in Cornwall in the mid-nineteenth century in a vast 'Cornish Diaspora', moving between various mineral fields as each became depleted, in turn, in a tightly-knit grouping. Hyslop, drawing from the works of Belich, called this a 'crew culture'.<sup>67</sup> Many of these Cornishmen had worked in Australia and had absorbed 'White Australia' attitudes and it was the 'strength of the crew culture of the Cornish on the Rand [that] gave them an ability to implement racially and ethnically exclusionary labour practices'.<sup>68</sup>

Although Labour candidates often failed to win municipal seats and were the minority on most of the Town Councils on the Witwatersrand, the ideology of white labourism seems to have influenced municipal policy in the towns on the Rand from 1910 onwards, especially during the First World War. Perhaps the middle-class professionals and shopkeepers who held the majority of the seats on the Rand's Town Councils wanted to defuse labour militancy or they saw some merit in its racist arguments and wanted to seek out allies in their own struggle against Indian competitors. Whatever the

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<sup>64</sup> Hyslop, *A Notorious Syndicalist*, p. 10.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> See B. Kennedy, *A Tale of Two Mining Cities: Johannesburg and Broken Hill, 1885–1925*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1984.

<sup>67</sup> See J. Belich, *Making Peoples: A History of New Zealanders from Polynesian Settlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century*, Penguin, Auckland, 1996.

<sup>68</sup> Hyslop, 'The Imperial Working Class', p. 11.

reason, municipalities began to employ more white municipal workers at relatively good wages and supported a colour bar that excluded black workers from certain job categories. At the same time, these Town Councils began to experiment with municipal socialism. It is this combination of municipal socialism and white labourism that began to shape towns like Krugersdorp along new lines into what can usefully be described as a 'white-working class town'.

By 1912, this process was clearly detectable in Krugersdorp. Labour Town Councillors openly advocated a racist municipal labour policy in favour of white workers. Holmes, for example, campaigned to retain his seat in the 1912 municipal elections by declaring that 'giving in to Coolie stores and cheap coloured labour is a suicidal policy on the part of the white population'.<sup>69</sup> Racist statements like these became more and more common in the years that followed helping to shape labourite's emergent idea of the 'white working class' town. White workers, or at least their political representatives, 'mapped' Krugersdorp 'cognitively', just as Katznelson suggests, but they did so as a *white* urban environment, where Krugersdorp was envisaged as a 'white town'. It was explicitly stated, in a variety of contexts, that labourites supported segregation of races where Africans, Indians and Coloureds should be located in their 'own areas' far from white residents (see Chapter Six).

This vision resonated with white working-class municipal voters and Krugersdorp Labour candidates were elected onto the Town Council and began to influence municipal policy in the terms of white labourism and municipal socialism. The SALP's three municipal representatives (Holmes, Hoatson and Jacobs) were joined by a local miner, Robert Jones, who won the Mines Ward (Ward IV)<sup>70</sup>. This gave the Party a healthy representation of four seats out of fifteen on the Krugersdorp Town Council by 1913. Workers formed a substantial percentage of Town Council over the period 1913 to 1923 and most of these Councillors would have been labourites. The Party also had sympathisers like Kingdon who, although they stood as 'Independents', supported the labourites, perhaps because Labour's rapid rise convinced them that it would not be

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<sup>69</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 7 December 1912, 'Municipal Elections'.

<sup>70</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 29 March 1913, 'Municipal By-Election'.

long before it controlled the Town Council.

However, the local SALP branch suffered a number of setbacks at this point. Jones had to resign shortly afterwards as he was suffering from phthisis<sup>71</sup> while Jacobs also had to retire from the Council for health reasons.<sup>72</sup> The Party was struck with another blow when the Provincial Council, which was dominated by Unionists, passed an Ordinance four months earlier that required municipal candidates to possess property worth at least 300 pounds.<sup>73</sup> This ruled out a number of working-class candidates that could have replaced Jones and Jacobs.

Another blow was the death in office of Councillor R.F. Thomas<sup>74</sup> shortly after his election in November 1912.<sup>75</sup> Although an 'Independent', Thomas backed up his claims to be a labourite by supporting the Labour Town Councillors. For example, he backed Holmes' proposal to create the post of the Council's Motor Mechanic in accordance with the SALP's 'white labour' policy and municipal socialism. His seat was contested and won by an Independent who was openly hostile to Labour.<sup>76</sup> Despite these setbacks, the SALP members of the Town Council pushed on with their plans to establish municipality-run businesses and to hire exclusively white labour,<sup>77</sup> laying the foundations for their vision of a white working-class town. To advance this goal, Holmes proposed replacing 'natives' in the municipality's abattoir, pump stations and power station.<sup>78</sup>

The Labour Party also signalled that it would turn Krugersdorp into an environment that was friendly towards white adolescents as well as one that would establish secondary industries which would provide jobs for the children of white workers. Many white

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid.* Phthisis, like silicosis, was a lung disease that killed many white miners often decimating the ranks of the most experienced and politicised leadership cadres. See E. Katz, *The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 1886–1910*, Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1994.

<sup>72</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 29 March 1913, 'Jacobs Resigns'. See also *Mayor's Minute*, 1912–3, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 9 November 1912, 'Municipal Matters', 'The New Ordinance'.

<sup>74</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 15 March 1913, untitled.

<sup>75</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 2 November 1912, 'The New Mayor'.

<sup>76</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 15 March 1913, untitled.

<sup>77</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 30 December 1912, 'White Labour: Questions in Council'.

<sup>78</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 28 December 1912, 'Butchers, Bakeries and Blacks: Matters for Rectification: Radical Powers Required'.

workers had married and raised families shortly after the South African War so their children were teenagers by the 1910s and they were becoming increasingly concerned about their children's future on the Rand since the West Rand's mining industry had a limited lifespan.

Krugersdorp's municipal population had grown immensely from 35 000 in 1906/7 to 43 000 in 1908/9, then to 44 500 in 1909/10 followed by a dramatic leap to 54 259 in 1911.<sup>79</sup> Most of the increase is attributable to the expansion of the local mining industry and black miners made up the bulk of the municipal population. Nonetheless there was also a doubling of the white population in the town itself from 4 200 in 1906/7 to 9 842 in 1910/11.<sup>80</sup> This economic and population boom was not sustainable and, already by 1912, it became clear that Krugersdorp needed to promote secondary industrialisation to avoid economic collapse in the near future as primary, non-renewable extractive industry became depleted and finally closed down.

For example, the local newspaper called for the establishment of local industries in July 1912<sup>81</sup> and, again, in February 1913.<sup>82</sup> Krugersdorp's local newspaper quoted, with approval, the labourite newspaper, the *East Rand Express*, which called on the government to 'establish factories and run them, even at a loss for the first few years', effectively advocating the nationalisation of industry.<sup>83</sup> Krugersdorp, in this vision, would be a white working-class town where the state would run factories to provide jobs for its adolescent white boys regardless of cost or economic rationale.

## Site Value Taxation

To meet future employment needs, the Krugersdorp Labour Party also advocated the rating of site values because it would force land speculators to sell their land to investors who would use the land productively. In this way, labourites hoped that

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<sup>79</sup> *Mayor's Minute*, 1906–7, Report of the Medical Officer of Health (MOH), p. 68, *Mayor's Minute*, 1908–9, MOH, p. 68, *Mayor's Minute*, 1909–10, MOH, p. 92, *Mayor's Minute*, 1910–11, MOH, p. 81.

<sup>80</sup> *Mayor's Minute*, 1906–7, Report of the MOH, p. 68 and *Mayor's Minute*.

<sup>81</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 27 July 1912, 'Establishment of Industries'.

<sup>82</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 8 February 1913, 'What chance has a white boy?'

secondary industrialisation could be encouraged as a substitute for the doomed mines and so provide jobs for the next generation of workers. Site value rating, originally advocated by the American social reformer Henry George and subsequently endorsed by Britain's Lloyd George<sup>84</sup> found a champion in South Africa in the person of F.A.W. Lucas,<sup>85</sup> a SALP Town Councillor in Johannesburg. Lucas won supporters throughout the SALP's ranks, including Krugersdorp's labourite Town Councillors. They hoped that this form of taxation would cause a local building boom and provide employment.

Lucas claimed that site value taxation would encourage building, reduce rents, lessen poverty and render jerry-building and slum creation unprofitable. In Krugersdorp, various Township companies like the Luipaardsvlei Syndicate owned, in turn, by the Luipaardsvlei Estates and G.M. Co. Ltd., held onto vast areas of land for speculative purposes<sup>86</sup> much in the same way that gold-mining companies owned whole swathes of Johannesburg.<sup>87</sup> The middle-class elite of shopkeepers and professionals, including a number of 'Independent' Town Councillors, owned multiple stands in Krugersdorp: for example, Councillors van Blommenstein, Tindall, Adcock and Seehoff, all owned land in the 'Monument Brickfields' in the town in addition to their homes in the Stand and District Townships.<sup>88</sup> The most glaring example of speculation was J.B Robinson's vast landholdings on Randfontein farm to the south-west of the town where a township had been planned since the 1890s but which remained undeveloped by 1912 (see Chapter Two).

The professional and mercantile elite in the town expressed themselves ambivalently over site-value taxation. Some rejected it out of hand because of the financial burden it would place on them as landowners, while other members of the local middle class were more open-minded and were worried about the future of the town given the shaky

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<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> M-R. Lever, 'Johannesburg's Adoption of Site Value Rating', BA Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1993, ('Site Value Rating'), p. 67.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>86</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 13 July 1912, 'Townships in the Krugersdorp Area'.

<sup>87</sup> See E. Koch, 'Doornfontein and its African Working Class', MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983, pp. 59 and 63. See also N. Kagan, 'African Settlements in the Johannesburg Area, 1903–23', MA dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1983, p. 187.

<sup>88</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 27 July 1912, 'Monument Brickfields'.

state of the local mining industry. If site value taxation could help the town to develop alternative industries and provide jobs for their customers and clients, then the local white commercial and professional elite would also benefit.

This tentative support for site value taxation can be detected in the local newspaper owned and edited by local middle-class elements. The newspaper repeatedly warned that Krugersdorp had to attract new investment in order to build the factories that could provide employment for the 'considerable number of youths and maidens' in the town.<sup>89</sup> The newspaper also included an article on Australia's 'wild land' tax where authorities imposed a rate eight times higher on vacant land than on 'improved land' and this tended to 'lessen the burden on productive industry and increase it upon mere speculation'.<sup>90</sup>

By mobilising around site value taxation, politicised workers in the work of the Krugersdorp SALP branch and labourite Councillors were starting to make a distinct linkage between its growing political power and workers' economic needs. If the SALP could win control over the Krugersdorp Town Council, as well as other Rand municipalities and the Provincial Council, it could force through site value taxation. This, they believed, would attract new investment to Krugersdorp in the form of new factories. In the process this in turn would dramatically alter the built environment of the town and provide jobs for the 'rising generation' of young workers. This is what Katznelson meant by the 'fourth level' of 'collective action' where the struggles at the workplace intersected with those of the workers' families in the residential areas, where economic and political struggles blended. Although it was not explicitly articulated in these terms, this is what the vision of a white working-class town would mean in practical terms when it was transformed into reality.

