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The Rehoboth Rebellion

by P. Pearson

At dawn on the 5th of April 1925, a force of 621 men comprising citizen force troops and police surrounded the town of Rehoboth in South West Africa. Their object was to secure the arrest of three men who had failed to respond to summonses issued under the stock branding proclamation. Seven days previously a large group of supporters had prevented three local policemen from entering the building where the men were staying.(1) In response to this act of defiance, the Administrator had mobilized the citizen force in nine districts and declared martial law in Rehoboth.(2)

At 7am a messenger entered the town carrying an ultimatum from Col. de Jager, commander of the troops. It called for an unconditional surrender by 8am. The rebels asked for more time in order to evacuate the women and children, but at 8.15am three aeroplanes fitted with machine guns flew low over the town and the soldiers charged. Faced with this vastly superior force, the rebels offered little resistance, and no shots were fired. The soldiers and policemen were spurred on by de Jager to attack their opponents with sticks and rifle butts. Women and children who surrounded the rebel headquarters in an attempt to protect their menfolk inside were also quickly dealt with in this way.(4) Six hundred and thirty two people were arrested on charges of illegal assembly(5) and 304 firearms were confiscated. All of the weapons were subsequently declared 'unservicable' and destroyed.(6)

Organised resistance had begun some twenty months earlier on the 17th of August 1923. An agreement had been concluded on that day between the Union Government, represented by the Administrator of South West Africa; and the Baster Council, on behalf of the Rehoboth community. The treaty demarcated the boundaries of the Baster Gebiet or district, set out the laws applicable to the people within it, and described the powers of local government to be exercised by its Council and Courts.(7) It was rejected by about 80% of the Baster burgers who alleged that it limited their right to self-determination, made them subject to alien laws, and reduced their territory. The members of the community refused to abide by the terms of the agreement, openly defied the laws, and petitioned the League of Nations to intervene in the dispute.

While the rebellion was less than spectacular except perhaps for the cost involved, the result might have been quite different if the Basters had achieved more success in persuading the neighbouring Herero and Nama to join them in their resistance. A long record of Baster collaboration with colonial

156 344.

authorities no doubt counted against them in this attempt,(8) and only minor cases of Herero opposition occurred before the Union authorities took action. A brief history of the Baster people may serve to illustrate their role in the colonisation of Namibia.

The core of the Rehoboth community migrated to Namibia in 1868.(9) They were drawn mainly from the mission stations of de Tuin and Pella which lay on the northern border of the Cape Colony. They had lost their land to encroaching Boer pastoralists and had also suffered the depradations of !Kora raiding parties whose stronghold lay in the islands of the Orange river to the north-east.(10) About 90 Baster families crossed the border and moved slowly northwards, seeking water and grazing for their substantial herds. During the journey northwards they drew up a constitution and elected a Captain, Hermanus van Wyk. This election caused a split in the party and supporters of Klaas Swartz decided to remain at Grootfontein South in the neighbourhood of Bethanie.(11)

The Herero and their southern neighbours, the Nama, had been at war since about 1863,(12) and Rehoboth, which lay between the territories of these two peoples, had been uninhabited since 1864. The former chief of the area, Willem Swartbooi, had been forced to flee with his people to the protection of Maherero, the Herero Paramount, when he fell out with the major Nama leader, Jonker Afrikaner.

Van Wyk managed to rent Rehoboth from Swartbooi after negotiating with him at the Peace Conference called at Okahandja in 1870.(13) The area provided some of the best grazing in the country and the Basters set to work, rebuilding the ruined mission house and church, and digging wells. Later the Basters attempted to buy the land from Swartbooi, but whether this was successful or not, is not clear.(14)

Rehoboth lay in the path of the Nama and Herero warparties, and despite attempts to remain neutral in the continuing conflict between north and south, the Basters were drawn into the wars; sometimes on the side of the Nama, and on other occassions siding with Maherero. Their stock was also raided by groups of bandits thrown up by the wars.(15) The Basters' title to the land was also insecure. Even if Swartbooi had sold the area (which he denied), there were others who laid claim to it. Maherero claimed it as his by virtue of having given the Swartboois a piece of land in his own territory, while a Nama tribe to the south denied Swartbooi's right to it, and maintained that it had originally belonged to them. In addition, the Dorsland trekkers showed an interest in purchasing it.(16)

As a result of all this uncertainty, the Basters were quick to sign the treaty offered by the Imperial German Government in 1885.(17) It promised protection from other nations and recognised the right of the people to the territory which they inhabited. As a result of this treaty the Basters became active collaborators in the process of colonisation. For a number of reasons they were quite well suited to this position. In cultural terms they were fairly close to the Germans: many were literate, all were Christians, products of the Rhenish missionary Heidmann, who had accompanied them on their trek from the Cape Colony. Speakers of German, as well as of indigenous languages and their native Dutch were to be found amongst them. These factors, combined with skill in horsemanship, waggon driving, and marksmanship, as well as a good knowledge of the local terrain, made them very usefull allies to the Germans. They came to serve as soldiers, scouts and transport riders; in the latter area holding a virtual monopoly.(18)

The Schutztruppe, or colonial troops were far too few to 'pacify' so large an area, so Baster soldiers played an important role in the military.(19) This was formalised in 1895 when agreement was reached that the Rehoboth Captain would provide fifty men to serve under a German Officer in return for an annual salary of one thousand marks.(20) These soldiers drew high praise from military historians and their losses are recorded on a number of monuments in the territory.

