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POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND MOBILISATION AMONGST AFRIKANER DIGGERS ON THE LICHTENBURG DIAMOND FIELDS, 1926-1929.

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Arts
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

Timothy Paul Clynick

_____day of_____, 19__.

III.

Abstract

The alluvial diamond diggings in the district of Lichtenburg, in the south-western Transvaal, attracted many thousands of the Union's poor white population between 1926 and 1929. These 'diggers' settled in the tin and sacking rural towns scattered about the six diamond-bearing farms that formed the nucleus of the Lichtenburg [illegible]. Their hopes for fortune were dashed when they encountered a determined group of capitalist entrepreneurs, who eventually acquired the highly valuable diamond deposits. The [illegible] conflict between the owners and the diggers had political repercussions which rippled far beyond this community. [illegible] the character of the Pact Government and the [illegible]. The NP was forced into an alliance with the [illegible] and the owners of the diamond mines to protect the [illegible] of the state (by means of the [illegible], and this alienated Afrikaner diggers [illegible] the diggers formed the Diggers' [illegible] social, economic and political [illegible] they nominated and elected their [illegible] A.J. Swanepoel, a digger, in [illegible] Tielman Roos, who was also Chairman [illegible] Transvaal NP, and who had held the seat [illegible] the party.

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Preface

A number of people have been influential in assisting me to prepare this dissertation and I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to them. Professor N.G. Garson, provided guidance and support for the duration of my study and to him I owe particular thanks. Professor P.L. Bonner and Professor C. van Onselen were sources of inspiration, encouragement and model examples of academic rigour and curiosity. Their input to this study, however indirect, must be acknowledged. My wife Rose has borne the trials of this dissertation with a fortitude and stoicism worthy of another century, and I thank her for this. To my parents, who helped in so many ways, I owe a great debt. To my colleagues at the University of the Witwatersrand and in particular to Hilary Sapire, especial thanks are due. Finally, I must express my deepest appreciation to my colleagues at the University of Bophuthatswana for their assistance.

The University of the Witwatersrand and the Human Sciences Research Council provided much welcomed financial assistance. The opinions and conclusions expressed in this dissertation are however my own and cannot be regarded as a reflection of the opinions and conclusions of these bodies.

List of Abbreviations

In Text:

DU: The Diggers' Union of South Africa.

RC: The Diggers' Union "Poor Whites" Relief Committee.

NP: The National Party.

SAP: The South African Party.

In Footnotes:

ARB: Secretary for the Department of Labour.

GES: Secretary for Health.

GNLB: Government Native Labour Bureau.

JUS: Secretary for Justice.

MCK: Mining Commissioner for Klerksdorp.

MNW: Secretary for Mines and Industries.

NTS: Secretary for Native Affairs.

TES: Secretary for the Treasury Department.

TPS: Transvaal Provincial Secretary.

VWN: Secretary for Social Welfare.

Chapter One.

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the texture of white politics in a Transvaal rural community in a period of rapid social change between 1926 and 1929.[1] It is focused on understanding the nature and content of the political consciousness of a community of Afrikaners on the alluvial diamond diggings in the Lichtenburg district of the Transvaal between these years. This study aims to extend our knowledge of the variety and complexity of the Afrikaner experience of impoverishment.[2] This concern stands as a necessary corrective to that literature which views all Afrikaner 'poor whites' as a homogeneous social grouping, and as the simple objects of a social welfarist programme from the perspective of the 'state' or 'capital'.[3] The process of impoverishment was regionally discrete and chronologically

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[1] 'The whole rural population (of the Transvaal),' stated a correspondent to The Star in May 1926, 'is gradually becoming a mass of wanderers, roaming from one digging to another.' (The Star, 17 May 1926) For a detailed treatment of the Transvaal rural economy in the 1920's see H. Bradford, 'The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa in the South African Countryside, 1924-1930', Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985, pp.33-98.

[2] For a detailed account of these Afrikaner communities, see the five volume Report of the Commission on The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Stellenbosch, 1932.

[3] See, for example, the Report of the Commission on The Poor White Problem with its concern with the creation of a 'poor white class'. For an historical materialist account of the genesis and politics of the white working class, see R. Davies, Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa, 1900-1960, Brighton, 1979. See also D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948, Johannesburg, 1983.

uneven. Van Onselen's sensitive studies of the transformation of Afrikaner urban communities on the Witwatersrand from 1886 to 1914 have drawn our attention to the salience of these two characteristics of impoverishment. He found that Afrikaners were not only 'conquered' by capital in the countryside, but subsequently also in their new urban milieu. This suggests that a re-examination of Afrikaner impoverishment would advance our understanding of the making of modern 'Afrikaner' political consciousness.[4] Impoverishment is not a uni-linear process, and this dissertation charts only one of the many routes into the working class. This study is limited to one community, that of the Lichtenburg diamond diggers, whose experiences were unique in many ways. In general, however, many Afrikaner communities experienced impoverishment in this period and the alluvial diamond diggers were simply one of these rural communities broken up by the economic transformation of the countryside in the 1920's.

The 1920's were a decade of uneven economic growth and political turbulence. Most studies of these themes in this decade have an urban rather than a rural bias that has skewed the historiography away from the major fact of rapid social and economic change in the South African countryside. While the consequences of these processes have been sketched out in some detail for the urban areas, little attention has been paid to the rural areas in which the urban working class was born. Yet the late 1920's saw an acceleration in the rate and scale of impoverishment of both white and black country dwellers, which phenomenon formed the focus of pathbreaking studies by Macmillan

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[4] C. van Onselen, 'The Main Reef Road into the Working Class: proletarianisation, unemployment and class consciousness amongst Johannesburg's Afrikaner poor, 1890-1914' in Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914, Volume 2 New Ningvah, Johannesburg, 1982 pp.111-170.

and de Kiewiet in the 1920's and 1930's.[5] With the exception of these major liberal works, the experiences of South Africa's industrial revolution by the rural white population has been little explored in South African historiography. In the western districts of the Transvaal, within which the alluvial diggings were centred, the 1920's were nightmare years for this social group. Intermittent years of debilitating drought were interspersed with floods and locust plague. Chronic indebtedness of the white farming class, concludes a recent study, was caused by a combination of 'low incomes and low profit margins; high land prices and slow turnovers'.[6] This insight can be applied with profit to the farming class of the western Transvaal. The alluvial diggings proved to be an irresistible magnet to this impoverished farming community which flocked to the diggings to accumulate new resources of cash and to stave off the ever present threat of proletarianisation. Thus the theme of rural collapse underpins this study of Afrikaner politics on the Lichtenburg diamond diggings.

This study of the alluvial diggers is a local one, because of the need to focus on the actual experiences of the rank and file of Afrikaners, rather than elite groups who had privileged access to the state, the government or a political party.[7] It does not seem necessary, therefore, to justify this local

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[5]W.M. Macmillan, The South African Agrarian Problem, Johannesburg, 1919, Complex South Africa, London, 1930; C.W. de Kiewet, A History of South Africa: Social and Economic, London, 1957.

[6]H. Bradford, 'The ICU', p.41.

[7]For a criticism of these approaches see S. Marks, 'African and Afrikaner History', Journal of African History, XI, 3, 1970. For a recent re-affirmation of these criticisms, see B. Bozzoli, 'Class, Community and Ideology in the Evolution of South African Society' in B. Bozzoli, (ed.), Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives, Johannesburg, 1987.

microstudy except to note that this method has obvious advantages in capturing the experiences of these Afrikaners. Microstudies generate a sense of the dynamics and local specificity of change and they allow a glimpse, however brief, into the perceptions and consciousness of the historical actors. Ambiguity, complexity and multiplicity seem to characterise the consciousness of these Afrikaners, in contrast to the one-dimensional caricatures which dominate the existing literature.[8] Afrikaner political consciousness does not seem to be dominated by a sophisticated nationalist agenda. Rather it reflects more closely the more mundane issues of everyday life as R. Bouch concluded from his study of constituencies in the Eastern Cape. White voters, he noted, 'frequently chose to support one or other of the major parties not on the score of the national issues which party leaders enunciated, but because one party attempted more energetically than the other to resolve problems such as poverty....'[9]

This study tests Bouch's contention by means of a local study rather than a constituency, because a constituency is an arbitrary administrative unit and not the terrain of social interaction. Between 1926 and 1929 it was also possible to talk of a digging community in a geographical sense. Before this period the term 'digging community' referred to an occupational group and not to a community in a specific place. Most 'diggers' lived in small groups on isolated farms in the south-western districts of the Transvaal province.[10] Following the

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[8] For an account of these see D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, pp.4-8.

[9] R. Bouch, 'The South African Party and the National Party in the Eastern Cape 1919-1924', M.A. dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1979, pp.1[illegible].

[10] Descriptions of this early period are rare, but see

Lichtenburg discoveries, however, a population of some 80 000 whites and 100 000 blacks was thrown together, in a settlement of similar size to Benoni or Krugersdorp, on an isolated spot some 12 miles north of the town of Lichtenburg for a continuous period of thirty-six months. This geographic stasis generated an uncommon degree of public attention and provided a rich source of documentation, thus making this local study possible.

A variety of sources have been utilised in this dissertation, as is evident in the 'List of Sources' included below. Because the diggings did not fall exclusively under any one government department, a wide range of official (and unpublished) documentation has been consulted. The Department of Mines papers deserve special mention as a rich, and strangely under-utilised, historical source. Many other government departments, though, proved equally rich, including the Treasury Department and the Department of Public Health. The Transvaal Provincial Secretary's files were of great interest. Yet the most useful source for this dissertation, as is obvious from the footnotes to the various chapters, were the contemporary newspapers, of which The Star was the most useful. I have utilised The Star extensively because this newspaper, from the outset of digging at Lichtenburg, stationed a special correspondent on the diggings. The Star,in addition, ran a weekly column, called 'Life on the Diggings', which addressed a wide-range of activities ranging from 'social' activities, to the economic problems of the diggers. Much correspondence from the diggings was published in this paper as 'Letters to the Editor', and these were an extremely useful yardstick to public opinion on the diggings. The many sources consulted reflect the

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W.M. Macmillan, Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History, London, 1930, p.106. See also J.S. Kotze, 'Geskiedenis van die Wes-Transvaalse Diamantdelwerye', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education (PUK), 1972.

difficulties of constructing local studies, especially for communities which lie beyond the mainstream of social and economic development.

This local study helps to put one of these small communities back on the historical map, but it also helps to refine some broader historiographical controversies. The first of these concerns the nature of the Pact government. In 1924 the Pact parties - based on an electoral agreement between the National Party (NP) and the South African Labour Party (SALP) - won the general election, upsetting the South African Party (SAP) government headed by General J.C. Smuts. For the first time since Union in 1910 power was transferred from one party to another by the exercise of the ballot.[11] This election has come to symbolise for scholars more than a simple parliamentary transfer of power and a vindication of the electoral system. This is because, as a recent study puts it, 'the change of government in 1924 has been almost universally interpreted as one of the two major "turning points" in South African history (the other is the election of the National party government in 1948)'.[12] The Pact's triumph in 1924 has raised some interesting questions which lie at the heart of current historiographical debates about the nature of the South African state. The issues are the relationship between political parties and class interests, and that between ideology and party-political representation, and also the effectiveness or

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[11] N.G. Garson, 'The 1924 general election: a turning point in South African history?', unpublished paper presented at the African Studies Association of Australia and the Pacific and the Australian Historical Association held at the University of Sydney on 28 August 1982.

[12] D. Yudelman, The Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital and the Incorporation of Organised Labour on the South African Goldfields, 1902-1939, Westport, Connecticut, 1983, p.22.

otherwise of the electoral system as a vehicle for redistributing wealth and power in the society. These debates have been succinctly summarised by Yudelman:

> Afrikaner nationalists have seen (1924) as the culmination of the march of Afrikaner consciousness from the country into the towns, which was made irreversible by the Afrikaner takeover of the state in 1948. Liberals have seen 1924 as a decisive victory for racist white workers that entrenched the legislative color bar and elevated race discrimination to the prime motivation of the South African state. Marxists have seen the 1924 turning point as a victory for capital's policy of dividing the working class on racial lines, the triumph of the propagators of (false) racial consciousness, and the death of class-based politics (whilst) neo-Marxists have argued that 1924 marks a vital victory in the struggle for control of the state by local businessmen ("national capital") over foreign mining capital ("metropolitan bourgeosie").[13]

These conflicting interpretations of the significance of the Pact's election victory are, with important exceptions, based on analysis of the election manifesto of the Pact, rather than on the impact of the Pact on sections of the electorate.

When we turn to these important exceptions we see the value of focusing on the 'impact' of policy rather than on its intentions. For example, Yudelman has explored the actual impact of the Pact's programme for the white mineworkers whose interests, it has been argued, were represented by the Pact: 'the truth of the matter is,' he concluded, 'that the smashing of the 1922 strike and revolt dealt white miners a blow from which they had not recovered by the beginning of World War II.' The Pact was subsequently unable to restore the privileges of the mineworkers, nor was it able to incorporate them politically;

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[13] D. Yudelman, ibid., p.23.

as a supportive class.[14] We must therefore distinguish the impact of the Pact's programme for these white mineworkers from the rhetoric. It seems that the exercise of the franchise by white mineworkers was thus unable to offset the influence of men with wealth and power in the society.