Hyslop's observation that labourite ideas circulated the White Dominions is borne out by the way that site value taxation was adopted by the SALP. It was widely reported, for example, that Vancouver, Canada, had adopted this form of taxation to its considerable

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<sup>89</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 27 July 1912, 'Establishment of Industries'.

<sup>90</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 8 February 1913, 'The Rating of Site Values: Does it Encourage Industry?'

advantage, growing from 20 000 to 130 000 residents in just a decade. The editor inserted a parenthesis after the figure of 130 000 and wrote 'now 150 000 – Ed' indicating endorsement of this form of taxation.<sup>91</sup> This implies that some elements of the white middle class were sufficiently concerned about the 'worst case scenario' of a collapsed mining industry to 'buy into' at least this aspect of Labour's vision of a white working-class town. Nonetheless, there was considerable resistance over site value taxation from the local middle class and this was replicated in the Provincial Council. Labourites realised that such policies would take a long time to reach fruition and this may have driven them to shift their emphasis and to devise practical schemes to provide employment to white workers by the Town Council from late 1912 onwards.

### **The White Municipal Labour Policy**

The Labour Party members were by no means united on this emergent policy and this is well illustrated by the tensions that arose in Krugersdorp Town Council between Councillors Holmes and Hoatson over the employment of white labour in the municipal abattoir. Holmes had resurrected his earlier demand that the municipal abattoir should only employ white workers, but Hoatson did not immediately second this as he was expected to do as a fellow labourite. Holmes was forced to nominate Hoatson to second his motion under Standing Orders. Hence Hoatson agreed to second Holmes's proposal merely so that it could be discussed and nothing more.<sup>92</sup> Although he was a labourite, Hoatson was also a butcher who ran his own successful business in the town. As a self-employed man of business, Hoatson knew that, like other butchers in the town, he would have to pay more for meat from the municipal abattoir if more expensive white labour was exclusively used.

Local butchers were already so angry about Holmes' proposal that they had threatened to close up their shops in protest. Hoatson was torn between his own business interests and his labour sympathies. The policy would also require the Council to incur considerable costs in making alterations to the abattoir to make it feasible to employ the more skilled white labourers<sup>93</sup> and the 'Independents' were reluctant to support this

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<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 March 1913, 'Town Council Meeting'.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.* Councillor Friedman estimated it would cost 2 000 pounds to make the necessary alterations

policy if it meant that they would have to pay increased rates. Holmes's proposal was put to the vote and he was the only councillor to support it.<sup>94</sup>

Holmes had more success in persuading the Town Council to employ more white workers at the Municipal Power Station. Three white stokers were hired, as a result of this proposal, for a three-month period at a wage of twenty pounds a month at the expense of an unspecified number of African labourers who were retrenched. The Town Engineer estimated that additional costs amounted to 594 pounds per annum but claimed that the amount of coal that was pilfered had declined considerably, saving the Town Council 135 pounds per annum! He calculated that the employment of three white stokers would cause the cost of electricity to rise by just 0.15 pence per unit for Krugersdorp's consumers.<sup>95</sup> He did warn, however, that the scheme could not be extended to Randfontein where electricity was already produced at a loss to the Council.

Some prominent municipal officials also seemed to support municipal socialism even though their training and salaries placed them firmly in the middle class. They may have been concerned about long-standing proposals to 'prune' municipal personnel that reached its peak in 1912.<sup>96</sup> Some of these officials defensively claimed that 'departmental' work was of superior quality and was cheaper than 'private' work. The Chief Sanitary Inspector, James Munsie, for example, recommended that 'municipal workshops' be established to make and repair new harnesses, to shoe horses and make repairs to the plant and construct new wagons. He claimed that the Council had spent over three thousand pounds on services and equipment from the private sector in the past year and estimated that a saving of over a hundred pounds a year could be affected if this work was carried out in these municipal workshops.<sup>97</sup> The Town Councillors did not agree and this proposal was never carried out.

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to the abattoir. It is not clear what alterations needed to be made although it was pointed out that Krugersdorp's abattoir lacked the 'facilities' of the Johannesburg and Germiston abattoirs.

<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 March 1913, 'Town Council Meeting'.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 5 August 1905 'The Civil Service'.

<sup>97</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 31 May 1913, 'The Town Council'.

## Improving Working Conditions for Shop Assistants

By early 1913, the labourites in began to tap into a new reservoir of support in the form of the large body of shop assistants that emerged during the first decade after the South African War as shops grew larger and carried a wider range of goods to cater for large numbers of discerning white customers. Shop assistants were usually well spoken and better educated than ordinary workers and aspired to join the ranks of the middle class. These 'blackcoated' workers<sup>98</sup> considered trade unions as 'infra dig' so they had formed a Shop Assistants' Association instead.

Desai traced the history of shop assistants' organisations since these first emerged in Pietermaritzburg in 1885,<sup>99</sup> and confirms that shop assistants tended to be better educated than the average worker. For example, a male store clerk usually possessed a full secondary school education. He argues that these organisations tended to be short-lived and 'operated in a style of quasi-craft unionism, bereft of militancy'.<sup>100</sup> Shop assistants liked to think of their work as a 'skilled craft' and acted in ways that correspond to craft unionism, for example, an emphasis on craft identity, specialisation and restrictive membership. This attitude was influenced also by their slightly elevated employment status where their wages were comparable or higher than skilled artisans, although there was a wide range and gender discrimination in earnings.<sup>101</sup>

This Association was not particularly effective and shop assistants' working conditions, as defined by the Shop Hours Act of 1908, left much to be desired. The limited protections offered by the Act were, in any case, not effectively enforced. By taking up the cause of the Shop Assistants, the SALP was courting a potentially large new group of supporters – for example, it was estimated that there were between four and five thousand male and female shop assistants in Johannesburg alone.

The SALP supported a Draft Amendment to the Shop Hours Act that it had potentially

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<sup>98</sup> See D., Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: a study in class consciousness*, Unwin, London, 1958.

<sup>99</sup> Desai, 'Race, Gender and Class', p. 62.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>101</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 31 May 1913, 'Shop Assistants' Association: Annual Meeting'.

radical implications for the way in which commerce was conducted in urban environments and for consumers' shopping patterns by changing opening and closing hours. It was proposed that shops should open no earlier than 6 a.m. and that working hours should not exceed 54 hours a week. Assistants were also to be entitled to a holiday at least once a year.<sup>102</sup>

Shop owners had to keep a register of hours worked and any policeman could make unannounced inspections of working conditions. Given existing working conditions, the SALP saw an opportunity to win over a large new section of workers to its cause. If successful, the amendment would have transformed human movement patterns in and around the town, thus altering the commercial built environment of the white working-class town. The SALP addressed the Krugersdorp branch of the Shop Assistants Union on several occasions in June,<sup>103</sup> but the Party was distracted by a strike that had broken out among white miners on the East Rand and which spread steadily to the rest of the Rand during June.

### **The 1913 White Miners' Strike**

By July, the 1913 white miners' strike had become sufficiently serious<sup>104</sup> for the government to intervene. On 5 July 1913 martial law was declared, and over a hundred miners had been shot and killed by troops by the time that the strike ended. *The Standard, Krugersdorp* supported the government and issued a relentless stream of propaganda against the strike. In an article published on 5 July it pointed out that 5 700 pounds of wages were paid out to the miners of the Luipaard's Vlei Estate and G.M. Co. Ltd. alone and that the workers' loss of this income during the strike would be a 'heavy blow' to the commercial community. It warned the shop assistants that the wage earner who is 'an employee in a store, may get an unpleasant reminder of the consequences of a strike'.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 21 June 1913, 'Provincial Council: Shop Hours Draft Ordinance'.

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 21 June 1913, 'Shop Assistants and Clerks Foregather'.

<sup>104</sup> The 'official organ of the South African Labour Party referred to it as a 'Revolution', see *The Worker*, 10 July 1913, 'The Revolution of July'.

<sup>105</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 5 July 1913, 'The Strike: West Rand Out: Local Incidents'.

This was a transparent attempt at 'divide-and-rule' tactics which were countered at a meeting held in Krugersdorp where SALP members addressed a 'very large audience' and shared the stage with the chairman of the Krugersdorp branch of the Shop Assistants' Association.<sup>106</sup> The Labour speakers stressed solidarity with the miners, talked about the possibility of a general strike and sang the *Red Flag*.

The local newspaper, a mouthpiece of the middle class, also tried to weaken support for the strike by running a number of articles that attacked socialism, trade unionism and strike actions.<sup>107</sup> Another tactic was to carry an article on the Labour government in New South Wales, Australia, that pointed out that expensive social engineering projects had caused a deficit of 1 600 000 pounds in this state.<sup>108</sup> The newspaper continued to vent its antagonism towards socialism and labour reforms long after the strike and this may have played a role in turning the Krugersdorp electorate against Labour candidates in the municipal elections in October that year.

During these elections, Dr W. Adam, a local medical practitioner, stood as an Independent and defeated Walter Holmes. Local merchant and independent J. Seehoff defeated his Labour rival A. Nichols by over a hundred votes. A mine manager, C.B. Saner defeated labourite F. Shaw in the Mines Ward.<sup>109</sup> The only good news was the victory of W.G. Delport in Ward III but even this was soured by an unsuccessful legal challenge in the courts to deny Delport's victory on the grounds that he did not meet the property qualifications.<sup>110</sup> These electoral defeats suggest that labourite progress towards political ascendancy was marked by setbacks and detours.

The municipal election results did not bode well for the SALP in the upcoming Provincial Council elections. It was crucial for the labourites to gain control over the Provincial Council as it could then pass far-reaching reforms. These included free and compulsory

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<sup>106</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 2 August 1913, 'The Labour Party: General Strike: Trouble Brewing'.

<sup>107</sup> See, for example, *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 'Edison on Socialism' where the newspaper quoted the great inventor's attack on socialism, describing it as a 'wild dream' that would 'break down' as 'socialists' do not want to work'.

<sup>108</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 4 October 1913, 'Where Labour Rules: Ratepayers Take Note'.

<sup>109</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 November 1913, 'Municipal Elections'.

<sup>110</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 8 November 1913, 'Election of Mayor'.

secondary education, women's municipal franchise and site value taxation. Krugersdorp had begun to take shape as a white working town but unless labour gained control of the second tier of government, labour's vision would not be realised.

The SALP had been making steady but very modest inroads among the Rand's electorate so it was unlikely to gain a majority for many years unless there was strong, compelling factor that could propel it into power. Fate then intervened to give the Party its breakthrough in the form of the railway workers and the Federation of Trades that announced a General Strike.