Collaboration cost the Basters dearly not only in lives however, but in liberty and land. The Captain"....had been reduced to a position of dependance in regard to the Government by granting him an annual salary. He (had) thereby acquired the status of an official and his political independance (was) at an end!"(21) An increasing number of colonial laws became applicable to the Rehoboth Gebiet and by 1903 a German Resident was installed,(22) significantly reducing the authority of Baster council and courts, while on the death of Hermanus van Wyk three years later, the German authorities refused to recognise his son Cornelius as Captain, acknowledging him only as Foreman, and reviewing his position annually.(23)

Despite the fact that "...the Rehoboth community in order to keep their own ground, had to assist the German Government in dispossesing others",(24) the loss of land by the indigenous peoples to German settlers did not leave the Baster Gebiet unscathed. As their importance to the Colonial effort, decreased so did their land. The community was in no position to resist this encroachment; they would have been unable to ally themselves with other natives and were too small to resist the substantially increased German forces alone. In the seven years between 1898 and 1905 a quarter of a million hectares

of the Gebiet was alienated,[25] some through the redemarcation of boundaries, some being sold in order to cover the debts of the community[26] and also, it was alleged, to raise private revenue for Councillors.[27]

The relationship with the Germans deteriorated steadily. In 1904, with the outbreak of the Herero war, a large portion of the community was inclined to join this rebellion against the Germans. Fischer[28] describes these as "... the poor, the lower social class, the debtors, those dissatisfied with the prohibition of brandy and those who had nothing to lose". But the influence of the Captain, his Council and the members of "the more prominent families" prevailed. The Captain turned over to the German authorities communications between Samuel Maherero and Hendrik Witbooi which had been sent through him.[29] He also provided soldiers for the campaign.

The war reduced the Herero population by four fifths,[30] leaving adequate land available for German settlement and reducing settler pressure for Baster land. Having been witnesses to what the alternative might be, the Basters seem to have come to accept their subservient position. Opposition to their own leaders may have been developing during this period - it has been suggested that members of the Beukes family had made representations to the German authorities that Cornelius be denied official recognition as Captain.[31] Whatever the true position, there is little evidence of opposition to the increasing limitations to their freedom up to the outbreak of the First World War.

In a letter[32] to the Baster Council dated two weeks after the British declaration of war against Germany, the Baster council was assured that the Baster company would not be required to fight against Whites, but was to be deployed purely "for the purposes of keeping peace and safety in the country" and to catch thieves. Despite this assurance Baster soldiers were ordered to guard Union prisoners of war.[33] They deserted their posts and the community rebelled. The Germans reacted harshly to this insurrection on the part of their former allies, and convoys of Baster families fleeing to the security of the mountain stronghold of Sam Kubis were attacked and murdered by German patrols. Three children of the Captain were executed, leaving the Basters without an heir to that position. In all, about fifty Basters were killed or wounded and vast numbers of their stock looted or slaughtered.

Cornelius van Wyk and two members of his Council had managed to slip through the German lines to Walvis Bay where they interviewed General Botha. He advised them not to take part in the war, promising that if they remained loyal

to the Union "that which you have, at least, you will keep".(34) The Basters had interpreted their treaty with the Germans in 1885 as being one between two independant nations and they understood Botha's words as a promise that this independance would be restored.

Relations between the community and the Union were initially very cordial. Basters served as scouts in the army for the brief period until the Germans surrendered.(35) In the Gebiet, owners of rifles were issued with ammunition, from the military stores in order that they might serve as a "brake" on the possible insurrection of German farmers in the district.(36) They were also not restricted in the way other natives were in respect of the purchase of liquor.(37) In these and many other matters the Council retained a good deal of authority, the military magistrate of the district having been ordered to do nothing to limit their independance or status as recognised by the German Administration.(38)

Signs that certain members of the community and at least one member of the Council felt that the Captain was too friendly towards the Government are evident from magistrates' reports during this early period of South African rule.(39) There were also other grounds for dissatisfaction with the Council. Members were suspected of misappropriating funds,(40) favouring their kin, selling community land for private gain,(41) and being among the heaviest drinkers in the Gebiet.(42)

The intention of the 1923 Agreement was to put relations between the community and the Union Government on a former legal footing, but Baster hopes for independance were not to be realised.

I do not intend to examine the terms of the agreement in any detail in this paper. The main focus will be on relations within the community rather than between the community and the Union government. The people were deeply divided over their Council's acceptance of the Agreement and this division still has some relevance in Rehoboth politics today. Changed economic circumstances, the congruence of colour and class, and marriage strategies were important in the development of this schism and it is these factors which I intend to describe here.

About 20% of the Baster population accepted the Agreement which their Council had signed, and remained loyal to the Union Government.(43) They were called the Minority Party. The rest (who became known as the Majority Party), rejected it and created an impressive alternative political, judicial and educational system. They elected a Captain and Council of nine members(44) (called the

New Council to distinguish it from the collaborators Old Council) as well as creating a body known as the Parliamentary Council which had 23 members. A magistrate was appointed from their own ranks to deal with civil and criminal cases,(45) a jail was constructed, and convicted prisioners were set to work on road repairs.(46) Improvements were made to the village water supply(47) and two new schools were built.(48) Taxes of approximately £100 were collected and a further £100 subscribed to a widows' and orphans' fund.(49)

The rebels were variously referred to as 'the Bolshevic element','the inferior type of Baster', 'those with a good deal of native blood' and 'the poorer classes'. But the division between the Minority Party and Majority Party was not a simple one between rich and poor. Although the Majority party did attract most of the poorer people, some were also to be found in the Minority Party and even sitting on its Old Council.(50) Certain of the New Council members were amongst the wealthiest people in the Gebiet. Despite this lack of a close correlation between level of wealth and political persuasion, deteriorating economic circumstances were probably an important contributing factor to the rebellion and bear examination, particularly since they provided a means through which the Union authorities were able to put pressure on the recalcitrants to come to heel.