Working from this perspective we can examine similar lacunae in the treatment by scholars of other sections of the white electorate who were said to have been the special recipients of the Pact's legislative programme. In the case of 'farmers' the Pact victory was brought about largely by electoral gains in the Transvaal countryside where the NP won 7 new seats from the SAP. It is thus concluded that the Pact's impact on the Transvaal countryside was positive and the extensive legislative programme of the Pact as regards agriculture is used as evidence for this.[15] The results of the 1929 general election seem to substantiate the view that the Pact represented the interests of the farmers, and that the farmers remained politically loyal to the NP.[16] Yet no analysis of a rural constituency for this period has been completed. Recently Bradford has demonstrated that the impact of the Pact's agricultural programme was uneven, and that 'agriculture' does not refer to a homogeneous group of farmers. The Pact's rural programme was regionally diverse, and

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[14] D. Yudelman, The Emergence, pp.213-248. See also J. Lewis, 'The Germiston By-Election of 1932: The State and the White Working Class during the Depression', in Bonner, P., Working Papers in Southern African Studies, Volume 2, Johannesburg, 1981, pp. 97-120 for a confirmation of this.

[15] See for example D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, pp.27-29.

[16] In 1929 the NP won 78 seats as against the SAP's 61. However, as Hancock points out, the SAP secured the support of the majority of the electorate (48.6 percent of the voters supported the SAP whilst 40.36 percent voted for the NP). W.K. Hancock, Smuts:The Fields of Force, 1919-1950, Cambridge, 1968, pp.216-217.

uneven in its impact on farmers in the Transvaal.[17] There were class divisions amongst farmers which determined their political responses to the Pact but no studies have been done to test the party political ramifications of the Pact's agricultural programme.

For the purposes of this dissertation it is the absence of these types of studies for a third important section of the electorate, the so-called 'poor whites', which is significant. They constituted approximately 25 per cent of the white population in 1929, and are assumed to have been the prime beneficiaries of the Pact's legislative programme.[18] It has been suggested that because of their voting power the 'poor whites' were able to determine the nature and direction of the Pact's legislative programme, and as a result the Pact 'vociferously' legislated pro-white populist policies to retain their political support.[19] It has also been suggested that they were a homogeneous social group who were mobilised politically and socially by a uniform ideology.[20] No studies have yet addressed the impact of the Pact's policies on the

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[17] H. Bradford, 'The ICU', pp.33-98. See also R. Morrell, 'Competition and Co-operation in Middelburg, 1900-1930', in W. Beinart; P. Delius; and S. Trapido, Putting a Plough to the Ground. Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930, Johannesburg, 1986.

[18] R. Davies, Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa 1900-1960: An Historical Materialist Analysis of Class Formation and Class Relations, Sussex, 1979, pp.179-244; D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, pp.1-33.

[19] D. Yudelman, The Emergence, pp.22-30 and pp.214-248; N.G. Garson, 'The 1924 General Election', p.3.

[20] H. Adam and H. Gilliomee, The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power, Cape Town, 1979, pp.83-127 and 145-177. See also L. Salomon, 'Socio-Economic Aspects of South African History, 1870-1962', Phd. dissertation, Boston University, 1962.

rural poor white electorate, although much attention has been paid to the urban poor white class.[21] No analysis examines the relationship between the rural unemployed and the NP in the period between 1924 and 1929, nor the impact of the Pact's programme on them. The vigorous contemporary political debates about the poor white question, the anxiety about social and moral degeneration of this section of the white population which they reflected, and the escalating numbers of poor whites during this period all point to a pressing need for such studies.[22] This dissertation seeks to reduce this paucity in the historiography by examining the impact of the Pact on the digging community between 1926 and 1929, a community which was being rapidly transformed by South Africa's industrial revolution and which became a focus of concern about the 'poor white question' in the 1930's.

This study also contributes to the broader historiogr[illegible] debates on the political behaviour of Afrikaners. The ex[illegible] literature available on this behaviour operates at a high of abstraction from which the political ideology of Afrikaners is inferred. The most recent historiography has tended to move away from these over-arching, undifferentiated accounts of this political behaviour and to take a less dogmatic look at the salience of 'determining' social categories. Yet it seems that

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[21] For examples of an expanding literature see the following: R. Davies, Capital, State and White Labour; D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme; C. van Onselen, 'The Main Reef Road'.

[22] By the 1920's an average of 12 000 whites were leaving the rural areas annually. In 1932 it was estimated that over 300 000 whites out of a total population of just over one and a half million whites were 'poor whites'. (D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, p.26). See also D.F. Malan, Die Groot Vlug: n' Nabetragting van die Arm-Blanke Kongres, 1923, en van die Offisiele Sensusopgawe, no date.

none of these studies advances our understanding of how and why ordinary white South African men voted the way they did or of the historical context in which they made their political choices. We have learnt much about the broad impact and influence of 'race' and 'class' in the formulating of public policy, and about the structures of domination and exploitation within the society, but we know very little about those 'experiences' of Afrikaners which shaped the ways in which they perceived the world, and moulded their political consciousness. This study contributes to this debate by focusing on the actual 'experiences' of Afrikaners in a specific historical context and by examining the social and political structures within which their consciousness was formed.

There is an extensive historiography concerned with the manner in which Afrikaners conceived and conducted politics in the twentieth century, but these studies are largely unhelpful here precisely for the reasons mentioned above. These studies are overviews from which Afrikaner political thought or behaviour is simply read off from a priori assumptions. They do not help to explain political behaviour in particular because the analytical nets they deploy are not fine enough to capture the variety of historical 'experiences' of Afrikaners. Bozzoli explains it this way:

> In an ideal analysis, we would have to start from the very basic experiential category of the individual, work through the local groups and communities in which such individuals forge their world view, and tease out the layers of ideology-formation which shape that individual in the group or community of which he or she is a part. All this, moreover, would have to be done against the background of broader social and economic changes.[23]

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[23] B. Bozzoli, 'Class, Community and Ideology', p.2.

This dissertation recognises that such an 'ideal' analysis is not possible, but nevertheless does attempt to focus on the actual experiences of the digging community to explain their political behaviour, rather than relying on existing explanations of Afrikaner political behaviour.

We can identify in the extensive literature about Afrikaner politics two major macro-type explanations of how Afrikaners acted politically. The first is concerned with the homogeneity of Afrikaners and stresses those things which Afrikaners have in common with other Afrikaners. Both Afrikaner nationalist and liberal writers lie within this camp. According to this analysis, all Afrikaners are 'automatically integrated into the cross-class unity of the volk, instinctively share the presumably innate 'Afrikaner' conservative traditional cultural values, and are always available for ethnic mobilisation in terms of their common 'Afrikaner' interests.'[24] The concept of 'Afrikanerdom' is used to capture all these various themes in an over-arching, largely ahistorical social category which is then used to explain Afrikaner political activity, past and present. Differences between Afrikaners in terms of wealth, status, education and social values are simply glossed over in favour of an overarching Afrikaner culture. The experiences of 'Afrikaners' in terms of place and time are taken to be universal. This is clearly not very useful to a study which addresses the relationship between the experiences of Afrikaners in a specific context and their political consciousness at a particular historical moment. Much of the literature in this school has focused on 'the party', rather than 'the people', and as a result we know a lot about the organisation and leadership of the party, but very little about the consciousness of the

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[24] D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, p.6.

rank-and-file who constituted the bulk of its membership. The party is frequently conflated with the people. Political activity which takes place outside of the party is dismissed as deviant or mischievous. A dependence upon the policy statements of the leaders of the party, rather than on the historical milieu in which they were uttered has tended to support this type of approach. The notion of the people is, however, questionable, for Afrikaners, as O'Meara points out, have historically always been 'disparate, differentiated and highly fractious' and can only be reduced to a monolithic and static ethnic group with grave reservations.[25] This study explores this relationship between 'the party' and 'the people' in some detail by focusing on the relationship between the experiences of ordinary Afrikaners and the 'organised expression' of the people - the party - in a local context, and by distinguishing clearly between them.

The second approach stresses the heterogeneity of Afrikaners - those things which divided Afrikaners from one another. Thus what needs to be explained is how Afrikaners with very little in common were induced to act in concert politically. Marxist historians have focused on class issues as being one of the factors which have divided Afrikaners politically.[26] In order to explain how Afrikaners began to vote for an exclusively Afrikaner nationalist party - the NP - in spite of major class differences between them, they have deployed a model which stresses the primacy of the party, and the role of a clique of middle class intellectuals within it.[27] Once again we are

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[25] D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, p.6.

[26] The pioneering studies of R. Davies, Capital, State and White Labour and D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme, are classic examples of these studies.

[27] For a refined example of this approach see I. Hofmeyr,

faced with a model which has advanced our understanding of 'the party' but which has merely alerted us to divisions within the Afrikaner community. The relationship between the Afrikaner working class on the Witwatersrand and the Afrikaner nationalist parties has been the focus of these studies. Yet for all the advances made, these historians have also been the victims of their teleological theoretical system, which they have deployed as an over-arching explanatory mechanism. The consciousness of Afrikaners and their experiences of the varied social and economic forces which shaped their value and belief-systems have, with some important exceptions, been simply read off from the conjunctures between the interests of the capitalist classes and the state. Consciousness becomes simply a function of objective class position within the social structure, with little attention being given to the lived experiences of ordinary Afrikaners as moulding this consciousness. Little explanation is offerred of the nature of party political support, and the impression is given that popular support for a party is largely irrelevant to the ultimate outcome of elections. This dissertation focuses precisely on this tension between the party message and popular perception of it, and contributes to a fuller understanding of the relationship between the consciousness of Afrikaners and the larger social and economic forces which encompass them.

S.Marks remarked 18 years ago that 'we still lack a history of Afrikaner politics... which looks at politics in terms of social structure, economic and class interests, and at the

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'Building a nation from words: Afrikaans language, literature and ethnic identity', in S. Marks and S. Trapido, The Politics of Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa, New York, 1987, pp.95-123. A recent critique of this approach is H. Giliomee, 'Western Cape Farmers and the Beginnings of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1870-1915', Journal of Southern African Studies, 14, No.1, October 1987, pp.41-63.

grass-roots level of mobilisation and party recruitment, rather than one which simply repeats the policy statements made by the generals'.[28] The questions which Marks raised concerning social structure, economic and class interests, and the grass-roots of mobilisation and party recruitment, which became those addressed by a school of historians, variously termed 'radical' or 'revisionist', are those which this dissertation examines. However, although we draw on the intellectual heritage of this particular school, we deploy the experiences of ordinary people as a necessary counter-weight to excessive concerns with 'social structure'. If we are to understand the political responses of ordinary people we need to focus on the manner in which broader economic and social forces are refracted through their experiences, and discover how their experiences mould their political consciousness.

When we turn to the secondary literature on the alluvial diggings we encounter many omissions. The broader studies of mining in South Africa fail to mention alluvial diamond digging following the shift of the individual digger from the Vaal river diggings to the dry diggings of Kimberley in 1871.[29] Following the centralisation of the diamond mining companies at Kimberley in the 1880's and the formation of the De Beers Diamond Mining Company (De Beers), however, many individual diggers returned to work on the alluvial deposits on the banks and bed of the Vaal river. The alluvial digging community thrived in the 1890's, when new alluvial deposits were discovered at some distance from

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[28] S. Marks, 'African and Afrikaner History', Journal of African History (JAH), 9, No.3, 1970, p.446.

[29] R.V. Turrell, 'Capital, Class and Monopoly: the Kimberley Diamond Fields, 1871-1889', Ph.D., School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, 1982; D.J. Viljoen, 'Die diamantnywerheid van Suid-Afrika', D.Comm. thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1956.

the Vaal confluence with the Harts river in the district of Barkly West in the Cape Colony. In 1908 diggers prospecting in the vicinity of Bloemhof and Christiana in the Transvaal Colony found extensive deposits of shallow alluvial gravel scattered across the vast plain between the Harts and the Mooi river near Potchefstroom.[30] These deposits attracted a large community of diggers from many occupations into the south-western districts of the Transvaal. By 1920 over 20 000 diggers were working on these deposits. There was thus a history of rapid expansion in alluvial diamond digging following the centralisation of the diamond mining companies in the nineteenth century, which has gone by largely unremarked upon. Yet there have been some important exceptions to these lacunae. G. Beet and T. Terpend, who were themselves diggers on the river diggings in the early decades of this century, published a pioneering study of this community in 1917. Their Romance and Reality of the Vaal River Diggings is the only study of this community in existence.[31] A number of geological investigations of the alluvial deposits have been published which are useful for technical detail, but do not throw much light on the community itself.[32] Kotze's dissertation on the 'Geskiedenis van die Wes-Transvaalse Diamantdelwerye' provides a useful guide to the sources available in the official archive deposits but does not attempt

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[30]J.S. Kotze, 'Geskiedenis van die Wes-Transvaalse Diamantdelwerye', M.A. dissertation, Potchefstroom University for Higher Christian Education (PUK), 1972.

[31]G. Beet and T.L. Terpend, Romance and Reality on the Vaal River Diggings, Kimberley, 1917.