### **The General Strike of 1914**

In early January 1914, railway workers went on strike all over the Rand. A number of grievances lay behind their decision especially the fear of retrenchments that had threatened them since October 1913. The strikers also demanded an eight-hour day, a minimum wage, recognition of the railway trade union and overtime rates.<sup>111</sup>

Although a broad spectrum of workers, including shop assistants and bakery workers, supported a General Strike,<sup>112</sup> this was not to be conceived as an act of radical syndicalism meant to bring down the government but rather as a trade union action designed to improve wages and working conditions. As van der Walt has recently pointed out, 'White Labour, however, militant, was rarely revolutionary'.<sup>113</sup> Despite the failure of the TMA to support the strike, it was nonetheless remarkably widespread and effective, prompting the government to declare martial law and pour seventeen thousand 'citizen soldiers' (Dutch-speaking 'burgher forces') and police onto the Rand.

These elements of the state repressive apparatus seized the Trades Hall in Johannesburg and arrested a number of trade union leaders. In Krugersdorp, the mouthpiece of the 'Independents' called the strike a 'madly-conceived and hare-brained

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<sup>111</sup> Katz, *A Trade Union Aristocracy*, p. 469. See also E. Roux, *S.P. Bunting: A Political Biography*, African Bookman, Cape Town, 1944, p. 21.

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 January 1914, untitled and 13 January 1914, untitled.

<sup>113</sup> L. van der Walt, 'Revolutionary syndicalism and African Trade Unionism in South Africa: From the Industrial Workers of Africa to the ICU, 1917–1921', Seminar Paper, African Studies Seminar

project' and Sir Abe Bailey fêted the burgher forces that arrived in the town, treating them to a bioscope show at the local Vaudette Theatre.<sup>114</sup> The West Rand's white workers had joined the strike later than those of the East Rand<sup>115</sup> which suggests that they were ambivalent and hesitant about labour militancy.

By the middle of January the strike was crushed, and at the end of the month General Smuts announced that the strike leaders, including a Rand Town Councillor,<sup>116</sup> would be deported to Britain. The deportation caused a 'sensation' in various parts of the Rand as labourites whipped up concern for the violation of 'British traditions'.<sup>117</sup> Labourites also campaigned against the government-sponsored Peace Preservation Bill that proposed to grant sweeping powers to the government in 'times of emergency'.<sup>118</sup> A number of meetings were held all over the Rand to protest against this 'drastic legislation'. A meeting was held at Krugersdorp on 23 July and chaired by E. Cresswell, the SALP leader's brother, who declared,

THAT this meeting of the inhabitants of Krugersdorp emphatically protests against the confirmation of the 'Indemnity Act', and also against the introduction of the 'Peace Preservation Bill', as these measures constitute a gross violation of the rights of the people and are likely to cause great unrest and discontent.<sup>119</sup>

The Labour Party benefited enormously from this turmoil and rode on a powerful 'wave of anti-South African Party sentiment' that swept the party to power in the Transvaal Provincial elections.<sup>120</sup> The unconstitutional actions of the government and the timing of these acts, which were passed just a week before the elections, certainly played a

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Series, University of the Witwatersrand, 2000, p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 24 January 1914, 'The Burghers'. See also 'The Strike'.

<sup>115</sup> S. Valentine, 'White Labour on the Rand: Working Class Consciousness and the 1914 Strike', BA Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985, p. 54.

<sup>116</sup> *East Rand Express*, 31 January 1914, p. 24, 'Martial Law Notes'.

<sup>117</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 7 February 1914, 'The Deportees'. See also Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, Chapter Nineteen, pp. 229–41.

<sup>118</sup> CAD, Archives of the Governor-General (GG) 337, File no. 7/995, 'Bill to make special provision for the maintenance of public safety in times of actual or apprehended grave disturbance of the public peace', Chapter One, p. 1.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, paraphrased copy of telegram from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General, 26 March 1914.

<sup>120</sup> Valentine, 'White Labour on the Rand', p. 57.

major part,<sup>121</sup> but not the only role, in the victory of the Labour Party. The labourites won 23 seats out of 45, winning an outright majority in the process.

### **An Analysis of the 1914 Transvaal Provincial Elections**

While Labour's victory has been conventionally depicted as the result of an angry response to the government's heavy-handed suppression of the 1914 strike, this is not the whole story. The SALP, it is contended, also made some of its gains on the back of increasingly popular campaigns around a whole range of reforms and its vision of a working-class friendly urban environment. Its victory was also less spectacular than traditionally depicted and should be interpreted rather as part of a pattern of steady growth in popularity that can be detected in incremental improvement (with the occasional setback) of Labour candidates' performances in municipal elections on the Rand since Union.

Labour candidates said very little about the General Strike or the deportations in their campaign speeches and preferred to highlight Labour's election manifesto. For example, Ernest Cresswell, the Krugersdorp candidate for the Provincial Council, addressed the miners at the French Rand mine and promised a variety of reforms. He made a point of attacking his Unionist opponent, Town Councillor Friedman, who had vociferously opposed Holmes' proposal to hire more white workers at the municipal abattoir.<sup>122</sup> Only at the very end of his speech did Cresswell make a brief reference to the deportation of the strike leaders.

Labour Party candidates constantly emphasised their goals of free and compulsory secondary education, women's suffrage, site value taxation, white labour employment by municipalities and the Saturday Half-Holiday. The appeal of this attractive platform of social, political and economic reforms contributed heavily to

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<sup>121</sup> A. Mawby, 'The Unionist Party of South Africa, from May 1910 to August, 1914', BA Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1965, p. 62.

<sup>122</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 21 February 1914, 'Provincial Council Elections: Mr. Cresswell at the French Rand'. See also, *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 7 March 1914, 'Provincial Council's Elections: Mr. Friedman's Campaign'.

Labour's rise in popularity. The Unionists, who had controlled the Provincial Council with the SAP, since 1910, did not blame the government's Draconian response to the General strike for Labour's victory, but, instead, claimed that

...there can be no doubt that the careful propagation by the Labour Party of the doctrine of class consciousness has had an immense effect on the artisan classes and other white manual workers on the Rand. The teaching of this gospel has also synchronised with a wave of class feeling that seems to have spread like a delirium through the ranks of the working classes all over the civilised world today.<sup>123</sup>

An analysis of the elections also suggests that while Labour's victory was impressive, it was not as 'sweeping' as is conventionally portrayed. In 1910 the SALP held just two out of the 35 Provincial Council seats or 6% of the total number of seats available. The SAP held 20 seats (56%), the Unionists held 12 seats (33%) and the remaining seat went to an Independent (5%). The Provincial Council was expanded to 45 seats in 1914 and the SALP's 23 seats represented a bare majority (51%) of the total seats available.

While the Unionists did suffer a heavy defeat and ended up with just two seats in the 1914 election (4%), the SAP performed very well and held onto all of its 20 seats. Its share of the total number of seats fell, but overall its representation only declined slightly from 56% to 44% of the seats on the Council. The SALP had gone from being the smallest party to the largest but the SAP was not far behind and a swing of just *two* seats, at the expense of Labour, would have given the SAP outright control instead. Furthermore the SALP did not challenge the SAP in any of its rural constituencies. The SALP only contested urban constituencies so its popularity was actually more limited in terms of geographical extent than its number of seats would suggest.

The SALP also contested more urban seats than it did in 1910. As Hall points out, 'many of the seats taken by the SALP in 1914 were in areas where it had not even put up candidates in 1910'.<sup>124</sup> Had the SALP contested more seats earlier on, it is plausible

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<sup>123</sup> Lever, 'Site Value Rating', p. 91.

<sup>124</sup> A. Hall, 'The SALP and Electoral Politics in the Transvaal, January 1910 to October 1915' ('Electoral Politics'), BA Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1994, p. 47.

to argue that it would have won more than just two seats (Krugersdorp and Fordsburg) and one extra seat in Johannesburg in a by-election. This, too, seems to have provided historians with a skewed impression of a massive swing to Labour between the two elections.

Most of the SALP's gains were made at the expense of the Unionists, the SAP's ally, rather than the SAP itself and this weakens the argument that the 1914 elections constituted an anti-government backlash in the aftermath of the government crackdown of the General Strike. The voters may have, just as plausibly, felt that the SALP offered a better programme of reforms than the Unionists who generally presented a watered-down version of labourite policy. It seems feasible that the Unionist candidates simply did not impress and voters saw no reason for a third party.

Whatever the reason for Labour's victory, there can be no denying that its triumph was politically important. The SALP had won a majority in the Provincial Council and could now set about implementing its reform agenda. The Party benefited from the principle of 'all spoils to the victors' and all the chairmanships of all the Council's committees went to the Labour Party.<sup>125</sup> Everything was in place for Labour to implement a range of reforms that would, in the case of Krugersdorp, go a long way in realising the labourite vision of the white working-class town.

The Rand's anti-Labour newspapers were fearful of what a Labour-dominated Council would bring. The *Star* predicted that 'mismanagement and academic discussions' would be the 'least of the penalties' that the electors would suffer for their 'grave error' in electing the party into power. W.H. Andrews, the famous SALP leader had to reassure the white public that there was 'no need to be alarmed' and promised voters that they 'did not have to fear anything very revolutionary'.<sup>126</sup>

Tom Mann, the radical trade unionist and syndicalist, visited the Rand in late March and congratulated the SALP on their election victory.<sup>127</sup> He visited Krugersdorp twice,

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<sup>125</sup> *Star*, 19 March 1914, p. 9, 'Labour's Success: Chat With Mr. Andrews'.

<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, pp. 188–9.

striking fear in the hearts of the local middle class. The local newspaper felt compelled to warn that while Mann's theories might be applicable to countries of the 'Old World', they did not apply to the 'new countries' like South Africa. They claimed that if Mann's theories were implemented, it would create an 'effeminate and luxurious working class' that would drift into hedonism.<sup>128</sup>

Mann may have influenced at least one labourite provincial councillor to support his syndicalist ideas. Walter Holmes, who had not shown any sign of radicalism during his first term as a MPC, seems to have had a change of heart shortly after Mann's visit. He protested strongly against the government's proposed Industrial Disputes Bill at a meeting of the Labour Party in the town, warning that 'even a Labour majority would be exploited by commercial and professional classes in their own interests'. Rather, he cautioned, workers had to look to the trade unions for their protection and claimed that 'the best weapon was the strike'.<sup>129</sup> Holmes' syndicalist tendencies were met with some disapproval from the workers present in the crowd and may have initiated growing tensions between Holmes and other Party members that would have serious implications later.

### **The Saturday Half Holiday and the Krugersdorp Town Council**

The local Labour Party in Krugersdorp was sufficiently emboldened by its victory that it pushed for a Saturday half-holiday for shop assistants in the Town Council. The labourites received a surprising amount of support from several 'Independents', including well-known local shopkeepers, outfitters and general dealers who sat on the Town Council. This was unexpected as the proposal would force shops to close at 1 o'clock on Saturday afternoons and would undoubtedly have an immediate, negative effect on commercial revenue as customers adjusted their shopping patterns to accommodate these new hours.

The preference of local shoppers for the larger, brighter, well-stocked shops of

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<sup>128</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 11 April 1914, 'Notes and Comments: The Gospel of Mann'.

<sup>129</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 16 May 1914, 'Protest Meeting: The Labour Party and Proposed Legislation'.