There is no doubt that the community was becoming progressively poorer. The main source of wealth derived from stock breeding, and although statistics for the Gebiet are extremely unreliable,(51) it is clear that the increase in stock was not keeping pace with the growth in human population. Although some sources show an increase in cattle in the period 1908-1925, the later figure may have included stock owned by Herero who had moved into the Gebiet in the intervening period. Even if it did not, cattle were the capital of the rich farmer, while small stock, which did not show a significant increase in these years,were the means of subsistence of the poor man, so that the figures might be interpreted as showing an increasingly uneven distribution of wealth in the community.

The changing character of the village also provides evidence of a widening gap between rich and poor in respect of land ownership. In 1908 the townsfolk were rich farmers who kept houses in the village while Baster bywoners or non-Baster servants cared for the stock on their farms.(52) By 1925 the majority of those living in the town were landless poor.(53) Many had sold their farms and taken up employment as transport riders or artisans in Windhoek and other urban centres. Two developments caused a decline in transport riding. The first was the rinderpest epidemic of 1897 which destroyed large numbers of Baster trek oxen.(54) The second was the completion of the

railway line in 1909,which meant that transport riding became outmoded on what had been the most lucrative haul between the coast and Windhoek.

Opportunities for artisans were to last a little longer than those for transport riders, but the First World War and subsequent depression caused a slump in the building industry in which most Baster artisans were employed. They were then forced by economic circumstances to return to Rehoboth where their status as Burgers entitled them to a free house and garden plot in the village. Ex-transport riders and artisans were to be found in the ranks of both political parties.

Members of the Old Council and its predecessors had been drawn mainly from the ranks of the wealthy farmers. To some extent their positions were hereditory,(55) although this was not written into the constitution. The Captain was elected for life and, with two Councillors whom he appointed, and three others elected by the community, he controlled most aspects of Rehoboth political and economic life. The most important element in the Rehoboth economy was grazing land.

Initially land had been communally owned,(56) but in 1890 farm titles were issued for land occupied by Council members. These farms were 10,000 hectares in extent, surveying being conducted by riding around the area on horseback and the journey being timed with a pocket watch. In 1895 the first titles were issued to ordinary burgers. These farms were only 7,000 hectares in size. A clause in the title deed prohibited the sale or mortgaging of land without the permission of the Captain and Council. A similar provision applied to the exporting of wood or grass from the property.

Allegations were made that this control over the sale of land was used to the personal benefit of councillors, but even where land was sold ostensibly in the interests of the community at large, the wealthy tended to reap the major benefit. The sale of the 'Debt Farms' is a useful example.(57)

The incomes to be earned from transport riding, particularly during the establishment of Windhoek as the Capital of the territory, had caused a number of Basters to seek credit from White storekeepers for the purchase of waggons and equipment. Some had fleets of as many as six waggons(58) and employed other burgers as drivers and assistants. The collapse of the service left many in substantial debt. These were mainly rich men, traders being hesitant to extend credit to the poor. In order to meet the demands of the storekeepers, it became necessary to sell land. White landowners within the boundaries of the Gebiet had a history of encroaching onto their neighbours' farms, and so rather than selling the debtors' own farms and running the risk of creating

more expanding White islands within Baster territory, the Council decided to dispose of a block of land lying on the eastern border. The area lacked sufficient surface water for stock farming on any large scale, and was used mainly as a hunting ground for the provision of both meat and game pelts.(59) The manufacture of karosses and floor mats from these pelts was an industry on which the wives of poor burgers depended to supplement their incomes. The intention was that farmers who were dispossed through the sale of these farms would be compensated with vacant land within the boundaries of the Gebiet, but only three cases of this being done are recorded,(60) although as many as 33 might have lost their land in the transaction. The poor paid the debts of the rich with their land.

Control over the issue of liquor permits also lay in the hands of the Council.(61) Its members attempted to extend their control over the very lucrative(62) distribution of liquor through the creation of a community store.(63) When the authorities intervened and prohibited the sale of alcohol through this outlet,(64) the Council tried to have its sale outlawed in the whole Rehoboth district, requesting that certain individuals be granted total exemption from the permit system to purchase liquor only in Windhoek.(65) This request was refused by the Administrator, who noted that it would mean that only those who had the means to get to Windhoek would have access to liquor, and an illicit trade controlled by the wealthy could develop as a result.(66)

The refusal to abide by the terms of the Agreement of 1923 led to further economic disabilities being imposed on supporters of the New Council. The Union Authorities and the collaborating Old Council tried to use their control over the export of wood and stock and the issuing of permits for arms and ammunition to force the recalcitrants to capitulate.

The export of firewood provided one of the few potential avenues for men without stock to make a living. It was not a very attractive undertaking for the supplier. The major consumers appear to have been state organisations in Windhoek,(67) and the price of wood was controlled. The system also favoured the agents who were White shopkeepers living near the railway line. The traders paid the suppliers in goods or 'goodfors', thus extracting a profit on the goods as well as a handling fee on the wood. It was acknowledged by the authorities that the scales on which the wood was weighed were rigged to the advantage of the agent.(68) A permit for the export of wood had to be granted by the Old Council whose right to office the majority of the community did not accept.