[32]See for example P.A. Wagner, The Diamond Fields of Southern Africa, Johannesburg, 1914; A.L. du Toit, The diamondiferous gravels of Lichtenburg, Union Government, Department of Mines, Geological Survey Memoir No.44, Pretoria, 1957; J.W. van Backstrom, Die geologie van die gebied om Lichtenburg, Union Government, Department of Mines, Pretoria, 1952.

to address social structure, class interests, consciousness or conflict on the Transvaal diggings.[33]

Some studies have examined the economics of the alluvial diamond industry, largely as a by-product of their interest in the diamond mines.[34] These have provided useful background material on the economics of diamond production, but little detail on the producers themselves. Booyens's sociological investigation of these producers in the 1940's was a useful but ahistorical piece of work which was of little value for the years 1926 to 1929.[35] A set of studies was produced by two students from Pretoria and Potchefstroom universities, on the 'social and economic history' of the alluvial diggings in the Transvaal in the twentieth century.[36] Krause's study centered specifically upon the Lichtenburg alluvial diggings from about 1926. Both of these studies, whilst rich in administrative detail and empirically exact on matters of policy, did not set out to explore the diggings experience from the perspective of the ordinary people, who appear to be largely absent from their accounts. The themes which they have explored reflect an unwillingness to go beyond the dominant Afrikaner nationalist historiographical school, exhibiting a theoretical poverty which systematically turns away from questions about social structure,

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[33] J.S. Kotze, 'Geskiedenis'.

[34] For example see D.J. Viljoen, 'Die Diamantnywerheid'; T. Gregory, Ernest Oppenheimer and the Economic Development of South Africa, Cape Town, 1962.

[35] J.J. Booyens, 'Die delwersberoep. n' Ekonomiese analise met verwysing na die Lichtenburgse diamantvelde', M.A. dissertation, University of South Africa, 1942.

[36] J.S. Kotze, 'Geskiedenis' and A.E. Krause, 'Die Lichtenburgse Alluviale Diamantdelwerye, 1928-1945: n' Sosio-Ekonomiese Geskiedenis', M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1985.

class interests and political consciousness. Krause asserts that the diggers had no political consciousness whatsoever, whilst Kotze argues that, as 'Afrikaners', the diggers automatically would have supported the NP.[37] They both hold the opinion that the diggers had little or no community organisation or spirit, lacked social and political initiative, and were largely the passive recipients of state and privately donated largess. For both Krause and Kotze the digging population was characterised as homogeneously 'poor' in this period, largely on the evidence that poverty on the diggings in the 1930's ran at a high figure, with no analysis offered for this. Their studies thus offer little more than rich empirical detail. It appears as if Keegan's criticism of Afrikaner social historians is relevant here: 'Local history (becomes) a directory of local government, white religious and educational institutions and cultural organisations.'[38] These theses are ultimately simple lists of legislative enactments and administrative routine.

Turning from these accounts to the secondary literature on 'poor whites' we find similar problems of approach and analysis. Perhaps the best of these accounts are those of the academics who undertook extensive research for the Carnegie Commission in 1928 and 1929.[39] Their investigations, by concentrating on the collection of local case studies of poor white families, describe the conditions of life on the diggings, and highlight the poverty and squalor of white digging families. Their

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[37] Ibid.

[38] T. Keegan, Rural Transformations in Industrializing South Africa: The Southern Highveld to 1914, Johannesburg, 1986, pp.xvi-xviii.

[39] See Report of the Carnegie Commission, 5 volumes. In particular, see J.F.W. Grosskopf, Volume 1; R.W. Wilcocks, Volume 2 and M.E.J. Rothman and J.R. Albertyn, Volume 5.

analyses are thus descriptions of the moral failings of 'the poor white', their lack of initiative, and their failure to adapt to the 'progressive' spirit of modern industrial life. Grosskopf's conclusion reflects these concerns quite graphically:

> The whole atmosphere of the diggings, with their cosmopolitan population, their lack of community feeling or recognised moral standards, and their all-pervading sense of gambling, recklessness and instability, (has reacted) perniciously on (these) simple rural people.[40]

Wilcocks attributes this 'pernicious attitude' to outdated sensibilities about manual work: 'the digger... carrying out his own operations, employing natives to do the hard manual work, was unwilling to surrender his position and mastership. The man who had formerly been an underdog felt that here "he was his own master and not the rich man's dog".'[41] These descriptions lie much closer to the social reality of the diggings than do the rather sanitised accounts of those scholars examined above. But there are still problems with the sort of analysis offered by the Carnegie investigators for this study of the consciousness of Afrikaners on the alluvial diggings. Their analyses of the processes moulding the diggers' experience are superficial, and do not explore the dynamics of class formation on the diggings. This dissertation draws on the groundwork of this path-breaking investigation, but tries also to elaborate some themes which are of current interest.

In the study which follows we explore the themes of social

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[40] J.F.W. Grosskopf, Volume 2, pp.103-104.

[41] R.W. Wilcocks, Volume 2, p.100.

structure, economic and class interest, political mobilisation and consciousness, and party recruitment amongst the white digging community. The second chapter explores the theme of social structure of the Lichtenburg digging community between 1926 and 1929. It describes the formation of the community and demonstrates the existence of competing classes on the diggings, evaluating the influence of these competing economic interests on the social structure of the diggings. It identifies a capitalist class which includes local Lichtenburg landowners, large land-owning companies, local and national entrepreneurs involved in the diamond digging syndicates and companies, the national investing public, professional diggers with capital and equipment, and storekeepers, hoteliers and other service-orientated entrepreneurs. This chapter argues that these capitalists were crucial in determining the social and economic structure of the diggings. 'Diggers' are identified as a heterogeneous group of producers consisting of rich capitalist professional diggers and moneyed speculators, an intermediate group of independent but marginalised and transient producers spanning the gap between moneyed and impoverished diggers, white wage workers and, finally, the unemployed.

Those poorer 'diggers' who were attracted to the diggings found that their own opportunities for accumulation were very circumscribed by the operation of this capitalist class because they did not have unlimited access to the richest gravel deposits. The risks they bore in digging were therefore much higher than was the case for the capitalist class. The vast majority of diggers were forced to occupy an intermediate position in the social structure as marginalised but independent producers. Their rank and status were crucially determined by their access to new sources of alluvial gravel. As the gravel deposits were worked out, or monopolised by capitalists, these diggers were forced to seek work, first in partnership with other diggers, secondly on shares with other diggers, and finally for wages. Like their poor white brethren elsewhere

in the Union', the chapter concludes, 'those diggers without financial backbone were unable to secure an economic foothold.' Consequently they were forced into the ranks of the working class as dependent wage labourers, or into the ranks of the unemployed.

The third chapter explores the theme of economic and class interest on the diggings. It does this by analysing the political responses of diggers to the attempts of capitalists to mould the nature of alluvial digging to suit their own parochial class interests. In this attempt, the role of the Pact government was crucial. The political response of the digging community chiefly determined the nature of the Pact's response. Diggers who had access to the corridors of power articulated their own programme which was at variance with those of local capitalists on the diggings. This chapter details the little explored intervention of the international diamond magnates - the monopoly capitalists - on the local diggings. It suggests that these businessmen, specifically Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and Solly Joel, entered into temporary political alliance with a local popular diggers movement. This alliance was crucial in informing the Pact's response to the digging community. The Precious Stones Act (Act 44 of 1927), which was passed by the Pact in order to reserve the diggings for the 'small man' and to prevent the local capitalists (landowners, company and syndicate promotors and local entrepreneurs) from exploiting alluvial gravel, was the product of this alliance between Oppenheimer and this diggers movement. Diggers were, thus, not politically inarticulate, nor were they simply the 'victims' of 'capitalists'. Their political response to 'exploitation' was vigorous, and the diggers' movement which emerged articulated their demands which reflected the economic and social experiences of the digging community. This was the matrix in which the consciousness of the digging community was formed. 'Experience' thus crucially informed their political responses to the broader social and economic forces transforming their

community.

Chapter Four turns from a concern with social and economic structure, to examine the impact of popular digger consciousness upon political life. The digging community consisted of white voters, who, as Van Onselen has suggested in the case of the white working class on the Witwatersrand, were neither politically powerless, nor enslave' within an all-embracing nationalist paradigm.[42] On the diggings, impoverishment and the actions of an unsympathetic government, which was seemingly determined to eliminate independent alluvial digging, clashed explosively with a growing narrow digger chauvinism which detected 'conspiracy' and collusion with 'monopoly' amongst its party political representatives in 1928. The National Party, 'its party', was increasingly seen to have 'betrayed' the 'small man', the marginalised diggers on the public diggings, because of the failure of the party to combat growing impoverishment amongst the community. The NP, for a number of reasons, was slow to respond to demands of this radical constituency. In December 1927 a number of diggers, 'all of them Nationalists', established the South African Diggers Union (DU) to articulate digger demands on a political platform. Within six months this Union was used to launch a local candidate who stood against Tielman Roos, the 'Lion of the North', the NP member for Lichtenburg of 14 years standing, the Chairman of the Transvaal NP, Minister for Justice in the Pact cabinet, in the general election of 1929. This candidate, A.J Swanepoel, a man without long-standing political credentials, was nominated as the diggings NP candidate in August 1928 against Roos. When the NP district committee by-passed Swanepoel and nominated Roos as the official NP candidate for the constituency, Swanepoel announced his determination to stand as an 'Independent Nationalist', so

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[42] C. van Onselen, 'The Main Reef Road', pp.164-165.

confident was he of 'representing the will of the people'. In November Roos withdrew his candidacy in favour of Swanepoel. The diggers, he stated, needed their own representative in Parliament. This chapter thus explores some of the tensions which existed between 'the party' and 'the people' during the Pact's period of office. It does so from the perspective of the rank-and-file members of the NP. We suggest that this exciting rural electoral battle opens up new perspectives on the relationship between political consciousness and party political support which needs to explored further.

We finally turn to consider the different perspectives on impoverishment held by unemployed diggers and the Pact government. This involves an evaluation of the process of impoverishment within the digging community in the period between 1926 and 1929. Afrikaner proletarianisation on the diggings is identified as a process which involved specific class-based interventions, which were the 'motor-force' for locally-based political activity. The diggers, more especially those threatened with the prospect of losing their independent livelihood, exhibited a well-developed awareness of their interests, which were threatened, initially, by the local companies and syndicates (which monopolised the most valuable claims), and then by the large diamond mining magnates and the Pact government following the passage of the Precious Stones Act in November 1927. The relationship between proletarianisation and the interests of the capitalist classes emerges with some clarity in this chapter as we focus on the fortunes of the most vulnerable sections of the Afrikaner community. Initially poverty was largely 'casual' on the diggings, or imported from the rural agricultural economy. Following the passage of the Act, unemployment and poverty were dramatically accelerated on the fields, and peaked before the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. Diggers driven into the ranks of the unemployed condemned the Pact's handling of the 'alluvial digging question' and blamed their plight on the government. The diggers were

critical of the content and implications of the Pact's 'white labour policy' which would drive them into the ranks of the working class at 'kaffir wages' rather than setting them up as independent producers, and this perception moulded the content of their local political agenda.

Chapter Two

DIAMOND PRODUCTION FROM THE LICHTENBURG DIAMOND DIGGINGS,1926-1929.

Die grond eienaars kryg duizende van pond van die delwers, en sy geef die delwers gans geen kans, wil zy het op Grasfontein duizend van rezerf-kleimse, en ik denk dat dit die grootste onreg van die wereld is, want als je die stroms van geld zien wat hulle van die delwers kry, dan kan jy nie dink, dat hulle die delvers zoo gemeen kan behandel nie.[1]

The owner of a proclaimed farm, the nearest hotel, the storekeepers, and the diamond buyers, in about that order named, are the only sure profit-makers from the gamble of diamond digging.[2]

Why not make the diggings as unattractive as possible for the moneyed element...? Under present conditions syndicates, rich farmers, moneyed speculators who can afford to pay runners and unscrupulous diggers get the plums and the poorer and older diggers get nothing.[3]

Introduction

This chapter examines how ownership of property on the alluvial diamond diggings in the Lichtenburg district of the western Transvaal shaped one particular moment in the history of the South African countryside between 1926 and 1929. These diggings were centred on the diamond-bearing gravels scattered across the surface of the farms. Here large numbers of the Union's poor whites - the victims of rapid economic growth -

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[1]MNW 886, mm525/27, 'Comments on Precious Stones Bill', A.J. de Villiers to Minister of Mines, 12 April 1927.

[2]The Star 21 July 1926.

[3]The Star 31 December 1926.

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congregated in this period of industrialisation. This chapter casts some light on the Lichtenburg diggings experience, and demonstrates that although the diggings beckoned invitingly to the impoverished Afrikaner on the land, and to the unemployed from the cities and small towns of the platteland, their economic opportunities there were very circumscribed. These diggings were the kingdom of the moneyed elements, to whose interests the poor white paid homage and tribute, and not the Utopia of the small man. It is this class perspective which is absent from the literature on the Lichtenburg alluvial diggings, and this chapter explores the theme of class formation in the digging community more fully.[4]

In January 1926 two du Plessis brothers discovered diamonds whilst prospecting on Klipbankfontein, twelve miles north of Lichtenburg, where they farmed. In May a public alluvial digging was proclaimed on the farm. Many landowners in the district immediately turned with a new eye to formerly barren and unproductive veld and began prospecting for diamonds. On Elandsputte, an adjoining farm, Dr Harold Harger, prospecting under contract with the landowner, Kosie Voorendyk, located one of the richest deposits of alluvial gravel in the subcontinent. This farm, like others in the immediate vicinity, was not very remarkable in appearance or agricultural potential and had formerly been subdivided in an effort to sell it. But by August 1926 scarcely a farm in the whole of Lichtenburg and Ventersdorp could be acquired whether it carried gravel or not.[5] From this

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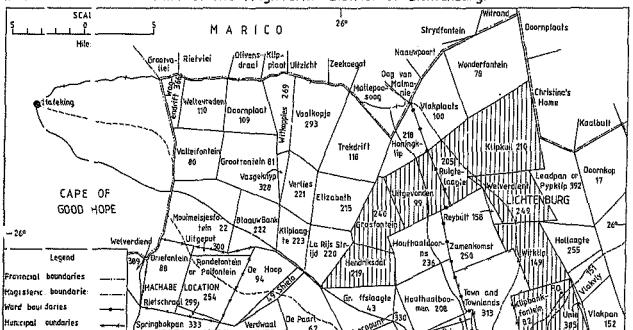
[4]See for example J.S. Kotze, 'Geskiedenis van die Wes-Transvaalse Diamantdelwerye', M.A. dissertation, PUK, 1972; A.E. Krause, 'Die Lichtenburgse Alluviale Diamantdelwerye, 1928-1945: 'n' Sosio-Ekonomiese Geskiedenis', M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1985.