Johannesburg had always threatened Krugersdorp's commercial elite (see Chapters chapters One and Five) and this new by-law could have had a profound effect on the town's commercial environment, possibly even reducing the CBD to a hollow shell of empty shops. Yet many shopkeepers seemed to have thought it prudent to express support for the proposal,<sup>130</sup> perhaps believing that it could head off even more drastic reform of shop hours from a Labour dominated Provincial Council. The local branch of the Shop Assistants' Association invited the Krugersdorp Chamber of Commerce to the meeting where the Chamber's President H.C. Tanner (of 'Harper and Tanner's', a gentlemen's outfitters) declared that the proposal would be 'most beneficial' to shop assistants, particularly those with families.<sup>131</sup>

The members of the Chamber of Commerce may have realised that there were a number of advantages to be gained should a Saturday Half Holiday be adopted, but only if it was implemented throughout the Rand. It could, for example, lead to a decrease in the numbers of East and West Rand shoppers who travelled on Saturdays to shop in the large Johannesburg chains with their wider range of goods and lower prices (see Chapter One), as there would be insufficient time to travel to the city and shop there before the departmental stores closed at one o' clock. The Johannesburg commercial community in fact claimed that the proposal came from the 'Reef storekeepers whose sole object was to injure Johannesburg'.<sup>132</sup>

The proposal failed and shop hours remain unchanged.<sup>133</sup> What seems likely is that in the absence of a Rand-wide Saturday Half Holiday, the middle-class Independents in Krugersdorp Town Council, who dominated local government, realised that their commercial and professional interests would be harmed unless all Rand towns did the same. Labourite municipal candidates still occasionally campaigned on the issue in the years that followed, as will be discussed later.

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<sup>130</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 23 May 1914, 'Saturday Half Holiday: The Colour Bar: Public Meeting'.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 30 May 1914, 'Chamber of Commerce: Saturday Half Holiday'.

<sup>133</sup> Desai points out that the Transvaal Shop Assistants' Union was formed in 1916 and it tried to cut back the working week which was still 53 hours on average, even though a 1913 Shop Ordinance had stipulated a 48-hour week. Desai also notes that it was only in 1925 that a half day closing was legislated in the Cape Provincial Legislative Assembly but sheds no further light on this issue. See Desai, 'Race, Gender and Class', p. 68.

## Free Compulsory Secondary Schooling for White Children

The Labour Party then introduced another proposal in the Provincial Council that also held profound implications for the social and built environment of Krugersdorp. It passed an Ordinance allowing for free secondary school education throughout the Transvaal.<sup>134</sup> This meant that Krugersdorp would need more high schools to accommodate those who would be attracted to free secondary schooling. Labour also used its majority to grant the municipal franchise to adult white women, a reform that had potentially profound implications for towns like Krugersdorp and that helped to shape the town in new ways (see Chapter Seven).

## The 1914 Provincial Council Deadlock and Constitutional Crisis

The Labour Party's reform programme was, however, halted in its tracks by the Administrator who chaired the Executive Council as an *ex-officio* member who used his casting vote to reject Labour's proposed reforms. The Administrator, for example, twice vetoed Labour's proposed introduction of site value taxation.<sup>135</sup> The Labour Party was furious that this non-elected official, appointed by the government and therefore a 'SAP man', could obstruct Labour's reforms 'in spite of the unmistakable mandate given [to the SALP] by the urban population of the Transvaal'.<sup>136</sup> The SALP appealed to the government to change the Executive's structure so that the majority party could control the Executive but the SAP-dominated government, not surprisingly, refused to do so.

The SALP then adopted a policy that prompted a constitutional crisis. The two SALP representatives on the Executive resigned in protest and the party used its simple majority on the Council to pass an Ordinance that removed power from remaining members of the Executive. The Governor-General refused to sign this proposal into law as it was unconstitutional. The SALP majority in the Provincial Council then refused to

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<sup>134</sup> Johannesburg Public Library (JPL), Harold Strange Collection (HSC), SALP Minute Book no. 3 14/8/13 – 15/5/18, p. 83, 'Executive Report to the Annual Conference at East London, 28 December 1914, p. 4.

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.*

pass its own budget, effectively paralysing the provincial government.

The SALP's actions were dramatic and highly controversial but it is difficult to see what else the party could have done under the circumstances. The hiatus meant that thousands of teachers and officials were not paid their salaries. The government refused to back down, however, and the constitutional deadlock drifted on for three full months. The legal and political confrontation between two political parties, wielding control over two separate levels of government, was suddenly brought to an end in a way that was just as dramatic as the actions that had precipitated it.

Walter Holmes, Krugersdorp's Labour representative on the Provincial Council, took his moment on the stage of history. He broke ranks with his own party and voted with the SAP to get the Budget passed in August 1914.<sup>137</sup> The SALP's leadership were furious at this breach in party discipline and ordered Holmes to appear before the Party's Executive. The Party's chief whip in the Provincial Council gave evidence that Holmes voted against the decisions of the Labour Caucus from the 'very first vote taken by the Transvaal Provincial Council'.<sup>138</sup> Holmes defended himself by claiming that he 'had never voted against anything that is included in the Party's Constitution and the Provincial Council Election Manifesto'.<sup>139</sup> The Executive Committee was in no mood to consider such arguments and Holmes was summarily expelled<sup>140</sup> and ordered to resign his seats in the Provincial Council and Town Council. Holmes remained defiant and refused to resign. He remained on both bodies as an 'Independent'.

Why Holmes behaved in this way is not easy to ascertain. Upon closer investigation, it appears that Holmes' apparently principled stand against his own party was secretly inspired by less noble aims. It appears that an 'Independent' Krugersdorp Town Councillor, Alexander, had proposed Holmes for the post of Municipal Motor Mechanic, a post which Holmes wanted to create in early 1913 in accordance with Labour's white labour policy, as mentioned earlier. Holmes may have been promised support by J.B. Robinson's son, William Robinson, and 'Independent' Town Councillor, who had visited

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<sup>137</sup> Hall, 'The SALP on the Rand', p. 51.

<sup>138</sup> JPL, HSC, SALP Administrative Council Meeting Report, 3 September 1914, p.1.

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

Holmes' house in West Krugersdorp together with Alexander, shortly before the appointment was made. Holmes was subsequently advised to 'make himself scarce for certain political reasons', after which he left for Durban.<sup>141</sup>

The local newspaper reported that Robinson was said to be behind Holmes's mysterious 'non-appearance' at a crucial Provincial Council meeting. Holmes denied that Robinson had been to his home but admitted that Alexander had visited 'on business matters'. Alexander confirmed this but stressed that it was a 'private matter' between the two men.<sup>142</sup> It seems plausible from these reports that Holmes had been promised a lucrative municipal position in a corrupt agreement and was then manipulated (possibly even blackmailed) to turn his back on his Party in the Provincial Council.

Whatever lay behind Holmes' dramatic defection, the SALP's popularity was harmed by the spectacle of a paralysed Provincial Council, an undignified stand-off between the SALP and the Administrator. It seems likely, too, that the rumours of corruption by one of the most prominent labourites on the Council also damaged Labour's reputation. Labour's failure to implement many of its promised reforms, as a result of this stand-off, played an important contributory role to its relatively poor performance in the forthcoming 1915 parliamentary elections, which will be discussed in the next section. This, in turn, may have restricted the ability of labourites to realise their vision of a white working-class town.

### **Labour's Fluctuating Fortunes: 1915 to 1917**

The Labour Party won just two parliamentary seats in the 1915 national elections, in Benoni and Siemert street in Johannesburg. This was a shocking result for a party that had secured 23 seats and control over the Provincial Council elections just a year earlier. Conventionally the Labour Party's poor performance has been blamed on a

<sup>140</sup> JPL, HSC, SALP Minutes, 14/1/1912 – 23/12/14, Executive Meeting, 26 August, 1914, p. 188.

<sup>141</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 1 August 1914, 'Mr. Walter Holmes and Con. Jamieson: The Appointment of a Motor Mechanic'.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

patriotic backlash in a 'Khaki Election' during the First World War when the electorate punished the Party for the anti-war stance taken by its left wing. The 'war issue' certainly played a major role in the swing against Labour but an important factor, which has been hitherto neglected by historians, was Labour's inability to carry out many of its promised reforms at a municipal level which may have also contributed to its downfall.

A number of major writers on the SALP have stressed the role played by the 'war issue' in the demise of the Labour Party. Tickin believed that the outbreak of the First World War 'caused war issues to overshadow those of peace-time and the Party proved unable to adapt itself successfully'.<sup>143</sup> Roux, in his biography of S.P. Bunting, is even more blunt: the 'spectacular growth of the Labour Party came to a sudden halt in August, 1914, with the outbreak of the First World War' as it 'could not hope to compete with the out-and-out jingo parties'.<sup>144</sup> Cope claims that Andrews, the subject of his biography, knew that the war would 'shatter the great movement which he had shared so largely in building'.<sup>145</sup>

The war did split the SALP into two competing groups. On the one side was a radical minority of 'internationalists' who opposed working-class participation in an imperialist war and who later formed the 'War-on-War League' that included Bunting and Andrews amongst its leaders. On the other side was the more conservative majority who patriotically supported Britain and pointed to the stridently anti-Labour policies of Germany's Kaiser. The latter group called themselves the 'See-it-Throughs' and fought bitterly for control with the 'War-on-War' faction over the soul of the Party.<sup>146</sup>

This well-publicised in-fighting and the 'unpatriotic' behaviour of the pacifist wing undoubtedly caused widespread disaffection among Labour's supporters and led directly to its poor performance in the 'Khaki Elections'. For example, Krugersdorp's only local newspaper loudly denounced the Party for its anti-war stance in the months leading up to the 1915 parliamentary elections and stated that it had shown a 'most

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<sup>143</sup> D. Tickin, 'The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914-15' ('The War Issue'), *South African Historical Journal*, November 1969,1, p. 59.

<sup>144</sup> Roux, *S.P. Bunting*, p. 22.

<sup>145</sup> Cope, *Comrade Bill*, p. 163.

<sup>146</sup> Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, pp. 268 and 271.

disloyal spirit'.<sup>147</sup> The newspaper also expressed deep concern over what it claimed was the Labour Party's plans for an election pact with Hertzog's Nationalist Party which took an openly pro-German stance. It declared that workers should reject the Labour Party for its unpatriotic behaviour:

The wage earner who believes in the solidarity of the Empire should renounce Labour leaders who are willing to join forces with pro-German Hertzogites so that they may win a seat in Parliament and secure 400 pounds a year. The workers of the Reef will have to decide between pro-German Hertzog-Labour leaders, on the one hand, and Bothaism on the other.<sup>148</sup>

While the war clearly played a major role in Labour's defeat, it was also Labour's failure to fulfil its promised reform programme that would have turned many voters against them, even if it was due to the obstructive behaviour of the Administrator. The behaviour of labourite MPCs in the stand-off between the Provincial Council and the government may have antagonised many of its supporters particularly when it meant that many people employed by the Council were not paid their salaries. This may have been interpreted as uncaring and ruthless behaviour. Holmes' sudden betrayal of his party and his apparent corruption was widely reported, and this may have turned many potential supporters against the SALP. The conventional explanation for Labour's apparently poor performance thus needs to take into account these factors as well, and not simply resort to the 'Khaki election' as an explanatory device.