The New Council reacted to this situation by advertising new prices for wood and announcing the appointment of its own agent in the columns of the Algemeine Zeitung of 13 September 1924. Woodcutters who continued to acquire permits from the Old Council had their lives threatened and their waggons damaged.(69) The authorities then threatened to withdraw the trading licences of those Whites who accepted wood from the Majority Party,(70) and instructed stationmasters not to rail wood without the necessary permit.(71) This action did not meet with complete success however. Agents cancelled their contracts with the New Council(72) but continued to export wood which was allegedly "from their own land",(73) no doubt at a greater profit. This was insufficient to meet the demand however, and the Basters lost their contracts to other more reliable suppliers,(74) when it became clear that the woodcutters did not intend to back down and apply for permits from the Old Council.

Possession of a rifle was a decided economic advantage in Rehoboth. Stockfarmers were plagued by jackals, and without a rifle there was little means of protecting lambs and kids from these vermin. Game pelts were cured and sold, as has been mentioned above. Venison could also provide a supplement to the family diet and reduce the need to slaughter livestock. As would be expected, the authorities would grant permits to purchase arms and ammunition only to those Basters whose support for the Agreement was beyond question.(75)

Stock to be sold or exported had to be dipped and branded in terms of regulations laid down in the Agreement, so that legal markets were closed to those who refused to abide by the law. Some speculators did risk prosecution and bought unbranded stock and stock which had not been dipped,(76) no doubt at prices which favoured the purchaser. The refusal by Baster rebels to cooperate in the government's locust extermination program must have led to another economic disadvantage through the destruction of pasturage and reduced stock holding capacities.(77)

While it is likely that a decreasing share in the economic benefits of the colonial economy fostered a growing militancy among the poor, the level of wealth of members of the community and their political affilliation do not correlate faultlessly. Certain anomalies arise when one examines the composition of both collaborationist and rebel councils. Of the twelve members of the Old Council, six were rich farmers, three were poor artisans, one was a teacher and another a clerk; both of the latter being poor men. The level of wealth and occupation of the twelfth member is not known. The New Council had seven prosperous and one poor farmer in its ranks. The ninth member was a poor artisan, while details on the tenth councillor were not available.(78)

In 1914 the German Resident in Rehoboth wrote as follows to his superior in Windhoek:

> "Even today I cannot agree that a large number of the Proletariat can stand in marked contrast to the few mostly hated large landowners. As time goes on it might come to pass that such be the case; however the conglomeration of the nation as a whole, as also of the large families, can hardly now be influenced by this social question. The influence of these families, especially van Wijk's and Beukes' together with their widespread relationship, is no doubt far reaching..... It is the duty of the Government to have under their control the elders of these families". (79)

Nine years later a breach developed between these influential families. The Union Government retained its control over the elders of only some of the families, while the others used their 'widespread relationship' to enlist the support of the dispossessed.

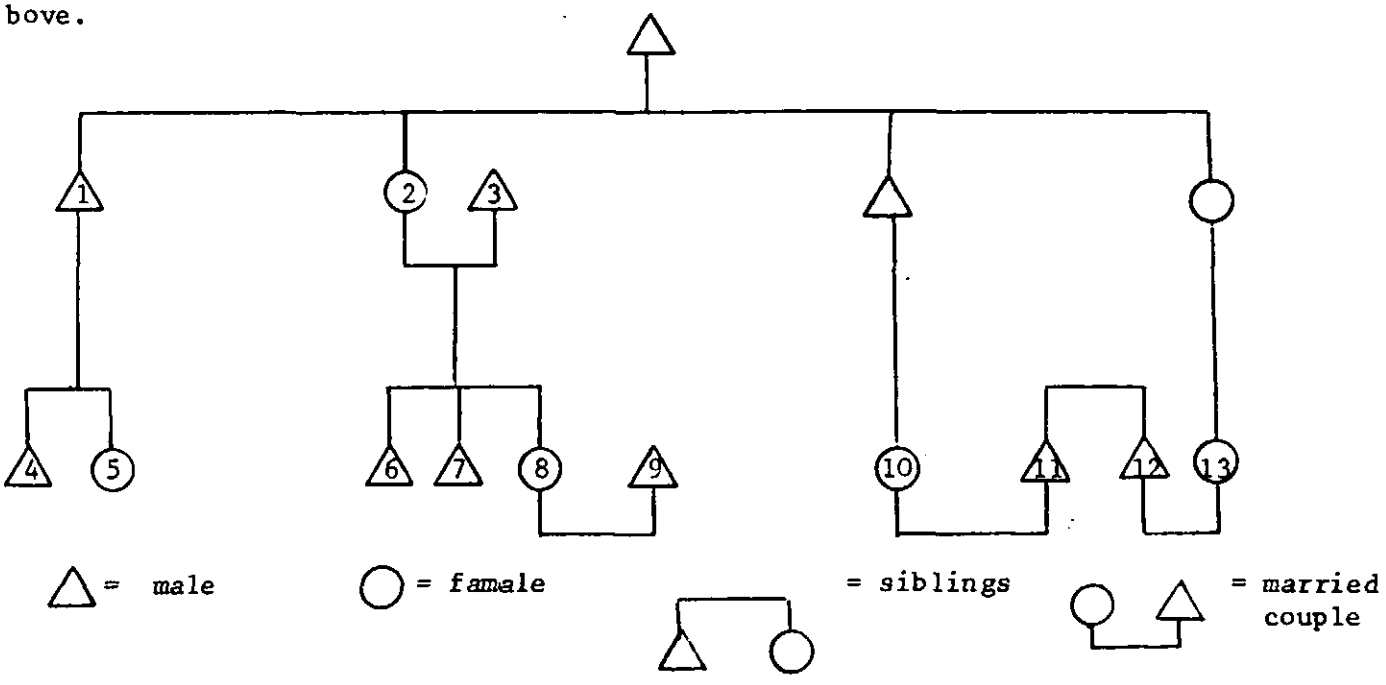
The division of the community into distinct upper and lower classes was noted by Eugen Fischer, a geneticist who conducted research into the Baster community in 1908.(80) These classes correllated significantly with physical appearance (caucasoid or Khoi) and to some extent with surname. Upper-class surnames were Van Wyk, Beukes, Mouton, Diergaardt, and Koopman; while Vries, Orlam, Witbooi, and Engelbrecht were generally the names of poor and dark-skinned Basters.(81)