[5]For early prospecting on Klipbankfontein (Manana) see Lichtenburg Museum, manuscript, J.W. du Preez, 'Die ontdekking van Diamante op Manana, January 1926', 26 September 1926.

MAP 3

Part of the Magisterial District of Lichtenburg.



Adopted from UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA. PROVINCE OF TRANSVAAL. MAGISTERIAL DISTRICT OF LICHTENBURG. SHEET M7. Lithographed in January 1925

barren dusty corner of the Transvaal there sprang into being a local industry producing over a million carats of diamonds in 1926 and over two million in the following year, representing a total money value of five million pounds: an industry having its economic foundations firmly rooted in the world's demand for diamonds, supporting directly and indirectly some 250 000 people.[6]

From June 1926 till August 1927 forty five public alluvial diamond diggings were proclaimed in a rough run on seven farms in the Klipveld. These farms were Klipbankfontein No.82, Uitgevonden No.99, Ruigtalaagte No.203, Klipkuil No.210, Witklip No.149, Grasfontein No.240 and Welverdiend No.294. From January 1928 to December 1928 a further fifty proclamations followed on six farms.[7] For a brief moment the small village of Lichtenburg blossomed into the noisy hub of the South African alluvial diamond industry where 'everybody seemed to be making money'. The prospect of acquiring wealth beyond their wildest dreams sparked off one of the most astonishing local migrations of the twentieth century. From all parts of the Transvaal, men, women and children, were 'wending their way to Elandsputte.... Many people are transporting their entire homes.... Cows, sheep, donkeys, goats and even pigs are being driven along behind the wagons - just like the moving of the tribes described in the Bible.'[8] In this Union-wide rush people from all walks of life were represented. Professional people, civil servants, white workers, and altogether the flotsam and jetsam of the towns and

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[6] The Star 21 July 1926. For comparative figures see Appendix One.

[7] J.S. Kotze, 'Geskiedenis', p.218.

[8] The Star 5 June 1926.

cities were drawn towards this vortex of the alluvial diamond world.[9] The largest percentage of the diggers were farmers many of whom had experienced bad seasons and now turned to the diggings for quick cash returns. The unemployed from the Witwatersrand and the smaller Transvaal towns were present in equal proportions. Professional diggers formed the third largest section of this population and the older, established diggings on the Orange and Lower Vaal Rivers, and at Bloemhof and Wolmaransstad, were like cemeteries 'the old guard' having trekked to Lichtenburg 'to the last man'.[10]

Voorendyk's farm Elandsputte formed the hub of the diggings, and descriptions of the camp in June 1926 give some idea of the glamour, mystique, movement and contrast which characterized these prosperous and optimistic early days of digging:

> Flaring lights on a big wheel cast a giant circle against the star-studded heaven. Swarming throngs walled round merry-go-rounds, shooting galleries and Aunt Sallies and all the appurtenances (sic.) of James' Carnival Company and extended businesses. Ventriloquists and cheap jacks attracted huge throngs. It was busier than the sideshows at the Durban beach during the season. In another quarter of the camp, however, a solemn prayer and song service was held. For an hour a preacher... exhorted his congregation to lead Christian lives... and the open-air service in the midst of the mimosa bushes broke out with solemn hymns sung by 50 voices, accompanied by an harmonium.[11]

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[9] 'Alluvial Diamond Diggings. Analysis of Population Types', The Social and Industrial Review, 3, No.15, March 1927, pp.221-233 (see Appendix Two below); A.A. van Wyk, 'Report on Lichtenburg Digging Schools in Transvaal Province', U.P. 9-1929, Department of Education, Annual Report for year ending 31st December 1929', p.62; The Star 17 July 1926.

[10] The Star 9 June 1926.

[11] The Star 10 June 1926.

The township at Elandsputte had a main street three miles long, its central feature being the spacious square with its four cafes, a 'bioscope' and dance hall, and many stores. All along the main street of the camp there were stores occupied by grocers, bakers, butchers, jewellers and watchmakers, clothing merchants, bootmakers and hairdressers. This tin and canvas city grew as people flooded in from the surrounding districts. By August this human antheap constituted one of the largest gatherings found on one spot in the Union of South Africa.[12]

In August the diggings of Bakers (known locally as Bakerville), adjoining Elandsputte, was proclaimed and its output soon outstripped that of Elandsputte, attracting more people into the area. The township and diggings there was an extraordinary phenomenon:

> As far as the eye can see... are irregular rows of galvanized iron huts, whose shining tops glisten in the blazing sunlight, even through the dust which rises like a barrage or the smoke of some erupting volcano.... They had changed the face of nature. On the long, low curved ridge not a vestige of plant life remains; from end to end it is scarred and pitted, deep, wide holes alternating with piles of ochre-coloured gravel and stones. All the claims... edge in (on each other) and each is worked by a group of men, who work as though urged by whip and spur. Often the whole group consists of Europeans... bent on keeping down labour expenses....[13]

Elandsputte now formed the metropolis of the diggings:

> It is here that all the diggers are congregated, living in their huts not far from the ground which has proven to be so rich in diamonds; here we have the Hatton

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[12] The Star 5 August 1926, 30 July 1926, 30 June 1926.

[13] The Star 26 October 1926.

> Garden of the diggings; here we have the "Piccadilly"- the street of shops and bars and cafes which runs along the edge of the ridge; here we have the police barracks and the magistrates court; here we have the pumping station... which gives water to all the inhabitants of the diggings.[14]

This 'hideous, corrugated town' was little more than two irregular lines of closely-jammed zinc buildings separated by a roadway of dust strewn with garbage. But it formed the economic nucleus of the diggings. On Saturdays work ceased in the claims and diggers and their families flocked to 'Piccadilly' to exchange their diamonds for cash from the diamond buyers, who each possessed a little tin shack and a distinctive pennant and who were grouped together within the 'Buyers square' in the centre of the camp. This cash flowed out to the many traders and merchants and hawkers:

> Eloff Street shopkeepers would gnash their teeth in envy at the roaring trade done by the 250 traders who have set up their tin shops in the streets. There are traders of every conceivable kind, and each one appears to be prosperous... Round the shops... were hordes of white men and natives eager to buy.[15]

The township formed the social centre of the camp. Here the tempestuous diggers' meetings were held, in the open air, the speakers addressing the milling crowds from the safety of a raised platform or the tailgate of the nearest truck. It was also here that the notorious cafes, billiard rooms, shebeens and cinemas were to be found:

> The 15 cafes in Piccadilly do a roaring trade all day,and at night the floors are cleared and the dance

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[14] The Star 28 August 1926.

[15] The Star 27 October 1926.

> begins to the music of a gramophone. The cabaret dance is for the digger one of the most delectable ways of spending an evening for there are enough women to make the dance a great success. Those who prefer billiards... are able to find a good game in one or other of the four billiard saloons; and finally, to complete the effect two bioscopes ran nightly.[16]

The source of all the wealth - the productive hub of the diggings - lay within the confines of the claims, each in size 45 foot by 45 foot, where labour commenced at sunrise and ceased at sunset, and where the long, monotonous unending process of digging,sieving and washing went on for hour after hour, from Monday to Friday every week. Here in the claims:

> huge stones are hurled,laboriously and dangerously- only to be shovelled back when the space they occupy is required.... At others, picks rise and fall, wrestling with solidly packed gravel and stones. Everywhere cradles are rocked and gravel and water carried to the puddling troughs. Puddle boys handling short wedge-shaped spades, combine gravel, sand and water into a mixture capable of passing through the revolving circular machines which separate and eject the valueless light pebbles from the "heavy stuff".... [17]

The interests of property and propriety were very active behind all the public euphoria, for Lichtenburg's brief flowering had attracted considerable commercial interest. The gamble of diamond digging provided quick and ready profits to the owners of the farms, the hotel and canteen keepers, the storekeepers and the diamond buyers. The diggers themselves, though, discovered that their own opportunities for accumulation were very limited and their capacity for independent action severely circumscribed by those capitalists who owned the land

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[16] The Star 11 December 1926.

[17] The Star 28 August 1926.

and held the commercial rights on the farms. Diggers were bound in a web of interlocking commercial interests which extended literally from the gravel of the south-western Transvaal to the boardrooms and exchanges of the diamond world.[18]

Local Capitalists on the diggings

Landowners were the first to extract a surplus in the form of rent from the diggers who were the direct producers. The landowners of the eight Lichtenburg farms on which alluvial diggings were proclaimed included four private owners and four companies. As the owners of property they were entitled to certain rights. In order to entice the landowners to allow the public to dig up these deposits, the legislature had made provision for their compensation. First, the landowner could prospect the deposits to determine their extent and value. Once this has been determined, the state took a hand to protect the minerals which it held in trust for the public, and proclaimed parts of the farms as public diggings, which allowed the public (white males over 18 years of age) onto the farm. These proclamations took away all rights the owner had over the gravel, except that he was allowed to select 235 owner's claims for his own private use on any portion of the proclaimed areas. The discoverer of the deposit was also entitled to peg some 60 claims on the gravel. These claims were known as the 'Reserve' claims. The surface rights of the landowner remained largely untouched, and he received rent from the digging population for living on his land, using his grazing and drinking his water. Landowners received half of all the claim licences collected on their diggings when a public digging was proclaimed on their farm. All of the landowner's property - his timber, grazing land and water resources - was reserved for his exclusive use, and

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[18] The Star 21 July 1926.

could be disposed of only with his consent. And the surface owner had sole authority to lease out stands on his property for purposes of trading.[19]

We can illustrate how these property rights placed landowners in an advantageous position by considering the farms Elandsputte and Uitgevonden. On Elandsputte Voorendyk sold his 235 Reserve claims to wealthy, experienced diggers at an average of £225 per claim. These professional diggers worked with large gangs and 'up to date motor-driven machinery'. The prices paid by the professional diggers for Voorendyk's private claims were much higher than the ten shilling licence fee required for pegging a claim on the public area of the farm. Yet diggers with experience were prepared to pay top prices for Reserve claims because they were sited on the richest gravel deposits on the farm, and this reduced the gamble involved in pegging good claims at the rush. The work on these claims was an amazing spectacle with 'thousands of natives on the mountains of gravel... like ants on an a gigantic antheap'. [20]

The population of 40 000 which congregated on Voorendyk's farm to rush the seven thousand public claims made possible his second financial killing, for storekeepers from all over the country clamoured for trading sites on the farm which he let at £100 a stand. The trading reserve thus formed the hub of the Elandsputte camp. Voorendyk capped these financial bonanzas through the provision of water, for machines and people, at the price of fourpence per digger's barrel of 64 gallons, from a

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[19] The Precious Stones (Alluvial) Amendment Act, Act No. 15 of 1919, Chapter 1, 3, 11, 22, 23 and 24.

[20] For Reserve claims, see The Star 10 June 1926, 9 June 1926. For other activities see Lichtenburg Museum, K. Voorendyk to 'Fiena', 2 May 1956.

number of hastily drilled boreholes on his property. Within six months Voorendyk had made over £40 000 from this source.[21] Voorendyk derived more benefit from the supply of water and the collection of stand rents and the sale of fuel and grazing, than from the sale of his owner's claims.[22]

The owners of Uitgevonden (popularly known as Bakerville) were David Russell, a diamond buyer and speculator from Kimberley, and Henry Clarke, his partner. They purchased the farm from A.W. Baker in June 1926 for £30 000 and in September 1926 they floated a public company, the Treasure Trove Diamonds Syndicate Limited (Treasure Trove), to work the farm. In partnership with some Johannesburg businessmen they concentrated on turning their property rights to good advantage. They set up a 25 horse-power suction engine to provide 500 000 gallons of water per day for sale to diggers. Their revenue from this source amounted to between £180 and £200 per day. They did not work their Reserve claims until late in 1927, but they let out their trading stands at from £50 to £100 per month. The company received £13 721 from these sources. In October 1926, just one month after proclamation, some 30 000 whites and 50 000 blacks resided on the property. Diggers pegged 10 000 claims at the rush and the company received a monthly revenue of 2/6 per claim from every digger. Treasure Trove was very successful and two dividends were paid from June 1926 to November 1927, amounting to a 40 per cent dividend per share.[23]

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[21] Lichtenburg Museum, K. Voorendyk to 'Fiena', 14 May 1956.

[22] MNW 886, mm525/27, 'Comments', E.M. Bradshaw to Minister Beyers, 20 April 1927.