Furthermore, Labour did not do as badly as has been suggested and in some places such as Benoni, it actually attracted more votes than it did in the 1910 elections. This suggests that local conditions also need to be considered in some detail to understand the Labour Party's fate in seats like Krugersdorp where it performed poorly. It is quite clear, for example, that the municipal elections in Krugersdorp in October 1914 had very little to do with the anti-war stance of the 'war-on-warites'. The Independents campaigned on the usual municipal issues claiming that Labour's site value taxation policy would hit the 'poor man' who owned a 'small plot' the 'hardest' and warned that

<sup>147</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 10 April 1915, 'The Coming Elections'.

<sup>148</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 8 May 1915, 'Notes and Comments, Electioneering Activity'.

rates would climb from 1 pence per pound to 6 pence per pound under a Labour-dominated Council.<sup>149</sup>

The Independent candidates also stole parts of their Labour opponents' platform by declaring that they were in favour of the 'employment of white labour whenever possible', favoured the establishment of municipal workshops and a minimum wage.<sup>150</sup> Clearly it was Labour's vision of a white working-class town and not its war stance that was the main focus of the campaign. Unfortunately, the 1914 Afrikaner Rebellion caused the government to cancel municipal elections so there is no way to determine how Labour candidates would have performed had these municipal elections been held.

A close study of local conditions in Krugersdorp reveal that while the war played a less prominent role in influencing voters than historians have hitherto claimed, other factors such as corruption, may have been important in explaining Labour's falling support in the 1915 parliamentary elections. One of the first problems that took its toll on the SALP's popularity was a bribery scandal concerning the Shop Hours Ordinance. A Judicial Commission of Inquiry investigated a claim that P. Deys, a Johannesburg Labour MPC, approached Mr Miller, another MPC, and offered him fifty pounds to vote a 'certain way' on the Shop Hours Ordinance. Other MPCs, including E. Cresswell, the Krugersdorp member, were also approached. The issue was publicised by the local newspaper<sup>151</sup> and although the Party had conducted its own internal investigation several months earlier and had decided to expel Deys,<sup>152</sup> the damage had already been done.

Municipal socialism also came under attack across the Rand because it was both expensive and inefficient. Boksburg's rates at 4.5 pence to the pound were the highest

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<sup>149</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 24 October 1914, 'Town Council Elections, Citizen's Candidates'.

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 10 April 1915, 'Alleged Bribe for Labour M.P.C.'. See also *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 17 April 1915, 'Notes and Comments: The Bribery Charges' and 'Alleged Bribery, Provincial Council', letter to the editor by I. Franklin, Secretary, West Rand Storekeepers' Association.

<sup>152</sup> JPL, HSC, Report of the Sub-Committee appointed by the Executive to Enquire into certain charges connected with the Draft Shop Hours Ordinance, 16 February, 1915, pp. 1–6 and pp. 190–5, in file.

on the Rand, yet it was in financial difficulties because tenants were falling behind on rents on municipal stands. At the same time, the town had a large number of officials who were handsomely paid. An East Rand newspaper complained that there were an estimated fifty empty shops in the town and most businessmen 'were not drawing half the pay of some of the officials'.<sup>153</sup>

Similar criticism was directed towards Labour's policies on the West Rand. John Hoatson, the SALP's candidate for Randfontein, was attacked by the local newspaper for his espousal of 'Tom Mann's philosophy' when he declared, at a meeting at the local Vaudette Theatre, that he supported the 'socialisation of the means of production, distribution and exchange'.<sup>154</sup> A week later, the local newspaper condemned the 'socialist lunacy' promoted by the 'socialist candidates of the Labour Party' which would cause 'considerable harm' if allowed free rein.<sup>155</sup>

The West Rand mining industry was in serious economic difficulties by 1915 and this may help to explain why Krugersdorp's voters turned against Labour. The two Independent parliamentary candidates, J.B. Robinson junior for Randfontein and Sir Abe Bailey for Krugersdorp, who were both closely associated with the mining industry, made it clear that the region could not afford any more socialist 'follies'.

When asked why he did not increase miners' wages, Robinson replied that his mines simply could not afford to do so and had only paid out 2.5% dividends to its shareholders that year. Investors would be better off placing the money in the bank at 4% interest. He, nonetheless, felt that it was better to keep the mines going in these circumstances. His mines employed 2 000 white workers and, he observed, their wages were spent in Krugersdorp and Randfontein. Any extra burden on the cost of production would be the 'last straw by which the camel's back would be broken'.<sup>156</sup>

Such words were carefully measured to weaken Labour's chances in the parliamentary

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<sup>153</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 29 May 1915, p. 43, 'Boksburg Municipal Stands', see also *The East Rand Express*, 26 June 1915, 'Boksburg's Ratepayers: Attacks on the Council'.

<sup>154</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 21 August 1915, 'Randfontein Election'.

<sup>155</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 28 August 1915, 'Notes and Comments: Labour and the War'.

<sup>156</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 25 September 1917, 'Election Notes'.

elections by attacking its policies – no mention was made of Labour's Pacifist 'war-on-war' wing or the issue of patriotism. There are also indications that Labour's candidate in Randfontein was the same middle-class Hoatson that had refused to support Holmes' proposal for increased employment of white workers at the municipal abattoir (and who had recently irritated middle-class voters with his open support for socialism). Hoatson was unpopular with trade unionists in Randfontein and another candidate had in fact been nominated although too late to be considered.<sup>157</sup> Thus, the local mining industry's vulnerable position, local conditions and the candidate's unpopularity all contributed to Hoatson's defeat. There seems to be little evidence that a patriotic backlash against Labour's anti-war reputation had any effect at all.

Robinson, indeed, had said little about the war throughout the election. It was only right at the end of his campaign that he was prepared to use the war issue for electoral advantage. He claimed that Hoatson had tried to woo a few Afrikaner voters at Randgate by telling them that 'The Nationalists and the Labour Party were the same thing'.<sup>158</sup> Robinson also promised to campaign for an increase in the pay of troops in the Overseas Contingent and on the eve of the elections he claimed that he stood for 'Imperial Solidarity'.<sup>159</sup> Other than these brief allusions, Labour's alleged lack of patriotism did not feature in the elections.

There can be no doubt that the SALP was comprehensively beaten in all three West Rand constituencies during the 1915 parliamentary elections. Bailey won in Krugersdorp with 1 153 votes to 339 for Labour. The Roodepoort-Maraisburg seat was won by a SAP candidate with 862 votes, while the third-placed SALP candidate was far behind with 516 votes. In Randfontein, Robinson won convincingly, defeating Labour's Hoatson by 1 100 votes to 410 votes. The Labour Party only won two seats in the whole Transvaal, in Benoni and Siemert in Johannesburg. Hall paints a picture of an electoral disaster for the SALP pointing out that it obtained one thousand or more votes in only one seat and came third in nine seats. The SALP contested 26 seats to the Unionists' 16 seats in the Transvaal and yet still received only 14 683 votes compared to 17 815

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<sup>157</sup> JPL, HSC, SALP Minute Book, 28 December 1914 to 2 April, 1916, Executive Council Minutes, 15 August 1915, 'Deputation from Randfontein', p. 319.

<sup>158</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 20 October 1915, 'Randfontein Election'.

votes for the Unionists. The average vote for Unionists was 1 113 per constituency compared to a mere 564 votes for the Labour Party.<sup>160</sup>

The claim that the SALP 'collapsed' at the polls should, nevertheless, be treated with some caution and it is simply not true to suggest, as did Marais, that the 'Labour Party virtually ceased to exist as a political factor'.<sup>161</sup> Historians are guilty of overstating Labour's defeat by comparing the 1915 parliamentary elections with the 1914 Provincial Council elections and this is inappropriate as it amounts to comparing 'apples to pears'.

Even a straight comparison of the 1910 and 1915 parliamentary elections is problematic as a delimitation commission sat between 1910 and 1915 and changed constituency boundaries affecting the size and geographical distribution of voters. Despite these difficulties, it should seem obvious that the SALP which had won three seats, all with narrow margins of victory in 1910, was in broadly the same position in 1915 when the SALP won two seats with comfortable majorities – Benoni by 843 votes and Siemert by 316 votes – and lost Bezuidenhout by a very narrow margin, by just 13 votes.

Furthermore Labour obtained roughly the same number of votes in Fordsburg, Germiston and Springs in both parliamentary elections, and increased its total vote in Pretoria and Georgetown in 1915 compared to 1910. On the Rand, the Labour Party more than doubled its votes from 6 621 in 1910 to 14 683 in 1915, although, of course, the electorate had also grown substantially between the two elections. Even allowing for population growth, this is, nonetheless, an impressive improvement and hardly constitutes an electoral collapse, as long as the focus remains on parliamentary elections only. The combined votes of the SAP, Unionists and Independents increased from 12 092 to 23 319 in 1915. Thus Labour's enjoyed a *greater* increase in support relative to its position in 1910 than its opponents.

The SALP obtained nearly one-third of all the votes cast in the major urban areas of the Transvaal including Pretoria and the Rand (14 683 out of 47 028 votes cast, or 31%)

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<sup>159</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> Hall, 'The SALP and Electoral Politics', Appendix, p. 64, Note 1.

<sup>161</sup> A.H. Marais, 'Aspekte van die 1915-Verkieping', *South African Historical Journal*, 5, 1973, pp. 61–

and if proportional representation was applied the Party would have obtained eight or nine seats. Admittedly the Party obtained 35% of the vote in 1910 (6 621 out of 18 746 votes) so its share of the total vote had fallen but this represented only a modest decline in support and not an electoral collapse. Delimitation seems to have hurt the SALP more than other parties especially on the East Rand where it obtained more votes than all other pro-government parties combined (3 566 votes to the combined tally of 3 499 for the SAP, Unionists and Independents) and yet secured only one seat from this region.

Many of the Afrikaners who voted for the Labour Party in the Provincial Council elections in Vrededorp and various Pretoria constituencies in 1914, shifted their support to the Nationalist Party in 1915. Had the Nationalists and the labourites entered an election pact, the results might have been very different because in no less than nine constituencies in the Transvaal, the combined votes for the Nationalists and the SALP exceeded that of their opponents. The large numbers of Afrikaners in Krugersdorp also would have made an electoral pact a good strategy for the SALP. Hall argues that

...had it not been for divergence on the war issue, a pact between the NP and the SALP would have been a sensible and profitable undertaking.<sup>162</sup>

Thus, Labour did not perform as badly in 1915 as Ticktin and Hall suggest. There was no Labour 'collapse' in these 'Khaki elections' if one compares the 1910 and 1915 parliamentary elections; indeed the Party performed better in the latter elections on a number of measurements. The delimitation commission and the 'spoiling' effect of the Nationalist Party's participation in the 1915 poll seem to have prevented Labour from translating a reasonable large share of the popular vote into seats.