A high degree of class endogamy prevailed and some family endogamy was also practiced through cousin and second cousin marriage. The latter type of endogamy has certain economic benefits since the division of land between heirs favours both males and females equally. Land can thus be consolidated in the second generation through cousin marriage, making for fewer dispersed and economically non-viable units. Endogamy is contradictory to political stability.(82) Discrete units without cross-cutting familial bonds develop, and the unity of the society is threatened by fission unless the political structure is maintained by economic relations and/or ideology, as in the case of the caste system in India.

Apart from keeping wealth within one family unit, cousin marriage is also believed to ensure that children resemble their parents in physical appearance. Where members of the upper class did contract marriages with those of lower social standing, this most often served to import light-skinned individuals into the ranks of the wealthy. A further infusion of caucasoid genes took place when White men (often traders and artisans with small businesses) took Baster wives. This form of marriage (vorentoetrouery or forward marriage) was encouraged through the offer of a farm as a dowry.(83) Children of such marriages inherited not only their father's genes, but also his store, smithy or

whatever. In contrast, marriage to Nama or Blacks (agteruittrouery or backward marriage) was discouraged, and was practiced mainly by men from the lower social class. Children of such marriages were prohibited from inheriting fixed property within the Gebiet and were generally incorporated into the group from which the mother had derived; taking with them as patrimony whatever livestock their father had owned. These extra-community marriages thus led to an infusion of capital at the top end of the social hierarchy and a drain at the bottom.

These mechanisms had led to the development of fairly discrete and relatively wealthy family segments which were in competition for political power. This power was mainly in the hands of the ruling segment of the van Wyk family in 1923. Their genealogy shows the extent to which members of the Old Council were related to one another, and offers evidence of the marital strategies described above.



The individuals numbered 1 and 4 were Captains of the community, the son taking over from his father when the latter died in 1906 . Numbers 6, 7, 9, 11 and 12 were councillors in 1925. In the case of the brothers (6 and 7) the tendency towards inheriting political office is evident onceagain; while 9 , 11 and 12 were wealthy men who had married into political power. Numbers 4 and 5 (the Captain and his sister) as well as 10 were products of cousin marriages.(84)

Fischer classified 16.5% of the sample of Basters which he investigated as European' in appearance, using such criteria as skin colour, the form and colour of hair and the shape of the eye. In the genealogy above, numbers 2, 3, 5, 10 and 13 were recorded by him as falling into this group. Although number 3 was a poor man, he increased the caucasoid component in the segment, while 9, 11, and 12, all relatively non-caucasoid in appearance, were wealthy men who were probably attracted to the segment by 'European' wives and potential political office.(85)

The correlation between political persuasion and colour is quite significant. Although only 20% of the total population supported the Old Council, at least 52% of those classified by Fischer as 'European' were to be found in the ranks of the Minority Party. In contrast, the Majority Party may have attracted the support of as little as 7.5% of this 'European' group.(86)

Although marginally less wealthy and darker, genealogies of the family segments from which the leadership of the Majority party were drawn show characteristics similar to those of the members of the Old Council. A large number of members of the New Council or its Parliamentary Council appear on that segment of the van Wyk genealogy from which the rebel Captain originated, and the politically active members of the Beukes, Diergaardt and Mouton families were also often close relatives.(87) The rebellion depended on popular support for its success however, so that the tendency towards the formation of a coterie on the basis of kinship is not nearly as strong among the rebels as among the collaborators. Attempts were made to attract as many family segments as was possible to the Majority Party.

Many leading members of such segments won seats on the Parliamentary Council, a body which was not provided for in the Baster Constitution. Its duties were rather vague: members could deputise for Captain's councillors if the latter were indisposed; and were also responsible for carrying out the orders of the Captain and Council and acting as a link between the people and their government.(88) The intention appears to have been to create a body which was more representative than the Old Council and its predecessors.