[23] MNW 886, mm 525/27, 'Comments', "Treasure Trove", Reference 857; The Star 19 August 1926, 25 October 1926, 7 April 1927, 22 November 1927, 22 December 1927, 29 December 1927; The Mining and Industrial Magazine, 3 November 1926, 8 September

Not all landowners were content to generate revenue from these sources only. These owners resorted to more devious means to multiply their returns. Some, especially on privately owned farms, worked out the gravel deposits while they were prospecting and before the public could put a spade into the ground. On Ruigtelaagte for example, which was owned jointly by five descendants from Lichtenburg pioneer families, there were 'thousands of men and women working' three months prior to the proclamation. Over 30 000 worth of diamonds were taken out in that month by 673 European diggers working under the licence of these owners on a ten to fifteen percentage. By August 1926 the owners of Ruigtelaagte had found stones which represented a 'five figure fortune'.[24] A similar tale was told on both Klipbankfontein and Klipkuil. Many of the diggers employed in prospecting were given first options to purchase the Reserve claims before they were put on the market.[25]

1926, 12 May 1928, 1 December 1928; The Mining Journal, 5 February 1927, 4 May 1928; The Rand Daily Mail 2 May 1928, 10 May 1928.

[24]Ruigtelaagte was owned by J.H de la Rey, A.E Schoeman, J.H. de Vos (ne' Greef), P. de Wet, H.G. Greef, S.M. Greef, A.C. Greef (Deeds Office Pretoria). Portion A of Ruigtelaagte was 2032 morgen (m.) in extent (original farm was 3252 m.) and was known as 'Vaalboschputte Alluvial Diggings' (Government Gazette No.181/1926, No.1573, Vol.LXV). See The Star 5 June 1926, 21 July 1926, 24 September 1926, 30 July 1926, 4 August 1926, 22 November 1326.

[25]Klipkuil No.210 (in extent 7456 m.) was owned in 1926 by A.A. Schoeman, W.M. Langrish, B.J. Krige and J.P.J. Conradie, and proclaimed 'Wondergat Rush Alluvial Diggings', on 11 November 1926 (2485 m.). See Government Gazette No.276/1926, No.1588, Vol.LXVV. Portions C and E of Klipbankfontein No.82 were registered to P.H. du Preez and W.J. de Wet respectively, proclaimed as 'Manana(de Wet) and Manana(du Preez) Alluvial diggings, in extent 606m. and 355m. (Government Gazette, No.99/1926, No.1554, Vol.LXIV).

Other landowners subdivided their farms. The Pretoria East Diamonds Company Limited, which acquired Witklip from a private owner in 1926, subdivided the farm into four portions in order to be able to proclaim each portion separately. One of these portions was proclaimed in November 1926 as the Witklip Alluvial Diggings. Six months before the public was allowed onto Witklip, the gravel there was being extensively prospected by the company's prospectors and by the date of proclamation the farm was practically worked out.[26]

The most dramatic examples of unfettered capitalist entrepreneurship took place on the farms Grasfontein No.240 and Welverdiend No.249. Here the landowners established a virtual monopoly over the extensive deposits of gravel on their farms by subdivision. Initially the farms were owned by Lewis and Marks and formed part of their extensive landholdings.[27] They now formed part of the portfolio of the African and European Investment Company Limited (A&E). The A&E began to subdivide their Lichtenburg farms when diamonds were first discovered in the district. Before July 1926 the company subdivided only seven of its 41 farms in the Lichtenburg district, and these into a maximum of two or three portions. Immediately after the

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[26]Witklip No.149 originally owned by F.J. Roos, and sold to Pretoria East Diamonds Company Limited. It was in extent 4154m. 161r., and subdivided by the Company into four portions. Proclaimed "Witklip Alluvial Diggings" on 18 November 1926 (see Government Gazette, No.278/1926, No.1889, vol. LXVI); The Star 9 June 1926, 3 November 1926, 9 November 1926, 22 November 1926.

[27]In 1926 the A&E owned 41 farms in the Lichtenburg district, and 50 in Marico. (NNW 898, mm379/27, 'List of Subdivisions of Diamondiferous bearing farms in the Lichtenburg district for purposes of P/S Act', J. van Eyssen to Minister of Mines, 'List of subdivision of diamondiferous bearing farms in Lichtenburg district for purposes of Precious Stones Act(1927)'). See also The Star 4 August 1926, 8 December 1926, 11 December 1926, 7 April 1927.

Elandsputte proclamation in July 1926 the A&E extensively subdivided its farms lying on the line of the gravel.[28] One of its farms, Welverdiend No.249, was sold to the partnership of Colonel James Donaldson and Woolf Carlis, in October 1926, for 30 000, but the A&E reserved to itself the owner's rights to any diamond mine or mines which might be discovered on the property.[29] In August 1926 J. Van Eyssen, the manager of the company's farms, reported that prospecting operations were in progress on fourteen of the A&E's Lichtenburg farms. The extremely rich run of gravel on Grasfontein snaked its way across Hendriksdal, LaReysStryd, Kliplaagte, Blaaubank and Mooimeisjiesfontein, all A&E farms. Isaac Lewis was able to announce with great pride at the twenty-first general meeting of the company that there had been 'outstanding' discoveries of diamonds on a block of nine farms on which diamondiferous gravel could be traced for thirty miles.[30]

Without a doubt the most promising jewel in the A&E portfolio was the farm Grasfontein. In October 1926 Lewis and Marks subdivided the farm into fifteen portions and immediately sold eight of them (see Appendix Two). The remaining seven portions were retained by the company and on each of these portions the company claimed the right to prospect before proclamation, and,

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[28]These farms were Blaaubank No.222 into 15 portions, Houthaaldoorns No.236 into 5, Mooimeisjesfontein No.22 into 17, LaReysStryd No.220 into 15, Kliplaagte No.223 into 8, Zamenkomst No.250 into 9, and Grasfontein No.240 into 22 portions (MNW 898, mm379/27, 'List of Subdivisions', J. van Eyssen to the Minister of Mines, 4 May 1927; The Star 11 December 1926).

[29]Donaldson and Carlis purchased the farm from the A&E on 29 October 1926 (Deeds Office, Deed No.11583). For the reservation of rights to any diamond mine which might be found on Welverdiend by Donaldson and Carlis, see MNW 898, mm379/27, 'List of Subdivisions', 4 May 1927.

[30]The Mining World and Engineering Journal 3 July 1926.

after proclamation, the right to select 235 Reserve claims and 60 discoverer's claims (as the company itself had conducted prospecting operations). On these seven portions the company prospected under the supervision of J. Van Eyssen, and diggers of the 'best class' offered their services to the company at exorbitant rates of up to 20 percent. These diggers were 'A lot of first class men - many of them with several thousands of pounds ready to invest in the undertaking... and they are almost clamorously offering their services to assist the Company in their prospecting'.[31] The work on the Reserve claims on Grasfontein was quite frantic:

> In less than a month what was bare veld has become a huge cavity that everyday becomes more and more suggestive of the open mine workings as they existed on the Premier Mine twenty years ago. While the workings are in the nature of a huge "pothole", the fact that diggers are finding it profitable to haul the ground from considerable depths (there are very many derrick cranes engaged) or to lift it to the surface by the terrace system of shovelling with native labour is proof... of the richness of the deposits.[32]

In these operations the professional diggers rather than the company bore the risks of digging and ventured their own capital. These diggers were able to secure the pick of the Reserve claims on Grasfontein through their involvement in the prospecting of the farm. One of these prospectors who bought a Reserve claim was L.D.C. van Wyk, who was probably taken on as a prospector on portion L of Grasfontein by van Eyssen because he had managed the A&E's farms at Sannieshof (Lichtenburg district) for a number of years. He drew plot L21927 in the lottery conducted by the company to distribute its discoverer's claims, and paid 1000 for the privilege. From this claim he recovered

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[31] The Star 11 December 1926, 7 December 1926.

[32] The Star 18 January 1927.

over £100 000 worth of diamonds; van Wyk's pothole stands today as a memory to his good fortune.[33]

The Reserve claims formed the focus of activity on Grasfontein and by January literally 'hundreds of native workers worked there under the supervision of diggers and paid white overseers'. As the gravel was probed to great depths it was necessary to denote the boundaries of the claims by stretching a grid of steel wires across the excavations and to hang long vertical weighted wires from these to act as plumb lines to show which areas were being worked on behalf of the different diggers.[34]

The A&E did exceptionally well out of Grasfontein. The sale of the eight portions of the farm alone realised £41 000. On the unsold portions of the farm, over £161 000 was realised by the sale of Reserve claims by April 1926, whilst 1 133 claims remained to be sold. The company was also entitled to half the revenue from claim licences paid by the diggers on the 60 628 claims pegged by the public after proclamation. The company received large amounts from its tributers during the prospecting operations. The company also retained the trading, water and grazing rights over the property as a whole and realised large amounts from these rights. The A&E certainly turned their private rights to good advantage on Grasfontein and they did so chiefly by monopolising large portions of the gravel by subdividing the farm, and claiming their owner's and discoverer's claims on each of the so-called farms or

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[33]Lichtenburg Museum, 'Mnr. L.D.C. van Wyk's se ryk 'Pothole' op Grasfontein plot L21927-1928', no date. See also The Star 3 November 1926, 6 November 1926, 12 November 1926, 7 November 1926, 11 November 1926, 12 January 1927, 18 January 1927, 19 February 1927, 6 February 1927.

[34]The Star 18 January 1927.

portions.[35]

The sales of portions of the farms created opportunities for a new class of entrepreneurs. Eight portions of Grasfontein were snapped up by eager investors. Portion E (for £5000) and J of the farm were sold to local Lichtenburg businessmen (Israel Cooper and Benedictus Krige, enthusiastic members of the Lichtenburg Chamber of Commerce) who formed a syndicate to work it.[36] Portions K and M of the farm were bought by the Treasure Trove directors, H. Clark and D. Russell, on behalf of the High Level Gravels Syndicate, that was set up as a front operation for the diamond magnates, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and Solly Joel.[37]

The most spectacular example of capitalist drive is provided by the operations of the Carrig Diamond Company Limited (Carrig), floated on 1 November 1926, with a nominal capital of £25 000, of which £22 100 was privately offered (more than twice the required capital being offered within a few hours of its inception). F.K. Webber, the chairman of the company, was the Government Surveyor at the Deeds Office at Pretoria. He was accused of illegally expediting the passage of the diagrams of the six subdivisions which the company carried out on its portion, portion L of Grasfontein, through the liberal offering

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[35]The Mining Journal 29 January 1927.

[36]Deeds Office, Pretoria, Grasfontein No.240; MNW 898, mm2370/27, 'Precious Stones Act 44/1927, Section 23. Holdings of interest by corporate bodies, syndicates and associations of persons', Schedules A1 and A2, B1 and B2, Statements showing number of owners and discoverers claims held by corporate bodies, syndicates and partnerships, 22 November 1927; The Star 3 March 1927, 8 September 1927, 4 August 1927, 3 November 1927.

[37]See T. Gregory, Ernest Oppenheimer and the Economic Development of Southern Africa, London, 1962, pp.176-182.

of batches of 100 £1 shares to various officials. The company was registered on 1 November 1926; by 11 November the transfer of the property was completed and the subdivision diagrams filed in the Deeds Office, and by 15 November prospecting was begun. In December 1926 the company declared an interim dividend of 50 per cent or 10 shillings per share. By the end of December the company's prospectors had found 3 073 carats. Following the example of the A&E, Carrig allowed their prospectors first options on the Reserve claims, and these prospectors put up over £13 000 in just four hours, the price per claim going up to £1000. Prospectors who were able to secure claims on the Carrig's ground did extremely well - two of them finding 470 carats and 987 carats respectively in four days.

By February 1927 the Carrig had sold 883 Reserve claims on portions 1 to 4 of the original portion L for £64 085, and worked choice claims on portions 5 and 6 on tribute - receiving £5000 as its percentage by January 1927. The Carrig leased their water rights to individuals, while trading sites were leased at £50 a stand. When the property was proclaimed in March 1927 approximately 4000 claims were pegged, and a further 2/6 fee per claim was paid to the company. The profitability of the company is demonstrated by the fact that the Carrig declared five interim dividends amounting to some 475 per cent within the first six months of operations, or a £4 15s. return on a £1 share. Because their operations were so successful the Carrig began to buy up other promising alluvial properties. In March 1927 they bought the 3200 morgen farm De Paarl No.62 in the district. The company then subdivided the farm into nine portions and began prospecting there.[38]

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[38] MNW 886, mm525/27, 'Comments', 'Carrig Diamonds, Limited', Reference 85E; The Star 7 December 1926, 5 February 1927, 31 March 1927, 11 April 1927, 14 April 1927; MNW 898, mm2370/27, 'Precious Stones Act', Memorandum Acting Mining

Carrig's operations, as we have seen, took the speculative spirit further than the A&E in subdividing the already tiny 169 morgen portions of Grasfontein. Carrig's Reserve claims were sold to three syndicates and two companies. One of these was the Eldorado Diamond Company Limited, 'composed mostly of the members of the partnership and their friends', and once again many local capitalists from Johannesburg, some well-connected in mining circles, were involved. The syndicate purchased 150 claims on portion L of Grasfontein from the Carrig, which were either worked directly by the company or through the agency of the tributers.[39] In March 1927 the Eldorado shareholders floated a further syndicate to purchase another 97 of the Carrig Reserve claims, which were sold to the syndicate members. This syndicate, like others on the farm, worked their claims primarily on the tribute system and by this means the holdings of the syndicate were worked out. A similar tale was told as regards the holdings of the parent company, Eldorado. [40]

Two further syndicates were directly interested in Carrig's portion L of Grasfontein; the L Diamond Syndicate Limited and the Grasfontein Diamond Syndicate Limited, the capital for both being subscribed by the same group of Johannesburg and Lichtenburg speculators. They bought a block of sixty Reserve claims at £100 each, some of which were resold, such as a block of twelve claims sold to E. Morkal, a professional digger for

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Commissioner Klerksdorp to Under Secretary Mines, 3 December 1927.