Labour was, thus, still fairly popular on the Rand in the middle of the First World War. In Krugersdorp no less than three out of the four Labour candidates were elected onto the Town Council at precisely the same time that patriotism was held to cause Labour's

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<sup>162</sup> Hall, 'The SALP and Electoral Politics', p. 57.

political collapse in the parliamentary elections.<sup>163</sup> Thus, the vision of the white working-class town remained intact and progress towards its implementation remained on track despite rising criticism. By focussing on Provincial Council and parliamentary elections, historians have not only misinterpreted the results and tended to resort to monocausal explanations to explain Labour's performance, they also failed to detect Labour's steadily improving trajectory of support in municipal elections in towns like Krugersdorp.

The war did, however, become an increasingly important factor in local politics over the next two years, particularly in Krugersdorp during 1916 and 1917 when a patriotic backlash started to turn the electorate against Labour. While the SALP there wanted to stress 'bread and butter' issues during elections, it was increasingly placed on the defensive by accusations that it was unpatriotic.

The main reason for this was that Krugersdorp had large numbers of Dutch-speaking whites, living in Burghershoop and West Krugersdorp who voted consistently and in numbers for the Nationalist Party. In a 1916 municipal by-election a Nationalist candidate topped the polls under proportional representation which is indicative of both their numbers and these voters' strategic voting.<sup>164</sup> Some of these Boers had voted for the Labour Party in previous municipal elections and this can account for some of its slippage in the polls.

The Labour Party had to focus on English-speaking white voters who had become devoutly patriotic, by stitching together patriotism and municipal reforms into a new vision of Krugersdorp as a white working-class and patriotic town. They did this by supporting the 'troops' who were identified as 'workers in uniform' and who had families who needed to be looked after by the municipality. Thus, Labour took the lead in campaigning for increased 'war bonuses' for Council employees, for example, who had opted to join the services on the grounds that they needed to support families living in the town. 'Bread and butter' labour reforms were also couched in patriotic terms by suggesting that these reforms not only would improve living conditions for the white working class in the town, but would also advance the 'war effort'. This new strategy

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<sup>163</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 13 November 1915, 'Polling Day'.

<sup>164</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 19 February 1916, 'The By-Election'.

helped Labour to cushion the effect of the patriotic backlash and it seems that Tickin was wrong, at least as far as municipal politics were concerned, when he argued that Labour failed to adapt to changing circumstances.

The main beneficiary of this approach was W.G. Delpport, the rising star of the local Labour Party who contested the municipal elections for the first time in 1916. Delpport was a Dutch-speaking resident of Burghershoop who worked as a fumigator<sup>165</sup> and owned a number of properties in the region. He spoke strongly in favour of the plight of returning soldiers who were unemployed, and this won him the support of many English-speaking voters. It seems likely that his ability to attract support across different constituencies enabled him to head the poll in the Krugersdorp municipal elections in October 1916.<sup>166</sup>

It is not clear what specific labour policies Delpport supported during these elections as these were not mentioned in the reports on his campaign in the local newspaper, but he presumably advocated the standard labourite vision of the white working-class town. A Nationalist Party newspaper claimed that Delpport had won only because he had gained support from the 'Jingo-Empire-Loyal-mad section' due to his promise to find work for returning soldiers.<sup>167</sup> This seems unlikely and, besides, the promise mentioned above, could be described as a 'White Labour' policy.

Delpport's success occurred against the backdrop of a struggling local mining economy. During the first few months of 1916, growing concern was expressed about Krugersdorp's floundering mines and the need to attract investors to erect factories in the town. A local newspaper article predicted that unless secondary industrialisation was stimulated in Krugersdorp, the residents would drift off to seek work in other towns, until Krugersdorp deteriorated into a 'collection of empty shops and dwellings' where the 'herds of the farmers would graze in the streets'.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 29 October 1922, untitled.

<sup>166</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 28 October, 1916, 'The Elections', 'Unexpected Interest'.

<sup>167</sup> Quoted and translated in *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 18 November 1916, 'Our Elections, Through Nationalist Eyes'.

<sup>168</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 26 February 1916, 'Local Industries'.

The Town Council considered a proposal for a promotional film to attract investors and residents to the town.<sup>169</sup> Another article in the same local newspaper highlighted the growing problem of 'poor whites' in Krugersdorp.<sup>170</sup> Krugersdorp shared with the East Rand the accentuating social pathologies where white youth were drifting into crime resulting in 'an abnormal number of cases of housebreaking and theft by young lads'.<sup>171</sup> These serious economic and social problems may have driven white working-class municipal voters to pin their hopes on Labour, particularly if the municipal candidates were also willing to support the war. Yet it is difficult to say that Krugersdorp's economic vulnerability always led to increased support for Labour as, just as often, it seemed to have the opposite effect.

The labourites not only topped the poll in 1916, a year after the parliamentary 'Khaki' elections where the SALP supposedly 'collapsed' as a political factor, but also took the Mayor's office for the first time. Hoatson, who had been defeated when contesting the Randfontein parliamentary seat, was unanimously elected Mayor by his fellow Councillors. Hoatson made it clear that he wanted to encourage local industries, particularly by promoting local fruit cultivation which could be bottled and preserved or canned in local factories.<sup>172</sup>

Labour's reforms continued to play a role – combined with patriotism – in the Provincial Council Elections held in June, 1917. Delpont was Labour's nominee for the Randfontein seat and his opponent was W.H. Robinson. Since Delpont had established impeccable pro-war credentials in the municipal elections, Robinson did not use the war issue to attack his Labour opponent and, instead focused on highlighting the crisis that had accompanied Labour's early months in the Council.

Robinson claimed that Labour had acted like 'spoilt children' in the Council in its stand-off against the Administrator.<sup>173</sup> Teachers and other municipal workers had not been paid during this time and the Provincial Council was the 'laughing stock' of South

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<sup>169</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 19 February 1916, 'Film to Promote Krugersdorp'.

<sup>170</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 15 April 1916, 'Poor Whites'.

<sup>171</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 1 April 1916, 'East Rand's Progress'.

<sup>172</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 14 November 1916, 'Election of Mayor'.

<sup>173</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 16 June 1917, 'Mr. W.H. Robinson's Candidature'.

Africa.<sup>174</sup> Delport who quietly supported war bonuses and jobs for returning troops, won by 640 votes to 310. He was lifted onto the shoulders of his supporters who sang the 'Red Flag' which indicates that he was still firmly seen as a champion of the white working-class constituency.<sup>175</sup>

Ernest Cresswell, the SALP candidate for Krugersdorp tried a different approach, playing down labour reforms and playing up his patriotism. For example, he pointed out that he had served in East Africa at every opportunity. This did little to help him as he was not elected in a three-way contest with Dr W. Adam, an 'Independent' Town Councillor, and J. Dieperink, a Nationalist opponent. The Krugersdorp branch of the Labour Party tried to link the war to Labour's programme by pointing out that war-induced inflation had made the cost of living much higher. Labourites also condemned landowners' 'unpatriotic' behaviour in trying to cut labour costs by employing cheaper black labour during wartime for various semi-skilled occupations or tasks.

Miners at Randfontein became so angry at this growing trend that they came out on strike in May against a new 'contract system' which allowed black miners to carry out work 'previously done by white men'.<sup>176</sup> The President of the SA Mineworkers' Union, Nicholas Toomey, who was also the Labour candidate for Roodepoort-Maraisburg, warned that 'lessons' of 1913 and 1914 'still needed to be learnt'.<sup>177</sup> This actions suggest that Labour was not only determined to play the patriotism card like the Unionists but could also skilfully weave war-related issues into Labour's traditional programme of reforms.

Despite this promising blend of patriotism and reformism, the election results were disappointing and Labour failed to hold most of its seats and suffered a considerable setback compared to its impressive performance in 1914. It still, however, managed to retain eight seats in all so the elections should not be portrayed as a temporary setback rather than as a rout. Labour's eight seats, after all, left it not far behind the SAP, the largest party with fourteen seats. This means that if Labour won just four of the SAP's

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<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 23 June, 'Election Results'.

<sup>176</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 2 May 1917, p. 5, 'The Randfontein Mines Trouble'.

<sup>177</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 21 May 1917, p.5, 'Miners' Strike'.

<sup>178</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 9 June 1917, p. 45, 'Provincial Council Elections'.

seats (a reasonably feasible task given that at least four of the SAP's seats were won by a only few hundred votes) it would have remained the largest party. Nonetheless, the war issue probably did seriously hurt Labour by 1917 even though the Party had done its best to stress their patriotism and to warn the voters, as one candidate did, not to allow the Unionists to 'hoodwink them with a khaki cry'.<sup>178</sup>

Labour managed to perform a little better on the West Rand where the effects of the war seem to be more muted. Delpont, for example, won convincingly, defeating W.H. Robinson by 640 votes to 310 votes and retained the Randfontein seat for Labour. His working-class supporters were so delighted with his victory that some of them hoisted him up onto their shoulders and sang the '*Red Flag*'.<sup>179</sup> Delpont hardly mentioned the war at all in any of his speeches, yet he defeated a wealthy mine owner with very high name recognition, who employed most of the electorate in Randfontein. Delpont's success seems to be attributable to his apparently moral conviction and his solid record in supporting Labour issues that were important to working families.

Cresswell, on the other hand, stressed his war service<sup>180</sup> but played down Labour's record in the Provincial Council and, unlike Delpont, he seems to have enjoyed little credibility with ordinary workers. He came third in a three-cornered race, although he did obtain a hundred more votes than he had obtained in the 1915 parliamentary elections.<sup>181</sup> These results, again, suggest that the effects of the war needed to be cautiously approached when analysing Labour's election successes or failures, but that, overall, the war began to take its toll on Labour's support base about two years into the war.

### **Municipal Elections in 1917 and 1918**

The Labour Party's real strength and their most consistent performance was at the lowest level of government, in the municipal councils. It was at the local government

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<sup>179</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 23 June 1917, 'Elections Results'.

<sup>180</sup> See *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 23 June 1917, 'Elections and After'.

<sup>181</sup> *ibid.*

level that the Party's bread and butter policies could make a real difference, to white families living on the Rand, particularly through its policies of municipal socialism and white labour which provided much needed employment for white workers. It is at this level, furthermore, that historians can truly test the conventional contention that Labour lost support due to a patriotic backlash.

Krugersdorp's Town Council, under pressure from the Labour Town Councillors and fearful of the increasing volatility of white labour, had become a major employer of white labour by 1917, employing 21 white men in the Town Engineer's Department and 11 in the Sanitary Department. White workers were given preferential employment in a range of municipal projects from the municipal abattoir to the municipal power station. In addition, the Town Council provided work to 32 white men through Public Relief Works at eight shillings per day as well as a one pound, ten shillings per month 'war bonus'. Thus, the 'Independents', who dominated the Town Council, appear to have realised that they were too dependent on the votes of at least a segment of the white working class to simply ignore them and had to offer at least some labour-friendly reforms or, at least, they had to avoid being seen as hostile to all of Labour's policies.