The election of Niklaas van Wyk as Captain of the New Council was also a political strategy designed to attract support from his large and influential family. There were at least three candidates with qualities of leadership superior to those of van Wyk. Two were unsuitable because of previous connections with the Old Council and alleged involvement in certain of its malpractices, while the third, Petrus Diergaardt refused nomination, suggesting that the van Wyks might be alienated if the Captaincy passed out of their family.(89) Seven years after the rebellion, while other members of the New Council attempted to keep resistance alive in the Gebiet, van Wyk was to prove the extent of his influence by persuading a large group of former rebels to join ranks of the Minority Party.(90)

Another innovation intended to make the New Council a more representative body may have been the broadening of the electorate. There had been indications that Hereros and other non-Basters living in the Gebiet had had the status of 'Achterburghers' conferred upon them,(91) but what exactly this meant in terms

of rights is not clear. In the election of the rebel leaders, it was reported that "Kaffirs, Hottentots, strangers who were not members of the community, women and girls were allowed to vote" in the election of rebel leaders.(92) While the accuracy of this statement, made by the soldier who was later to lead the attack on the village, is not above question,(93) all of the elements which he mentions were important in the rebellion.

The passive resistance of the women and children during the assault on the village has already been mentioned. It should also be noted that women had petitioned the authorities on both the liquor problem(94) and the political situation, expressing their solidarity with their menfolk in their opposition to the Agreement.(95)

Certain politically prominent individuals in both the Majority and Minority parties were not descendants of the original trekkers who had settled in Rehoboth. Some, like Franz Maasdorp, the secretary to the Old Council, had entered the territory only after it came under the control of the Union forces. Others were refugees from a German attack on that group which had chosen to remain in the south under the leadership of Klaas Swartz.(96) The blame for the split in the community was later to be laid at the door of these strangers; a strategy also used in other small-scale kin-based communities, where unity is restored by shifting the responsibility for dissension onto outsiders.(97)

The most important of the elements mentioned by de Jager was undoubtedly the involvement in the rebellion of non-Basters, and particularly of the Herero. In fact on the 5th of April more Blacks and Nama were arrested than were Basters.(98) There were a considerable number of Herero in Rehoboth in 1925. One source indicates that there almost were twice as many non-Baster as Baster stockowners in the Gebiet in 1923.(99) At the end of the 1904-06 war, those Herero who survived were deprived of their lands and prohibited from owning stock.(100) With South African occupation, stock ownership was once again permitted, but little land was made available for Herero settlement. The slaughter or looting of about 10,000 head of Baster - owned stock by German troops during the 1915 rebellion had left the farms of some burgers understocked.(101) This land was rented to Herero pastoralists who moved into the Gebiet in 1915. During the period of Baster resistance to the Union Government, these landlords put pressure on their tenants to refuse to brand or dip their animals; in some cases threatening them with eviction if they complied with the regulations.(102) The aim of the Herero stockowners at this time was to increase their herds rather than to breed animals for the market,(103) so the instruction did not cause them any immediate hardship, and the campaign met with almost complete success.(104) It was also alleged that the Basters were responsible for the

spreading of a rumour that the brand used for 'native' cattle was the mark of the Government, and that the Government intended seizing all stock so branded.(105)

Herero in settlements outside of the Gebiet began to oppose the regulations. In an incedent at Mariental, 180 kilometers south of Rehoboth, a court building was stormed by an angry crowd of Herero, many of whom were women; and men who had been sentenced to imprisonment for failing to brand their stock were released. Later the crowd gave up the prisoners to the authorities, but a large number insisted on being jailed as well as a statement of their defiance of the law.(106) It was also reported from Hoachanas, a Nama and Herero settlement about 40 kilometers from the south-eastern border of the Gebiet, that stockowners were refusing to comply with the branding regulations.(107)

Other reports came from Herero areas to the north. 'Hard-riding emmissaries' whom the magistrate suspected might have been Basters were met near Okahandja by unknown people who supplied them with fresh horses at the end of their journey from Ovitoto. The magistrate reported with concern that independance was being openly discussed on Sandveld farms, and that 'the Savages' were starting to resort to 'old customs' such as those which had accompanied the chosing of chiefs in earlier times.(108)

That opposition was not being expressed against the stock-branding regulations alone is evident from the school boycott at the mission school in Windhoek. Herero parents withdrew their children for some weeks when the missionary refused to comply with their demand that he stop accepting a government subsidy. Writing to Smuts, the Deupty Administrator noted that while he had no evidence to connect the two incidents, Baster parents had issued a similar ultimatum to the missionary in Rehoboth a short while before.(109) Theft of stock from White farmers, a crime which the branding regulations were designed to prevent, was also increasing; and the Herero were reported as becoming 'exceedingly truculent'.(110) The concern felt by many settlers was summed up by one Bassingthwaite in a conversation with the Rehoboth magistrate. He was reported as having said that "while he considered the Bastards as a rule rather cowardly and short of ammunition ..... the Herero once roused were brave and warlike".(111)

Without the involvement of the Herero, the Union Government might have been content to bide its time and use the considerable economic leverage it was able to bring to bear in order to force the Basters into obedience through means other than military action. But the Herero represented a far more difficult problem. The major obstacle was that the land on which the Government hoped to settle Union farmers had originally been taken from the Herero by the Germans

in 1906 at the end of the war and that there was a large population of pastoralists of this group without reserve areas. The massacre of the Herero had been the strongest argument against the return of the colony to the Germans,[112] and any action against these people by the holders of the Mandate would have undoubtedly raised questions in the League of Nations. The Union Government's exercise of the Mandate had already come under scrutiny as a result of their action against the Bondelswarts in 1922.[113] A rebellion by the Herero would have been more difficult to contain[114] and the international repercussions of military action might have led to the revocation of the Mandate.

FOOTNOTES. (A206/are Administrator's files in Windhoek archieves).

(1) A206/3: Statements of Sergeant Erasmus and others: 28/3/25.