[39]MNW 898, mm2532/27, 'Bonanza Syndicate (H.A. Dawson) Application to work claims on Grasfontein in Partnership under Section 73(4) of Act 44/1927', H.A. Dawson to Mining Commissioner Klerksdorp, 30 November 1927; The Star 15 November 1927.

[40]Ibid.

£750 (who subsequently resold at a profit to a partnership of two Barkly West diggers).[41]

In contrast to the rather restrained subdivisions at Grasfontein, Donaldson and Carlis cut Welverdiend up into thirty portions (see Appendix Three). Before long they further subdivided promising areas into smaller and smaller sections.[42] This drive to monopolise claims by the plotholders at Welverdiend provoked a blustering outburst from the Minister for Mines, F.W. Beyers, in Parliament during the s cond reading of the Precious Stones Bill in April:

> ...the farm Welverdiend... has been cut up into 50 blocks, and on every block a special company has been floated. That company is the registered owner of that plot of gravel, and the result is that each company claims 200 owners' and 150 discoverers' claims which is exactly equal to 5 morgen These acute and astute gentlemen are very farseeing when it comes to extracting wealth.

Beyers was astounded by the opportunities available to the landowners of alluvial farms: 'They could divide it into a thousand pieces of five morgen each, and each five morgen would be equivalent to their owners' and discoverers' claims and not one inch of ground would be left to the public and the

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[41]MNW 898, mm2432/27, 'The "L" Diamond Syndicate Limited. Application permission to sell claims under Section 73, Precious Stones Act 44/1927', Memorandum, Mining Commissioners Office, 22 December 1927; MNW 898, mm2431/27, 'Grasfontein Diamond Syndicate Limited. Application to sell claims under Section 73 of Act 44/1927', Memorandum, Mining Commissioner's Office, 22 December 1927.

[42]MNW 896, mm2370/27, 'Precious Stones Act 44/1927. Section 23. Holding of Interest by Corporate Bodies syndicates and associated persons', Schedules A1 and A2, B1 and B2. Statement showing unmarked owner's and discovers claims held by corporate bodies, syndicates and partnerships, 22 November 1927.

State.'[43] The subdivision of Welverdiend was carried out to multiply the Reserve claims. Although initial prospecting on the farm was carried out on the tribute system, Donaldson and Carlis went to great lengths to retain their monopoly over the Reserve ground and did not sell claims there as the A&E had done. This monopoly on Reserve ground enabled Donaldson and Carlis to allow many diggers with less than impressive resources to work on tribute for them.[44]

Donaldson and Carlis bought Welverdiend in their personal capacities and after subdivision they floated two public companies to work various portions of the farm with public money. These companies, the Welverdiend Diamonds Limited and the Lichtenburg Diamond Gravels Limited, were floated with a nominal capital of £70 000 and £25 000 respectively. Welverdiend Diamonds acquired portion C (subdivided into four portions), D, E, F, K, L (also subdivided into four portions), O and P of the farm, but only four of these portions were prospected before the passage of the Precious Stones Act in December 1927. Their other company, the Lichtenburg Gravels, was the third largest company on the fields and it purchased nineteen portions of the farm (two of which were further subdivided into four portions), each of about 125 morgen in size.

The two Donaldson and Carlis companies had 349 prospectors working their Reserve claims on tribute who produced between them £89 641 worth of diamonds by October 1927 (of which £14 114 went to the company as its fifteen percent and £75 526 went to

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[43] Hansard, vol. 8, 25 April 1927, 2709, Minister of Mines and Industries, Second Reading of Precious Stones Bill.

[44] The Star 11 December 1928; MNW 898, mm2370/27, 'Precious Stones Act'. Memorandum, F.J. Mathews, Acting Mining Commissioner to Under-Secretary Mines, 3 December 1927.

the diggers). The diggers were readily assisted by the company and these advances were repaid against the finds recorded.[45] Portion P of the farm - known as P Kopje- was the richest deposit of alluvial at Lichtenburg, and the company employed hundreds of workers to exploit it. After the passage of the Precious Stones Act, P Kopje was worked by white workers at a wage of 7/6 shillings a day as a white labour project, and a wonderful tin town ("blikdorp") sprang up at Carlisonia, to house the families of the 500 workers.[46]The trading rights for the entire farm were retained by Donaldson and Carlis. By February 1927 there was "little but flags to be seen" on Welverdiend as a result of the subdivisions. [47]

The landowners, syndicates and companies thus dominated the economic skyline on the Lichtenburg diggings from the inception of digging. There was a clear distinction between company land (on which lay the Reserve claims) and the public diggings upon which diggers were free, upon payment of a licence fee, to peg their claims. As we have seen, these enterprises sought to monopolise the richest deposits on the fields through buying up the properties and subdividing extensively. Diggers were in many instances forced to come to terms with these entrepreneurs in order to gain access to the more lucrative and payable parts of the farms. Indeed, the term 'digger' was recognised as a broad

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[45]MNW 886, mm525/27, 'Comments', Memorandum, F.J. Mathews, 'Returns of diamonds won on Welverdiend 249, Lichtenburg district, by prospectors under agreement with Lichtenburg Gravels Ltd. and Welverdiend Diamonds Ltd', and Memorandum, 'Lichtenburg Gravels Limited', Ref. 85G, no date. See also The Star 28 January 1927, 4 August 1927; *The Potchefstroom Herald* 30 March 1928.

[46]MNW 898, mm2370/27, 'Precious Stones Act', Memorandum, F.J. Mathews, Ibid.

[47] The Star, 26 February 1927.

descriptive label given to the occupation of making a living from digging and had little precise meaning. In June 1926, for example, although 6681 diggers had taken out licences to dig, almost four times that number dug without licences, working in various other contractual ways with licensed diggers, or for the companies. Most of these diggers worked in partnership with three or four other diggers under the licence of an individual digger. Other diggers who lacked the capital to attract partners worked on shares for other diggers who in effect acted as their 'backers'. A further 1670 diggers were employed for wages by the companies working the Reserve areas.[48]

Prospecting was another avenue for employment. Diggers with sufficient resources, using their own capital and equipment, and paying their own expenses, agreed to work for companies and private owners in prospecting the Reserves before proclamation in return for paying a fixed percentage of their finds to the company or owner.[49] Some prospectors payed percentages of up to 25 per cent of their total finds, so confident were they of finding diamonds on these rich deposits.

Thus the diggers were clearly divided into a number of classes, the divisons between which tended to blur with their changing fortunes. Professional diggers with money tended to work on the Reserves or as prospectors on company ground; individual diggers having limited capital worked on their own or in partnership with other diggers of a similar position on the public areas of the farms, or bought claims on private ground.

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[48] The Star 30 July 1926.

[49] Thus at Ruigtelaagte there were two licensed diggers (the two farm owners) under whose licence worked over 800 prospectors each paying the owner 10 to 15 per cent of the finds (Ibid.).

Those diggers with little but their labour to exchange worked on shares for other diggers, or with the companies we have examined in this chapter, or in the last resort, worked for wages.

Diggers and Capitalists

It was on the public diggings, rather than on the Reserve claims, that the beginnings of popular resentment amongst the public at the strategies of landowners began to be noticeable in late 1926. This resentment was carefully couched in the rhetoric and images of the 'small man', the 'bona fide' digger, versus the unprincipled exercize of the power of money. Vague feelings of unease that there were little ground left for the vast crowds of diggers diggings became more pointed as the proclamations of ...0.210 (Wondergat Rush Alluvial Diggings) on 11 Novemb... Witklip No.149 on 18 November 1926 proved to be very disappointing, in contrast to the results at Elandsputte and Treasure Trove where 90 per cent of the diggers were said to be making a living and 5 per cent doing extremely well. It was popularly felt that Grasfontein, 'which was next door' to Bakerville, should have been proclaimed prior to these two farms. Rumours quickly circulated that 'all the best claims' on Grasfontein had, through subdivision, been secured by the owners of the farm, the companies and syndicates, and the tribute workers.[50]

This uncertainty gave fresh impetus to a ground swell of popular opposition at this capitalist ingenuity, which was fanned to a white heat of indignation, on the already overcrowded public areas of the diggings. Rumours circulated that certain diggers were going to rush Grasfontein illegally and peg claims there to preserve 'public rights'. This sentiment

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[50] The Star 31 December 1926.

was publicly applauded as the community erupted into a fury of political activity, and accusations and counter-accusations were flung back and forth between a new generation of popular orators and harassed government spokesmen.[51] In this conflagration many other issues were publicly laundered - resentment felt at the maladministration of the diggings by the Mines Department, the lack of enthusiasm shown by the Native Affairs Department officials in enforcing pass regulations and residential segregation on the various diggings, the total inadequacy of the police presence in proportion to the size of the community, and the widespread insanitary conditions brought about by the rapid concentration of this huge population on a site over 25 miles from the nearest railhead.[52] These social problems meshed rather explosively with popular fears associated with the inevitable exhaustion of the gravel on the public diggings, and the consequent hardships that would result. In November 1926 some observers stated that Bakers would be worked out within the month, and that the diggers would soon have to find new propositions.[53]

Despite the protestations of the plotholders that the subdivisions were to the benefit of the community, in that they allowed the ground to be thoroughly prospected, and that 'a better regulated diggings' would be created by the scattering of the population, 'grave dissatisfaction' was felt at the procedures adopted by the owners of the farms, 'for the digging community apparently see in what has transpired similar procedures being followed on other farms, and the district which is said to have many years of alluvial life (will) thereby be

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[51] The Star 3 November 1926, 13 November 1926.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

closed to them'.[54]

With ranks rapidly closing and battle lines being drawn between the 'moneyed elements' holding the titles to the farms, and the hastily congregated and cosmopolitan community thrown together in the corrugated tin and sacking towns, the government began to edge itself, rather reluctantly, into the position of mediator in the threatening conflict. This was to prove a rather thankless task, and to sandwich it between the private rights of the owners and the public rights of the community.[55] The diggers regarded Elandsputte and Bakers as merely the beginnings of a series of farms which would give them many years of employment. But the working out of Bakers was the immediate problem and a huge population depended on the proclamation of Grasfontein. Political divisions within the community were prized open in the months during which Grasfontein was subdivided and prospected, and these were broadly taken up in 'The Diggers Union of South Africa' (DU) - a digger movement having no fixed organisational structure and which depended upon the rough and tumble of open air discussions and public protest meetings for its functioning.[56]

After initially recognising the legality of the subdivisions of the farms, the government hastily capitulated to the demands of the diggings community and publicly recanted, declaring subdivisions to be 'against the spirit of the law'.[57] Legislation was rapidly drawn up by government for inclusion in

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[54] The Star 11 December 1926, 12 November 1926.

[55] See Chapter 2.

[56] The Star, 3 November 1926. See for more detail Chapters 3, 4 and 5 below.

[57] The Star 12 November 1926, 22 January 1927.

the amended Precious Stones Bill, which had regularly appeared on the parliamentary agenda for some years, and which was reintroduced in late 1926. This new Bill received a very unhappy reception in the Assembly, and an even more disappointing one in the Senate, and it was to take at least two full parliamentary sessions before being forced into law through a Joint Sitting of the House and Senate in November 1927. Opposition to the Bill in the House came primarily from the South African Party. However, important sections of the National Party expressed dissatisfaction at the Bill because of its attack on the rights of property owners.[58] The delayed passage of the Bill throughout 1927 allowed the fomentation of popular anger to continue unabated on the Lichtenburg fields despite the best attempts of the Pact to quell this popular indignation.[59]

The digging year of 1927 opened with the proclamation of a further two portions of Ruigtelaagte on 12 January, which allowed the diggers another good look at the manner in which the owners were rapidly denuding the farms of diamondferous gravel and monopolising the good claims.[60] This knowledge, and the rumours of rich returns from the work of companies and syndicates on the Reserve claims on Grasfontein, fanned the heightened apprehension which surrounded the coming proclamation of the farm on 25 February. Many diggers were disappointed that only portions A to H, that is eight of the fifteen original subdivisions, amounting to one-third of the farm, were to be proclaimed. One week before the rush rumours circulated 'that, if the diggers cannot secure any claims on the day of the rush they will take possession of those reserved by the owners', and

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[58] See Chapter 3 below.

[59] See Chapter 4 below.

[60] The Star 5 June 1926, 22 November 1926.

the government was urged by some of its supporters to postpone the proclamation. A conspiracy by disaffected diggers to start a false rush and therefore to abort the proclamation was also unearthed a few weeks prior to the rush.[61]

Despite these rumours the proclamation went ahead, on 25 February, only for the rush to be turned into a fiasco as the huge crowd of *over 25 000 diggers leapt forward moments before* the embarrassed Mining Commissioner, C.M. Jack, could lower the flag.[62] Intense confusion followed and the rush was declared to be invalid and those fortunate diggers who had pegged claims were instructed to strike their pegs and to gather again at the same spot on 2 March. This time there was no mistake as the huge crowd reassembled, with a number of last minute additions to the digging ranks as the Lichtenburg Diggers Committee, fearing for its safety, issued thousands of certificates (illegally) to late applicants who, only days before, had been unable to secure them.[63] At 11:45 the flag was lowered, and to the delight of thousands of spectators, the 23 000 runners, strung out along a line of 3000 yards, swept off into the distance to peg their claims in and round the already well worked Reserve areas of the farm. It was a sight which those present would never forget:

> There was one great roar from the thousands of throats, and then the patter of many feet. Many of the runners wore white shirts, and in their forward sweep they appeared like a tremendous wave rolling towards the diggings. On the far extremities of the line the runners seemed spread out, and from the distance looked like a giant swarm of locusts. In a few minutes it seemed as if the whole veld was teeming with diggers. They kept together in a dense mass for the first mile,

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[61] The Star 19 February 1927, 20 February 1927.