This combination of municipal socialism and a white labour policy was very costly, however, and Town Councils across the Rand began to slip into debt in a climate of severe wartime inflation and economic depression. The middle-class elite in Krugersdorp, whose representatives held the majority of seats in the Town Council, grew increasingly anxious about this debt. As owners of a number of stands and as businessmen in the town, these men paid higher rates than other residents and they were concerned that this debt would force a rate increase that would hit their pockets particularly hard. The victory of the Unionists and the SAP in the Transvaal Provincial Council elections in 1917, gave the 'Independents' in the Town Council the confidence to stand up to Labour on this issue, even if it meant risking further Council seats in future municipal elections.

The Town Council election of 1917, thus marked a turning point in the approach of the 'Independents' who began to attack municipal socialism, white labour policy and a range of other Labour Party reforms, much more vigorously than they had done in the

past. In this regard it marked a conservative backlash against the radical Labour municipal policies in a way that closely parallels a similar right wing swing against female social activism in the same period (see Chapter Seven).

For example, the local newspaper, the mouthpiece of the 'Independents', attacked the municipal employment of white men by pointing out that 'Coloured' labour cost only two shillings per day.<sup>182</sup> The newspaper emphasised the heavy costs of 'relief labour' schemes, pointing out that it cost the Town Council over four thousand pounds a month to employ white men on the works programme.<sup>183</sup> The Krugersdorp Town Council also decided that to move away from municipalisation in favour of privatisation by resolving that it would not use municipal funds and Council employees to build the Central Power Station at Randfontein. It would, instead, hand over the important project to the private sector. The Labour Party's vision of a white working-class town was now firmly under attack.

Krugersdorp was not an isolated example and 'Independents' in Town Councils across the Rand began to reverse Labour's more extravagant and costly municipal projects, even in Labour strongholds like those on the East Rand. Benoni's Town Council, for example, cancelled its Sunday tram service while Germiston municipality considered scrapping its municipal trams altogether.<sup>184</sup> Boksburg abandoned its plans to build a municipal power station<sup>185</sup> and Germiston's Town Councillors held a debate on the retrenchment of municipal staff.<sup>186</sup> The white working-class town, only recently developed in a sporadic and incomplete form, was already becoming eroded across the Rand.

The 'Independents' frequently attacked Labour policies in the months leading up to the Municipal elections which were held in October 1917. They emphasised both their patriotism and how, as businessmen, they were able to run the Town Councils on 'strict

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<sup>182</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp* 29 December 1917, 'Central Power Station'.

<sup>183</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp* 12 May 1917, 'Relief Works'.

<sup>184</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 14 July, 1917, 'Germiston Municipal Estimates'.

<sup>185</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 1 September 1917, 'Boksburg Municipal Council'.

<sup>186</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 29 September 1917, 'Germiston's Sanitary Inspectors: Are there too many?'

<sup>187</sup> See, for example, *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 30 October 1915, untitled.

business lines'<sup>187</sup> unlike Labour Councillors who would run the municipalities into bankruptcy with their expensive and impractical 'socialist' projects.

The 'Independents', however, misinterpreted the 1917 Provincial Council elections as badly as historians have done since. They failed to see that Labour's reforms still retained a residual appeal and that Labour continued to successfully project an image as a caring, sympathetic political party that would provide employment and various social welfare projects for white workers at a time when these workers felt particularly vulnerable. The Labour Party's municipal candidates across the Rand performed nearly as well as they had in previous municipal elections and maintained a foothold on the Rand's Town Councils. The municipal elections did, however, indicate that Labour was finally on the downward slope and that pro-war patriotism was, at last, taking its toll, weakening support for Labour (along with a growing impression that Labour's policies were simply inefficient and expensive).

In Krugersdorp, Hoatson obtained the second-highest votes and was re-elected Mayor by his fellow Town Councillors. His staunch advocacy of loyalty helped his re-election in both cases but he also made it clear that he was a labourite and advocated the Labour 'platform' of reforms. Another labourite, Lewis, was elected and, together with Delport, Labour controlled three seats or one-fifth of the Town Council and also enjoyed the support of several 'Independents' in the Town Council. This suggests that Labour was hanging on to at least its core support despite the setbacks that it experienced.

Labour's performance on the East Rand was still strong and, in some areas, even improved. In Benoni, Labour's election successes brought it to the brink of taking over the Town Council as it carried five seats out of twelve,<sup>188</sup> while in Boksburg Labour was able to seize control over the Town Council when the elections lifted its total number of Town Councillors to ten out of eighteen.<sup>189</sup> In total, the Labour Party had three Mayors on the Rand and secured the second highest spot in polls in three Rand towns: Krugersdorp, Springs and Benoni. There is, thus, ample evidence of the Party's

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<sup>188</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 20 October 1917, 'Benoni Municipal Elections'.

<sup>189</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 17 November 1917, 'Boksburg's New Mayor'.

enduring popularity among white workers on the Rand despite a number of reversals in some of their municipal policies and projects as well as the effects of the patriotic backlash.

One of the most important reasons for the Labour Party's ongoing, if slightly diminishing, popularity was that its representatives remained committed to pursuing reforms even when they were in the minority, as was the case in the Krugersdorp Town Council and in the Provincial Council after 1917. For example, Labour MPCs proposed the building of more secondary schools,<sup>190</sup> more hospitals (Delpont wanted a state lottery to raise funds for this purpose),<sup>191</sup> a Saturday half-holiday<sup>192</sup> and site value taxation<sup>193</sup> to stimulate local industry and create jobs. All these proposals kept the vision of the white working-class town alive.

Even though Labour was not able to turn these policies into Ordinances due to its minority position in the Provincial Council, it was seen as a principled and imaginative Party that was sympathetic to the needs of the working class in urban areas. Delpont was an energetic Provincial Councillor who was described as being 'particularly active' in his pursuit of reforms that could benefit white workers.<sup>194</sup> Delpont also constantly demanded information on a range of issues from the Executive that dealt with living conditions of workers.<sup>195</sup> The Labour Party was particularly determined to push for a 'land tax', a version of site value taxation while their political opponents wanted an income tax or even a poll tax that placed an inequitable financial burden (the same tax was payable regardless of income) on all the Province's adult residents.<sup>196</sup> The Labour Party also wanted to place a heavy tax on profits accruing during the war but this was rejected immediately.<sup>197</sup> The Provincial Council's rejection of the Labour Party's

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<sup>190</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 25 August 1917, 'Brakpan and Springs'.

<sup>191</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 23 February 1918, 'State Lotteries: Delpont's Campaign'.

<sup>192</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 29 September 1917, untitled.

<sup>193</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 May 1918, 'Provincial Council Deficit: Suggestions for Taxation'.

<sup>194</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 11 May 1918, 'Mr. Delpont Wants to Know'.

<sup>195</sup> See, for example, *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 18 May 1918, 'Delpont Again Wants to Know' and *The Standard*, 1 June 1918, 'Inquisitive Delpont'.

<sup>196</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 May 1918, 'Provincial Council Deficit: suggestions for taxation'.

<sup>197</sup> *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 May 1918, 'Excess Profits Duty: Labour Motion Rejected'.

proposed land tax was a bitter pill for the Party to swallow<sup>198</sup> and further contributed to its loss of support outside a few East Rand enclaves.

The most serious reversal for the Labour Party and one that seems to have injected a sense of outrage in its ranks was the proposal to scrap proportional representation. The Labour Party's relative and consistent success in Town Council elections was partly the result of proportional representation. Once in power, the SAP/Unionist coalition took swift steps to re-introduce the 'Wards System'. It was widely expected that this action would weaken Labour's representation on Town Councils, further enfeebling its attempts to create labour-friendly urban environments out of the towns on the Rand.

The Labour Party's enemies criticised the Proportional Representation system for its complexity in presenting voters with a 'brain-wearying puzzle'.<sup>199</sup> When the SAP- and Unionist-dominated Provincial Council scrapped the system, labourites were so upset that there was talk of using Gandhi's 'passive resistance' tactics to force the Provincial Council Executive to retract its amendment.<sup>200</sup> The SALP obtained the support of the Transvaal Municipal Association, an umbrella body uniting all Town Councils, but all to no avail. The 1918 municipal elections would be fought under the 'Wards System'. It was widely predicted that Labour would be completely routed in these elections and its vision of a white working class in Krugersdorp and elsewhere on the Rand would finally disappear altogether.

The Labour Party in Krugersdorp rolled up its sleeves, determined to defend its vision. It had reasons to expect success because ordinary white working-class residents had suffered under wartime inflation and job shortages, particularly during the previous two years of the war. Poverty had become so serious that the West Rand Distress Fund could not cope and asked the government to intervene.<sup>201</sup> In early 1918 Krugersdorp was devastated by exceptionally heavy rains that swept away part of the railway line, roads and telegraph lines, leaving the town completely cut off from the rest of the Rand

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<sup>198</sup> *The Municipal Magazine*, 1 December 1917, untitled.

<sup>199</sup> *The Municipal Magazine*, 1 October 1917, 'The P.R. Puzzle'.

<sup>200</sup> *The East Rand Express*, 25 May 1918, 'The Town Councils Ignored'. See also *The East Rand Express*, 29 June 1918, 'Municipal Liberties Threatened by Provincial Council: Passive Resistance Advocated'.

for a period of time. Damaged water pipes threatened a 'water famine' in the town.<sup>202</sup> Black miners went on strike at Randfontein 'A' Compound because they had no water with which to cook their food.<sup>203</sup>

The Independents in the Town Council insensitively voted, amidst all this misery, to freeze its relief labour schemes in May, declaring that no more unskilled workers would be employed and those that left would not be replaced.<sup>204</sup> The Labour Party condemned this decision and Delpont, in particular, took a strong stand in favour of municipal employment of white workers. For example, in the Provincial Council, Delpont condemned the Unionist/SAP-dominated Provincial Council for discharging 112 white workers from its relief labour scheme.<sup>205</sup>

Two factors particularly favoured Labour in the run up to the 1918 key municipal elections that would 'make or break' its vision of a white working-class town. These were; firstly, the mining industry had stabilised even though it was struggling and, secondly, the war was coming to an end so the ideological baggage of the 'war-on-war' wing would no longer cost it votes.

Labour had many burning issues on which to campaign. Notably, the effects of wartime inflation that had reduced the spending power of a sovereign by 40 per cent over the period of the war<sup>206</sup> and which had plunged the Town Council into debt to the tune of fourteen thousand pounds. Krugersdorp, like the Town Councils across the Rand, was faced with a stark choice: either retrench municipal workers to cut costs or increase rates that would hit hard at the pockets of the embattled ratepayers.<sup>207</sup> In a sense, then, the elections became a struggle over the future of the town: either middle-class rate

<sup>201</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 29 December 1917, 'Our Poor Whites'.

<sup>202</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 16 February 1918, 'West Rand Flooded: the Dorp Cut Off'.

<sup>203</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 23 February 1918, 'After the Flood: Natives on Strike'.

<sup>204</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 25 May 1918, 'Unskilled Labour'.