(2) Official Gazette for S.W.A. No's 157 & 158 of 1925.

(3) See Scott, M. In Face of Fear JHB. 1948, pp. 60-63.

(4) Interview.

(5) Viall, J.D. "The history of the Rehoboth Basters". Typescript in Administration library, Windhoek.

(6) A206/3: Proceedings of a Board of Officers, S.W.A. Police, 2/10/25

(7) U.G. 41 - '26, pp. 100-107.

(8) A206/3: Report of a police spy, p. 4. 23/12/24.

(9) Histories of the trek are to be found in Marais, J.S. The Cape Coloured People JHB. 1939 pp. 88-89, Fischer, E. Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen Jena 1913 pp. 23-30. The best history is given in Britz, G. Ons Eeufees Windhoek, 1970 pp 6-19.

(10) See Ross, R. "The !Kora wars on the Orange River 1830-1880" J.A.H. 1975.

(11) U.G. 41 - '26 : p. 34.

(12) See Vedder, H. South West Africa in Early Times London, 1966 p. 325-

(13) Ibid.

(14) U.G. 41 - '26 : Deals in detail with the confusion surrounding the title.

(15) Wm. Coates Palgrave's Letter Book. p. 11 (C.T. Archives).

(16) U.G. 41 - 26 : p. 31.

(17) Ibid: pp. 98-99.

(18) Frey, K. Die Nie-Blanke Bevolking van S.W.A. (S.A.U.K.) 1958 ?

(19) Best source on the Baster's role in the Military is Bayer, Die Nation der Bastards Berlin 1906.

(20) U.G. 41 - '26 : p. 188.

(21) Hesse, H. Die Schutzvertraege in Suedwestafrika Berlin 1905. Quoted in U.G. 41-26. p. 188.

(22) U.G. 41 - 26 : p. 222.

(23) Ibid: p. 192.

(24) Ibid: p. 220

(25) Ibid: p. 190.

(26) See Below, p. 7-8.

(27) A206/4 : Chief Secretary to Secretary for Defence, 4/10/15 "... it is generally accepted that the proceeds from these transactions were pocketed by members of the Raad".

(28) Op.cit. p. 40.

(29) Ibid.

(30) See Bley, H. South West Africa under German Rule London, 1971.

(31) A206/3 v. 1X. Magistrates Report 2/1/28 p. 2.

(32) Report on the Inquiry in Regard to the German-Bastard Question (De Waal Commission) Govt. Printer Pretoria p. 32.

(33) Ibid: p. 9.

(34) See U.G. 41 - '26 p. 227 for Dewdney Drew's rendering of the phrase.

(35) A206/1 v. I : Drew to The Chairman, Mandates Commission, 9/8/28.

(36) A206/7 v. I : Magistrate to Chief Secretary, 19/10/15. Also Secretary to Ordinance Officer, 8/8/19.

(37) A206/14 : The Council issued a permit which was simply countersigned by the magistrate. The latter kept no record.

(38) A206/1 : Undated document.

(39) A206/4 : Administrator to Secretary for Defence, 18/7/16.

(40) A206/3 : Magistrate to Secretary, 19/10/23.

(41) See (27) above.

(42) A206/14 : Magistrate to Secretary, 3/7/17.

(43) Estimates vary from 17% (based on the number of voters who participated in an old council election) to 25% (based on the report of a police spy - see below footnote 49). I could discover no list of loyalists in Windhoek archieves, and my own estimate is based on lists of applicants for branding irons and firearm licences issued in the period.

(44) A206/3 : Announcement of results of New Council elections, 16/1/25.

(45) A206/3 : Magistrate to Secretary, 16/5/24.

(46) A206/3 : Magistrate to Secretary, 9/5/24.

(47) As for (45)

(48) A206/6 : Magistrate to Secretary, 2/10/30.

(49) A206/3 : Report of Police spy, 11/7/24.

(50) U.G. 41 - '26 p. 107 gives some statistics for the area. Those of 1908, from Fischer (op.cit.) are almost certainly totally inaccurate. Compare Goldblatt, I. History of South West Africa C.T. 1971, p. 199 on the number of cattle in Rehoboth Gebiet.

(52) See Fischer (op.cit.)

(53) Interview.

(54) See below, p. 7.

(55) Fischer, p. 232.

(56) Rehoboth Land Tenure Inquiry Commission 1930, Wits Archives.

(57) U.G. 41 - '26 has much detail on the transaction; see in particular evidence of Drew pp. 200-215.

(58) U.G. 41 - '26, p. 214.

(59) Interview.

(60) See (56) above, Minutes of Evidence.

(61) See (37) above.

(62) A206/14 Magistrate to Secretary, 3/7/17, noted with alarm that "considerably over £300 is paid in cash for liquor" in less than three months.

(63) A206/14 Magistrate to Secretary 15/8/16, mentions a rumour that the Cooperative store has applied for, or intends to apply for a liquor licence.

(64) A206/14: Secretary to magistrate, 12/8/16.

(65) A206/14 : Council to magistrate, 17/7/17.

(66) A206/14 : Administrator to Secretary for Defence, 15/11/17.

(67) A206/18 : Owen (Manager Sleith Davis & Co.) to Magistrate, 7/11/24.

(68) A206/2 v.I : Magistrate to Secretary, 8/3/33; "I have not the slightest doubt..... that one particular dealer in the Gebiet does not credit the Bastards with the full weight of the wood". Although for 1933, it accords with information from an interview.

(69) See (67) above.

(70) A206/3 : Magistrate to Secretary, 4/1/25.