[62] The Star 26 February 1927, 12 March 1927; The Sunday Times 6 March 1927.

[63] Sunday Times, 6 March 1927.

> and then the trained men ran ahead. Exciting battles for claims took place between the leaders, many of whom planted their pegs, and then rolled over exhausted on the ground...[64]

Amongst this large crowd there was bound to be disappointment especially amongst the many amateur diggers who had been attracted to Lichtenburg by rumours of the spectacular richness of Grasfontein. Many of these were unable to peg claims for themselves because professional runners were employed to peg claims for rich diggers and syndicates. One disgruntled digger voiced this feeling very succinctly: 'The rush made good reading, but the real digger was never even in the race.'[65]

Following the proclamation, the production of diamonds from Grasfontein increased dramatically: from a February figure of 65 160 carats worth £190 181, production rose sharply in March to 107 524 carats worth £321 028, and peaked in April with 175 524 carats worth £397 416, or 76 per cent of the total production form the Lichtenburg district for that month.[66] Despite this production, many diggers lost heavily at Grasfontein. They were the small men, some unable to peg claims, others having insufficient capital or machinery to capitalise on their deep claims. They returned to the shallow ground found on Bakers and Elandsputte, declaring themselves to be the victims of the the 'fat purses' - the plothlders and the rich diggers.[67] This disparity of opportunity heightened divisions within the community despite the enormous quantities of diamonds produced at Grasfontain, and the farm was described rather paradoxically

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[64] Ibid.

[65] The Star 15 March 1927.

[66] The Diamond Fields Advertiser, 7 July 1927.

[67] The Star 12 March 1927.

as 'a debtor to the community to the tune of hundreds of thousands of pounds'.[68]

Following the Grasfontein proclamation in March 1927 the Union government was prevailed upon by the large diamond mining capitalists of the Union, and the international Diamond Syndicate, to follow a stricter policy in proclaiming new farms. This policy was necessary to bring stability to the world's diamond market which was thrown into disarray by the large Lichtenburg output.[69] The proclamation of Grasfontein had also taught the government and the small digger an important lesson about the lengths to which private owners would go to protect and to maximise their investments in their Lichtenburg properties. The government declared a 'go slow' on the proclamation of new farms, and the Minister of Mines, F.W. Beyers, promised the diggers at a public meeting held at Bakerville in June 1927 that he would not proclaim more ground until the Precious Stones Bill became law. He hoped to prevent a repetition of the Grasfontein 'fiasco', but stated that this policy was a declaration of good faith by the government to the digging community and the 'small man'. One unfortunate result of this declaration was to put a premium on that ground which had already been proclaimed, or that ground already under prospect, for the digging population had now to look to such ground as they had for their livelihood, rather than toward the beckoning vistas of the unproclaimed farms.[70]

These farms were even more inviting after June 1927, when the Senate sent the Precious Stones Bill back to the House of

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[68] The Star 12 May 1927.

[69] See Chapter 3 below.

[70] See Chapters 3 and 4 above.

Assembly for amendment. The diggers were in for a long wait before the measure became law in November of that year.[71] In this context, attention shifted in the months following the Grasfontein rush in early March 1927, to Welverdiend No.240, which had been sold to Donaldson and Carlis in October 1926. The exploitation of Welverdiend by the 'moneyed element' went further than on any other farm in the district, to create a veritable jungle of interlocking investments and speculations which were the despair of the Mines Department, and their overworked ministerial representative, P.W. Beyers.

But as summer turned to winter and Parliament haggled over the Act, the large community felt the ill effects of the bargain they had made with Beyers and their confidence in the Government crashed to a new low as the shortage of new ground became acute. Clashes between the 'small men', the bona fide digger, and the representatives of property such as Captain F. Dixon, the foreman for Welverdiend Diamonds on P kopje, became more frequent and the spectre of starvation began to haunt the tin and sacking city for the first time since the wonderful discoveries at Elandsputte in early 1926. And because private landowners had monopolised the bulk of the diamondiferous gravel there was precious little ground left for the general public. To prevent wholesale starvation on the public areas of the farms, and to release some of the pent up frustration of those diggers stranded without claims there, the Mines Department decided to proclaim the remaining portions of Welverdiend - "Desperation Rush" - in August 1927. This was to no avail, for the proclamation merely highlighted the extent to which the landowners had subdivided the farm, and worked out their small portions of the farm through prospecting on the side with

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[71] See Chapter 2 above.

'unscrupulous diggers'.[72]

Conclusion

The diversity of economic and class interests which this chapter has highlighted provides the backdrop to the themes of political mobilisation and recruitment, which form the focus of this dissertation. As a result of the turmoil occasioned by production from the diggings, the Pact was prevailed upon to reform the existing legislation dealing with alluvial diamond digging. But this 'reform' was not without its detractors. It was embodied in the Precious Stones Act (Act 44 of 1927) which came into effect on 1 January 1927. The Act attacked the rights of the landowners of the alluvial farms and permanently reshaped the character of alluvial digging. D. Simpson of the Treasure Trove Company described it as 'the most revolutionary attack on private interests ever attempted in any country outside Russia'.[73] The local alluvial companies were legislated out of the sphere of production, which was to be reserved for the small man - a bona fide digger who was limited to the labour of ten workers on claims up to twenty feet. The capitalist entrepreneur was turned into a landed proprietor of the ground they had purchased and their Reserve claims, which they had acquired through manipulation of their private rights, were confiscated and redistributed to the public, such as was the case for those claims on Welverdiend on 9 August 1928.[74] Yet as we examine later in this dissertation, the Act embodied other principles which served effectively to hinder the expansion of the

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[72] See Chapter 3 above.

[73] The Star 7 April 1927.

[74] The Star 9 August 1928, 11 August 1928, 1 September 1928, 3 September 1928.

independent alluvial digging industry, and to tie it more closely to the interests of the monopoly diamond mining magnates who dominated the Diamond Syndicate and the international diamond market. Ironically, the interests of monopoly were catered for by the Pact, an alliance of parties purportedly dedicated to serving the small man.

For the local capitalists, however, the position of the landed proprietor, whilst not ideal, was not entirely without profit. These entrepreneurs floated new diamond companies to work the farms under the new dispensation. One of these companies was the Lichtenburg Diamond Estates Limited, having a nominal capital of £50 000, on whose board were represented many alluvial promotors who had been associated with some of the more innovative Lichtenburg speculations. All the farms in the Lichtenburg district which were proclaimed between December 1927 and the end of 1930 were owned by companies.[75]

The experience of the diggers was a lesson in the power of money. Private property, as always, was the font of wealth, and the position was no different on the diggings. Like their poor white brethren elsewhere in the Union, those diggers who lacked financial backbone were simply unable to muscle in on the capitalist action during the eighteen months of digging which preceded the passage of the Precious Stones Act in November 1927.[76] They took their chances on the public areas of the farms in an elusive gamble for wealth but the landowners had already plucked the eyes of the deposits and the companies and

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[75]Hendriksdal No.219, Witstinkhoutboom No.74, and LaReysStryd were owned by A&E, Elizabeth No.215 by the Lichtenberg Diamond Estates Limited and Vlakplaats No.100 by Treasure Trove.

[76] See Footnote 2 above.

syndicates had stripped the remaining flesh and bones. Yet these diggers vigorously resisted this process of exclusion from the most lucrative sections of the farms. And their experiences of the power of money crucially shaped and moulded their resistance. This resistance forms the focus of the following chapters.

Chapter Three

THE 'BIG INTERESTS' AND THE 'SMALL SPRATS': MONOPOLY CAPITAL AND LOCAL DIGGER POLITICS ON THE LICHTENBURG FIELDS.

> ...wherever the state 'intervenes', there also, in an exceptionally strong position compared with other groups, will businessmen be found to influence and even to determine the nature of that intervention.[1]

> This Bill is 90 percent to the big interests, 10 percent to the taxpayers interest, and to h... with the small sprats....[2]

> Though much has been said about the Namaqualand diggings, yet no-one has been so courageous as General Smuts to assert that the Government is working "hand in hand" with the capitalists....[3]

Introduction

In December 1926 two itinerant individuals, A.N. Ireton and W.P. Thom, were approached in Johannesburg by Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and Solly Joel. These two principal figures of the world's diamond industry wanted some assistance in 'fixing' the provisions of the new Precious Stones Bill, which was to consolidate and reform the inadequate alluvial diamond digging legislation in the Union. This bill, which became the Precious Stones Act (Act 44 of 1927), was introduced to the House of Assembly in January 1927 as a result of the Lichtenburg alluvial

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[1] Milliband, R., The State in Capitalist Society: An Analysis of the Western System of Power. New York, 1969, p.54.

[2] MNW 886, mm525/27, 'Comments on the Precious Stones Bill', C.D.F. Brasin to F.W. Beyers, Minister of Mines, 4 June 1927.

[3] The Star 16 August 1928.

discoveries. The careers of these two opportunists, Ireton and Thom, illustrate the complex and intricate interplay of local and national economic interests on the diggings between June 1926 and December 1927. It is argued that this competition between the monopoly interests of the diamond mining magnates, Oppenheimer and Joel, and the local sectional interests of the Lichtenburg alluvial speculators, shaped the fortunes of digger political movements in this period.

Oppenheimer and Joel wanted the production of diamonds from the Lichtenburg fields cut by 1 00 000 within a year, and agreed to pay the partnership of Ireton and Thom £10 000 to engineer this. Ireton and Thom entered the political arena of the Lichtenburg diggings as representatives of the 'small man', but their backing had originated in the offices of the large international diamond companies. Their ideas found great resonance within the Lichtenburg diggings community, which consisted overwhelmingly of small producers who, as we have seen, were locked in a struggle with local capitalists for access to the alluvial gravel on the farms. Ireton and Thom's targets were these local capitalists who owned the companies and syndicates on the Lichtenburg farms, rather than the monopoly diamond capitalists. Ireton and Thom proceeded to cast the activities of these local capitalists in a bad light, and through the mobilisation of popular pressure forced the Pact to shut down the operations of the local capitalists by means of the Precious Stones Act. As a result the production of alluvial diamonds from the Reserve claims (where the local capitalists had cornered the richest pockets of diamondiferous gravel) was severely curtailed and thus the interests of Oppenheimer and Joel, as well as the other diamond mining magnates were served.[4]

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[4]Standard and Diggers News, 23 November 1928; MNW 935,

Ireton and Thom believed that their 'deal' with the diamond magnates, who controlled the world's diamond mines and the international selling organisations, would serve the interests of the small producers - the diggers. The diggers, in their own view, were deprived of their public rights on the diamond bearing farms by local capitalists (landowners and entrepreneurs alike) who monopolised the rich gravels in the Reserve areas, in what they perceived as an unholy alliance with 'rich' diggers, prospectors and speculators. The large diamond interests were concerned only with stabilising the international prices of rough diamonds threatened by overproduction. This, Ireton and Thom believed, could be achieved by the elimination of local capitalist competition on the Lichtenburg diggings, and by promoting the interests of the small man. In the resulting 'small man's Utopia' the production of diamonds from alluvial deposits would be curtailed by eliminating 'irrational' capitalist production, which would benefit the small diggers. The alliance between the small diggers and the diamond magnates would be guaranteed by the Precious Stones Act which, it was hoped, would make provision for a strict white labour policy on all alluvial diggings, allowing only the small man with limited capital to dig there. This ideology, particular to the small diggers, advocated the policies of one-man one-claim, no 'kaffir' labour, and no 'moneyed interests' on an alluvial digging. Thus Thom claimed in late 1928 that his motive for his alliance with the diamond magnates was pure: 'So far as the digger is concerned we have played honestly with him... for if everything is taken into account, the interests of the diggers

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mm2513/28, 'Parliamentary: Motion by Mr Hay', cutting from The Natal Witness no date; Ons Vaderland 5 June 1929; The Star 16 August 1928, 14 August 1928.

are the same as those of the large diamond interests.'[5]

The quite unprecedented production of diamonds from the Lichtenburg diggings was the root of this alliance between the small diggers and the diamond magnates. Between June and December 1926 over 551 805 carats was won. In the following six months a further 754 127 carats was produced, an increase of over 300 per cent in weight over the production of 1925 and 100 per cent in value (see Appendix One). By 1927 this alluvial production accounted for approximately half of the total diamond production of the Union, whereas in the preceding ten years it had averaged at about 25 per cent of this total. This enormous production was offered on the open market to local diamond buyers with no thought paid to prices or the capacity of the market to absorb the volume. The diamond magnates, who made profits by the strict regulation of production to the volume of world diamond sales, were unable to restrict this production because there was no control over alluvial production, and these alluvial diamonds were sold on the open market to local diamond buyers and international diamond cutting establishments in competition with the Diamond Syndicate buyers. With other important capitalist interests involved in alluvial diamond digging, the diamond magnates were therefore forced to counter their influence at a local level, rather than at the elevated heights of international finance. The local diamond buyers who operated independently of the large Kimberley 'shippers' (who bought for the Diamond Syndicate) consisted, for example, that the interests of the diggers were best served by an ever-expanding production of diamonds, and that scares about overproduction were simply the results of the machinations of the Diamond Syndicate, which wanted the independent alluvial industry to be closed down. To defend their interests the local

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[5] Standard and Diggers News 23 November 1926.

diamond buyers attempted to cement an alliance with the digging community, for example, by funding diggers' deputations presenting petitions to the government. Local landowners, and company or syndicate promotors, also constituted a fairly homogeneous interest group in the production of diamonds from these diggings where the vision of alluvial digging differed from that of the diamond magnates.