<sup>205</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 18 June 1918, 'Work for Whites'. The Labour Party's record on this score was not unblemished because Hoatson used his casting vote as Mayor in a split Council to support the 'Independent's' decision to freeze the municipal relief labour scheme, see *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 25 May 1918, 'Unskilled Labour'.

<sup>206</sup> *Municipal Magazine*, 1 January 1918, p. 3, 'War Bonus or Salary?'

<sup>207</sup> Town Councils were given the option of voting for either land and improvements or site value taxation only. If no vote was taken, then site value taxation only would apply, see *Municipal Magazine*, May 1918, p. 18, 'The Next Municipal Rate'.

payers would dominate the town, as they had done before Union, or the white working class would ensure that the Town Council remained responsive to its needs and kept alive a vision of the white working-class town which, over time, could be developed more fully into reality.

Matters came to a head, in June 1918, in a heated Town Council meeting. Delpont, the vice-Chair of the Finance Committee, proposed a doubling of the rate by instituting an additional rate of 2 pence in the pound. This was to be imposed in such a way that would ensure that the costs would be borne mostly by the mining companies that owned huge tracts of land in Krugersdorp as they did throughout the Rand. Mr Friedman, a local landlord and 'Independent' Town Councillor, opposed this measure and recommended maintaining the same rate as the previous year. He felt that ratepayers would be strongly opposed to an increase in their rates and, while much of the additional costs would fall on the local mines, he felt that the Council should 'endeavour to avoid placing more burdens upon the industry'.<sup>208</sup>

Alexander, another 'Independent' Councillor claimed that the Krugersdorp's white labour policy meant that its wage bill was too high at 40 000 pounds a year compared to Council's revenue of only around 77 000 pounds a year, and advocated retrenchments rather than a rate increase. The Labour Mayor, Hoatson, pointed out that Alexander had been on the Town Council for many years, implying that he had accepted essentially Labour-inspired wage increases, municipal socialism and white labour policy that had caused the deficit. Mayor Hoatson tried to present the issue as a non-partisan responsibility and criticised a Nationalist Town Councillor who attacked the Labour Party's support for land taxation:

As a member of the Labour Party, I take the strongest exception to that remark. There are Unionists, S.A.P., Nationalists and labourites around the horseshoe and I hope we are all working in the best interest of the ratepayer.<sup>209</sup>

The Town Council meeting grew increasingly acrimonious and divided.<sup>210</sup> It was at the

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<sup>208</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *ibid.*

height of this bitter struggle over retrenchments and rating reform that municipal elections were held in October 1918. A number of ratepayers' associations were formed which nominated their own candidates with the explicit intention of maintaining the old assessment rate.<sup>211</sup> The rates issue was publicised through letters to the press<sup>212</sup> together with discussions of the Municipality's revenue and expenditure.<sup>213</sup> The elections were, of course, also influenced by the war, which was drawing to a close in Europe at this stage, and patriotism remained a potent if muted factor in local politics. The candidates were endorsed or vilified according to their level of 'patriotism' in the local newspaper.<sup>214</sup>

The Spanish Influenza Epidemic also figured as a factor in the municipal elections as it made social issues more prominent when medical personnel visited the sick in their homes, revealing the existence of 'slums' in the town. The epidemic disrupted election campaigns as meetings were either cancelled or sparsely attended since local medical authorities strongly discouraged public gatherings.<sup>215</sup>

Only two Labour candidates officially contested two separate wards and this may have been an indication of a degree of pessimism in the Party. Ernest Cresswell, who was described as 'a well-known public man, [who]...for years past...has been prominently identified with the Labour movement', opted to stand as an Independent. He emphasised his service record in East Africa in an effort to use patriotism to win a seat. This, again, is indicative of a sense of despondency in the local Labour branch. In Ward IV, the 'Mines Ward', the Labour Party put forward Mr Breckenridge, a resident of Lewisham and an 'engine fitter' on Luipaard's Vlei Estate and G.M. Co. Ltd. Mine. In Ward III, James Mackie, a house painter, stood for the Labour Party.<sup>216</sup>

The results are not easily interpreted. On the one hand, it could be argued that the re-introduction of the 'Wards System' hurt the Labour Party. Only one of the two Labour

<sup>210</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 17 August 1918, 'Municipal Business'.

<sup>211</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 5 October 1918, 'Municipal Elections'.

<sup>212</sup> See, for example, *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 29 June 1918, 'Municipal Salaries'.

<sup>213</sup> See, for example, *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 7 September 1918, untitled.

<sup>214</sup> See, for example, *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 12 October 1918, 'The Man for Ward II'.

<sup>215</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 26 October 1918, 'Municipal Elections'.

<sup>216</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 2 November 1918, 'Municipal Elections'.

candidates was elected and then only narrowly, while the Independent-labourite Cresswell was defeated yet again.<sup>217</sup> In some of previous elections as many as three labourites were elected and in the most recent municipal elections a Labour candidate came second in the polls under the Proportional Representation system.

On closer perusal, however, the results were not all that bad. Cresswell (although not an official Labour candidate, he was still closely identified with labour issues) was defeated by only 63 votes, the best result he ever obtained in municipal elections. However, it is difficult to decide whether this improved result should be interpreted as evidence for increasing support for Labour or declining support; Cresswell did, after all, stand as an Independent. Mackie a clear labourite lost by a single vote in a closely fought municipal election and Breckenridge won narrowly by 32 votes.<sup>218</sup> What these results suggest is that the Wards system (and the war issue) had a role in Labour's defeat but had not damaged them as seriously as expected.

The Influenza Epidemic and the effective ban on public gatherings may have hurt Labour as the local newspaper suggested that the Labour candidate Mackie 'lost by one vote in a low poll' caused by the epidemic.<sup>219</sup> Mackie also lost narrowly to a Nationalist in a ward that incorporated Burghershooop which was a heavily Dutch-speaking area so Labour must have secured many votes from poor 'Burghers' to get as close as he did to being elected.<sup>220</sup> Breckenridge's victory and the narrow defeat of Mackie suggests that Labour's policies, including its support for increased rate taxation and its opposition to municipal retrenchments, attracted a sizeable number of working-class voters.

Taken as a whole, Labour's representation improved slightly in the Krugersdorp Town Council and the Party now claimed four Town Councillors (Delpport, Hoatson, Lewis and now Breckenridge). The Party also had at least one ally in the form of Richardson (who was the only other Town Councillor to vote against the retention of the old assessment

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<sup>217</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>219</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>220</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 9 November 1918, 'Ward III Result'.

rate along with Labour's Hoatson and Lewis). However, the 'Independents' on the Town Council, together with Councillors from anti-Labour parties, were still in the majority and even more determined to keep Labour out of a position of influence. They also wanted to ruthlessly roll back remnants of municipal socialism and prevent the full realisation of the vision of the white working-class town.

Hoatson's attempts to be re-elected as Mayor were thwarted and Delport was defeated in his bid to become Deputy Mayor. Although he did secure the chair of the Works Committee, it is a measure of the Independents' hostility to Labour and its growing confidence that it could so completely shut out the still popular labourite and MPC from a relatively innocuous position like the Deputy Mayor's office.<sup>221</sup>

The middle-class 'Independents' then became ruthless in their dismantling of the white workers' town. They rejected rate increases and Krugersdorp's Town Council was the only local government on the Rand to refuse to increase municipal workers' wages despite being asked to do so by the powerful new Municipal Employees' Association that had formed a branch in the town a year earlier.<sup>222</sup> The white municipal workers rejected this decision and demanded a wage increase just a week after armistice.<sup>223</sup> Pressure mounted on Krugersdorp's commercial and professional elite on the Town Council to make concessions.

With the war now over, the 'Independents' could no longer use patriotism to deflect attention away from its anti-Labour policies. The Town Councillors agreed to meet with the Association's representatives and reluctantly conceded to some increases.<sup>224</sup> The white municipal workers' demand for higher pay was supported by both the Labour Party and by the Nationalist Party Town Councillors and this common ground brought these two groups politically closer, heralding a new political phase that would culminate in the 'Pact Government' of 1924.

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<sup>221</sup> *ibid.*, 'Our New Mayor'.

<sup>222</sup> *The Municipal Magazine*, 1 November 1917, 'Krugersdorp'.

<sup>223</sup> *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 16 November 1917, 'Municipal Employees'.

<sup>224</sup> *ibid.*

This mounting labour volatility reflected an increasing impatience among white workers at the way in which their wages lagged behind a rising cost of living, contributed to a heated confrontation between white municipal employees and the Krugersdorp Town Council in 1919.<sup>225</sup> It led to even more serious clashes elsewhere on the Rand (in Johannesburg the Town Council was physically 'seized' by the workers in a one-day show of force).<sup>226</sup> The Labour Party allied itself more closely to the Nationalist Party and concentrated on securing victory in the 1920 parliamentary elections where both parties made substantial gains. The Labour Party also co-operated with the Nationalist Party, for example, in Krugersdorp's municipal elections in October, 1922.

The post-war period was also marked by a series of labour actions not seen on the Rand since 1913 that culminated in a series of strikes by white miners in 1922 and plunged the Rand into a full-scale Revolt. This post-war phase of local and national politics, from 1923 onwards, was significantly different to that of the period between Union and the end of the First World War and will not be dealt with here. The Labour Party, with extraordinary tenacity attempted to hold on to its vision of a white working-class town that was under relentless attack. In the post-war years, particularly after the 1922 Revolt, it began to make steady advances again.

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter considered, in detail, how the politicised elements of the white working class, particularly the official South African Labour Party, worked hard to shape Krugersdorp's social and built environment, its 'flesh and stone', according to its vision of a white working-class town. Much of this was, however, envisioned rather than actual. For example a proposed policy of free secondary education meant that existing high schools would have become more crowded and there would have been growing pressure to build more senior schools. Site value taxation would mean a building boom which would have boosted employment and substantially changed Krugersdorp's appearance.

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<sup>225</sup> See, for example, *The Standard, Krugersdorp*, 19 April 1919, 'Municipal Grievances'.

<sup>226</sup> See Hyslop, *The Notorious Syndicalist*, Chapter 22, pp. 279–93.

This vision included a town where the Town Council would act as an employer of considerable numbers of white workers and the municipality would run a range of services at cost, notably a municipal abattoir and power station. The voting system that best served the vision of the white working-class town included the female municipal franchise and a system of proportional representation and was designed, along with proposals for evening meetings and payments for Town Councillors, to facilitate white working-class political participation. The white working-class town was also one where shop hours were friendly towards shop assistants, where textbooks were freely available to schoolchildren and where working-class soldiers returning from the frontlines were treated with respect and concern in the form of municipal employment at a living wage.

The Labour Party's fortunes fluctuated over the period from Union to the end of the First World War but it implemented most of its vision for a white working-class town, particularly during the period 1914–5. Thereafter, Labour's vision was progressively chipped away even though a core of labourites fought a vigorous rearguard action to halt this process. In the post-war period, the remnants of Labour began to regain support until their determination eventually bore fruit as 1924 parliamentary elections finally propelled Labour into power at a national level, but this lies outside the period under consideration.