(71) A206/2 : v. I Administrator to Divisional Superintendent S.A.R. & H., 20/12/24

(72) See (70) above.

(73) A206/2 v. I : Magistrate to Secretary, 23/3/25.

(74) A206/18 : Government Attorney to Secretary, 24/9/28.

(75) A206/7 : Applications were still being granted or refused on the basis of whether the Burgher had been 'loyal' or not until at least the early 30's.

(76) A206/3 : Administrator to Magistrate, 10/10/24.

(77) A206/3 : Magistrate's Annual Report, 16/1/25.

(78) Interview.

(79) Quoted in De Waal Commission. p. 34. See (32) above.

(80) Op.cit.

(81) Op.cit. p. 236.

(82) Harris, M. "Caste, Class, and Minority" Social Forces, v. 37, 1959.
"Exogamy is a levelling influence and is usually accompanied by a reciprocal flow of goods and services as well as by an exchange of spouses.
Endogamy, on the other hand, ...tends to perpetuate inequalities. ...Very strong restraints of a political nature are needed to keep a society composed of endogamous subgroups from flying apart".

(83) U.G. 41 - '26 p. 18.

(84) Genealogical information is from Fischer (Op.cit. and his later article "Neue Rehobother Bastardstudien II Fortfuhrung und Erganzungen der Sippentafeln". Zeitschrift fur Morphologie und Anthropologie Bd. XI. 1938) Archival records, and interviews.

(85) Classification in Fischer (1913) pp. 311-321. Note that while No. 8 was not examined by Fischer, the fact that both her parents fell into the 'European' category leads one to assume that she too would have been 'European' in appearance.

(86) In the case of 6 of the 12 men thus classified, political affiliation is not known, although two were possibily New Council supporters. One was certainly a member of the Majority Party, while five were definitely Minority Party members. It was not possible to determine the political persuasions of the women with any measure of certainty. I have classified them according to husbands' and fathers' affilliations. According to this M.C criterion, the sample of 15 splits as follows: nine Minority Party; one Majority Party; three possibly Majority Party; two unknown.

(87) In some cases close relatives were to be found in opposite political camps.

(88) A206/4 v.I Undated document titled 'Election is notified in the "Burgerryk" of Rehoboth'.

(89) Interview.

(90) A206/3 : Magistrate to Secretary, 23/8/32. Reports that the so-called Majority Captain Niklaas van Wyk and 123 others who also belonged to the Majority Party have now all joined the Minority Party. By the 2nd of August the next year, the magistrate could report that 64% of the Burgers were now members of the (ex) Minority Party.

(91) A206/7 : Detective Constable Vermaak to Divisional C.I. Officer, 3/4/24.

(92) A206/4 v. II : Document, undated.

(93) De Jager appears to have got his information from an Old Council member whose original statement contained the qualification that 'it appeared as if' this had been the case.

(94) A206/14. Petition to the Administrator from Katharina Beukes and 124 others dated 24/8/16.

(95) A206/3 Petition to the Administrator protesting the threats of the police and notifying him that they will not accept the Agreement 'zoo lang wy leven'. Signed by Elzie Diergaard and six others.

(96) U.G. 41 - '26, p. 42.

(97) Frankenberg, R. Village on the Border London, 1957.

(98) A206/3 : Administrator telegraphs Hertzog, 5/3 (probably 4) /25.

(99) U.G. 41 - '26, p. 107.

(100) See First, R. South West Africa Harmondsworth, 1963. p. 82. "The Herero tribal domain had been declared government property and the Herero themselves forbidden to keep cattle...." Also Bley (op.cit.) p. 171 who notes that Herero cattle were also expropriated.

(101) U.G. 41 - '26, p. 231, also De Waal Commission.

(102) A206/3 : Report of a spy of the Native Affairs Office, 31/12/24.

(103) A206/3 : Administrator to Hertzog, 17/10/24.

(104) A206/3 : Magistrate to Secretary, 9/3/25.

(105) As for (102) above.

(106) U.G. 33 - '25, p. 20.

(107) A206/3 : Magistrate to Secretary, 27/2/25. Also A206/1 Document dated Sept. 24

"The Hereros in the Tses Reserve have flatly refused to have their cattle branded, no doubt as a result of the attitude of the Hereros in the Gebiet".

Also Cape Argus 3/4/25. Reporting speech of Prime Minister :

"The most serious aspect of the position" pointed out General Hertzog, "has been the effect it has had on the natives, who have apparently come to regard the area as a sort of place where no laws exist, and where all laws are repudiated. When a police patrol visited the place.... the attitude of the natives.... was openly hostile".

(108) A206/3 : Magistrate of Okahandja to 'Drew' (Presumably Harry Drew, Chief Native Commissioner), 18/12/24.

(109) A206/3 : Administrator to Smuts, 6/6/24.

(110) As above (109)

(111) A206/3 : Magistrate to Secretary, 4/1/25.

(112) Goldblatt, op.cit. p. 230 "... the 'notorious' Blue Book of 1918 .. had been used at Versailles to demonstrate Germany's unfitness to possess colonies." The work referred to is Report on the Natives of South West Africa and Their Treatment by Germany London 1918.

(113) See Davis, A.M. The Bondelzwarts Affair: A Study of the Repercussions, 1922-1959. Pretoria, 1961.

(114) U.G. 33- '25 para. 33 "The position in the Gebiet was being closely watched by natives throughout the Territory, and it was felt that an initial disaster might have widespread results".