This chapter shows how the diamond magnates defended their particular class interests by an alliance with the small diggers and how these class interests intersected for a brief historical moment, with those of thousands of disadvantaged and marginalised small men on the public areas of the farms. This alliance resulted in the confiscation and elimination of the rights of the local capitalists to produce diamonds directly from their property by the exclusion of these rights in the Precious Stones Act. This temporary class alliance had important political repercussions for the Pact government, which was forced into an uncomfortable public alliance with the interests of monopoly capital, which proved to be politically embarrassing.[6]

The alluvial diggings and the diamond magnates

The Potchefstroom discoveries were quickly brought to the attention of Oppenheimer and Joel in mid-1926, for the production of alluvial diamonds competed directly with those produced by the Conference Producers - those companies which

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[6]For a similar example of this type of alliance between the owners of the South African gold mines and the Pact government see D. Yudelman, The Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital, and the Incorporation of Organised Labour on the South African Goldfields, 1902-1939, Westport, Connecticut, 1983, pp.13-51.

owned the South African diamond mir.e[7] - which had their output and sales tied by agreements between themselves and the Diamond Syndicate which thus regulated the sale of diamonds internationally. These contracts were underwritten by the South African government which had taken this power by means of the Diamond Control Act of 1925. The Syndicate controlled the international diamond market through its purchases of diamonds. As Oppenheimer explained: 'All we need to do is to buy as many diamonds as we sell from the big producers, and if we do not sell, then of course we do not buy.'[8] This ensured a firm market for diamonds by preventing overselling, and prevented overproduction by tying the mines to specific production quotas. The alluvial diamond diggings in the Union were not tied to any such quotas and were not controlled by any companies. They could supply as much of the world's demand for rough stones as they were in a position to produce, leaving the Syndicate to apportion amongst the four Conference mines a constantly decreasing proportion of the total production.

During the 1920's the world's alluvial diamond industry was a fast-growing and extremely aggressive competitor of the four mining companies in the Union. New deposits of alluvial gravel within these ten years were discovered in Portuguese Angola, the Gold Coast, the Belgian Congo, British Guiana, and in the Union, in the south-western districts of the Transvaal province and the Namaqualand district of the Cape province. The discovery of alluvial gravel was the principal feature of the world's diamond trade in this period. Prior to the First World War the total

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[7]These diamond mining companies were the De Beers, Jagerfontein and Premier Diamond Mining Companies, and the Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa (CDM).

[8]TES 862, F5/73, 'Conference of Diamond Producers held at the Mines Department, Pretoria on 1 December 1927. Minutes of Proceedings', p.48.

production of diamonds in the world amounted to some six million carats, of which the Union mines supplied 76 per cent, the Union's alluvials (from the Vaal River diggings in the Cape province) 3 per cent, German South West Africa 19 per cent, and the rest of the world 2 per cent. However by 1927 the world was producing seven million carats and the Union's mines supplied only 34 per cent of the total, the South African alluvials (including Lichtenburg and Namaqualand) 33 per cent, whilst a further 33 per cent was supplied by the newly discovered alluvial fields within Africa and British Guiana.[9]

Oppenheimer and Joel were successful in closing down this independent diamond market outside the borders of the Union and bringing it under the control of the new Syndicate by means of long-term contracts to purchase quotas of these diamonds at fixed prices.[10] By 1926 it controlled 75 per cent more of this output than did the old Syndicate.[11] This policy was not possible within the Union, however, because the Syndicate confronted producers who were not controlled by a company, and who were politically articulate and who had the vote. Within the Union alluvial production was not controlled in any way. The digging community enjoyed a measure of influence, both as producers and as voters, which made any alteration of the status-quo by the Pact government an extremely difficult manoeuver. In addition, in the general election of 1924 the Pact had promised these voters and producers protection from the large diamond capitalists, a policy of generous proclamations of new diggings, and unrestricted prospecting in the Native

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[9] The Mining and Industrial Magazine 21 October 1925, The Mineral Industry, XXXV, 1927.

[10] For details of this see T. Gregory, Ernest Oppenheimer, pp.109-218.

[11] The Mineral Industry, XXXIV, 1925, p.610.

Reserves in the northern Cape and western Transvaal which the Smuts government had not permitted.[12]

The Diamond Control Act, which had enshrined the principle of uncontrolled alluvial production for the individual digger, had been opposed by Sir David Harris, the Chairman of the De Beers Diamond Mining Company (De Beers), and by Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, the representatives of mining capital in the House of Assembly. National Party parliamentarians who represented constituencies in the Western Transvaal, such as General J.C.G. Kemp at Wolmaranstad, made reference to the sacredness of these promises to the diggings community: 'he did not go along with the suggestions made by a certain gentleman representing the mining interests about the control of the alluvial diggings to prevent the market from being flooded because the present legislation... provides for the proper control and sale of diamonds and he did not want the alluvial digger to suffer by special control measures.'[13] Advocate A.S. van Hees, the MP for Brakpan but formerly of Christiana in the western Transvaal, had similar things to say of this bond between the National Party and the digging community: 'The government will go wrong (he said in January 1927) if they limit the output of diamonds from the alluvial fields.'[14]

These political considerations prevented Oppenheimer and Joel from acting precipitately. Between June and December 1926 they explored indirect ways to regulate the flow of these alluvial diamonds onto the markets of Europe and America. Their first efforts were directed to buying up the production of the

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[12] The Star 14 February 1927.

[13] The Star 7 December 1926.

[14] The Star 21 January 1927.

fields.[15] But there was a ceiling to the amount of working capital the Syndicate could invest in the pursuance of this policy. Under optimum market conditions the Syndicate tied-up about £2,5 million in rough diamonds, sorted and ready for selling, so that when overproduction or a drop in the world demand occurred, they could stand by the Conference producers with a float of £4 million.[16] This meant that Oppenheimer could safely hold a maximum stock of between £6 and £7 million at any one time. By the end of 1926 the Syndicate had accumulated about £1 million of Lichtenburg stones which it could not sell. This sum, when it was added to the stock already held by the Syndicate, amounted to over £3,5 million in January 1927. In December 1926 the Grasfontein subdivisions were announced and prospecting on the Reserve claims by the companies began in earnest. The Syndicate's response was to cut the replacement quotas of the Conference producers by £2,5 million to finance any further purchases of Lichtenburg diamonds. By June 1927 the Syndicate carried a stock of between £6 and £7 million of these diamonds, which strained even its financial resources. The cost to the Syndicate for the financing of this stock was enormous and this helps to explain the anxious efforts of the Syndicate members to awaken the Union government to the dangers which uncontrolled alluvial production from within the Union posed to its continued success.[17]

Another option open to the Syndicate was to drive down prices until the diggers were starved out. This was not easily done because the local diamond buying fraternity would cry 'monopoly', and awaken the political watchdogs of the community

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[15] T. Gregory, Ernest Oppenheimer, pp.160-218.

[16] TES 862, F5/73, 'Conference', p.8.

[17] Ibid.

to the machinations of the big capitalists. The local Transvaal and Cape diamond-buying fraternity were an extremely self-confident and assertive interest group, well represented by their respective professional organisations. They revelled in the ready market for diamonds provided by the Syndicate buyers who bought up any quantity of rough diamonds at good prices.[18] The flourishing state of the local diamond market in late 1926 and early 1927 belied the assertions of the Syndicate that the production of Lichtenburg stones was threatening the diamond industry as a whole. 'The Holborn Viaduct headquarters of the Diamond Syndicate (stated one such local buyer) has entirely depleted its stocks owing to the enormous demand for rough stones from America and the Continent.'[19] In October 1926 George Scott-Ronaldson, a local buyer, assured diggers that the Lichtenburg production had barely caused a ripple in the international diamond pond.[20]

If demand for these Lichtenburg diamonds appeared to be high, the prices which the diggers were receiving from the buyers were extremely low. The production of alluvial stones at Lichtenburg had increased, as we have seen, over the 1925 figure by 300 per cent, and over this figure by another 100 per cent by April 1927 (563 863 carats and 754 172 carats respectively), but this 400 per cent increase in volume was accompanied by an increase of only 100 per cent in value. The prices of the Lichtenburg diamonds plummeted by over 74 per cent on the average, from

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[18]For the local diamond buyers see The Star 27 October 1926, 4 December 1926, 8 December 1926, 30 April 1927, 5 July 1927; The Klerksdorp Record and Western Transvaal News 3 December 1926.

[19]The Star 6 July 1926.

[20]The Star 5 October 1926.

167s. 11d. per carat to 44s. per carat in April 1927.[21] The caratage represented by this 200 per cent margin of diamonds was disposed of effectively for nothing and 'these diamonds were sheer waste - waste to the diggers in their cost of production, and waste to the revenue and resources of the State'.[22]

The drop in diamond prices forced the diggers to produce more in order to outdistance their declining profit line. The resulting production figures were dubbed by one observer as the "diggers' Suicide Charts"[23] (see Appendix Four). This inverse relation between price and production characterised alluvial digging for Oppenheimer: 'If the diggers produce, they sell and if the diamond market stops, they starve,' he said.[24] The independent diggers were thus weak sellers, and they were a great threat to the diamond market, for 'If more ground is thrown open to the diggers they will go for the best patches and get out the diamonds as quickly as possible without any regard for market conditions.'[25] With the Syndicate financially propping up the market by absorbing the surplus production, the local diamond buyers confidently asserted that all the Lichtenburg diamonds so far produced had been absorbed and appealed to the digging community to fight for an unrestricted output. The Transvaal Alluvial Diamond Buyers Union thus tied their colours firmly to the mast of the alluvial industry: 'Who could tell (they asked) exactly how many diamonds could be

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[21] The Diamond Fields Advertiser 9 July 1927.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] TES 862 F5/73, 'Conference', p.34.

[25] TES 953, F5/251, 'Alluvial Diamond Production. Control of', Memorandum Government Mining Engineer to Minister of Finance, 'Alluvial Production 1926', 12 January 1927.

absorbed per annum?'[26]

The Diamond Syndicate was not, however, an entity separate from the rest of the diamond industry. Joel and Oppenheimer had large holdings in the mining companies which were being forced to shoulder the burden of their purchasing policy. As producers, the Conference companies wanted the government either to limit the number of new alluvial proclamations, or to impose a quota on the production of alluvial diamonds within the Union. The mining companies had raised this issue in 1924, which had caused the breakdown of the Interproducers Conference of that year because the four companies refused to cut their production quotas. The proposed cuts, they asserted, meant in effect that they would be paying for the government's political programme of supporting the alluvial digging community. Their proposal was that the Pact restrict the output of the alluvial diggings. Replying to this suggestion, the Private Secretary to General Hertzog wrote: 'M/ Minister is of the clear opinion that it would be politically most dangerous and in every way inadvisable to consider the closing of the alluvial fields in response to the Syndicate's pressure.'[27]The Diamond Control Act resulted from the breakdown of these negotiations, as the members of Syndicate, who controlled the Conference companies through their representation on the mining company boards, tried to bring pressure to bear on the Pact to control the output and proclamation of new alluvial diggings within the Union. The Lichtenburg discoveries, to add insult to injury, coincided with a worldwide diamond boom but 'any increase there might have been

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[26]The Star 12 February 1926.

[27]TES 862, F5/73, 'Conference', Private Secretary of the Prime Minister to Secretary for Mines, 10 November 1924; Secretary of Mines, 'Memorandum on the Results of the Diamond Conference, 3rd and 4th November 1924', 6 November 1924.

for the conference producers over and above the original £8 million volume of trade fixed for 1926, has gone to the alluvial diggings'.[28]

If the Syndicate and its member companies were in trouble because of the Lichtenburg production, so was the Pact. The cutting of the replacement quotas of the mining companies directly affected the revenue which the state derived from taxation of the diamond industry. In private, officials and other state functionaries warned the government of the financial implications to the Union and South West Africa of the 'overproduction' of independently produced alluvial diamonds. Uncontrolled production from the alluvial fields might encourage the extra-Union alluvial producers to break their agreements with the Syndicate, for 'they can hardly be expected to meekly accept this restriction the meanwhile seeing an enormous uncontrolled production approximating to or perhaps exceeding that of the four big producers of the Union who have already such a preponderating share of the world's volume of the diamond trade'.[29] This would result in the break-up of the monopoly control of the diamond trade which the Pact had in fact cemented by means of the Diamond Control Act.

Closer to home, financial pressure would be brought to bear more directly on the Union treasury because of the Syndicate's decision to cut the replacement, for the 'control of the Union's alluvial production seems to be essential unless the Government is prepared to run the risk of a serious setback in the diamond market, the effect of which would fall most heavily on the

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[28] TES 862, F5/73, 'Conference', Secretary for Mines to Minister of Mines, 're Diamond Position', 4 December 1924.

[29] TES 862, F5/73, 'Conference', Secretary of Mines to Minister of Mines, 're Diamond Position', 4 December 1924.

producers in whose operations the Government is most deeply interested in, ie. the Premier and South West Africa'.[30] The Lichtenburg stones were in direct competition with the Premier and CDM which produced so-called 'small stuff'. Almost the entire budget for the Administration of SWA was drawn from the CDM and the alluvial production by the Union's diggers threatened the economic independence of this territory.[31] This danger was given added emphasis because South West Africa was looked to as a territory to which the Union could export some of its poor whites as settlers.

A similar financial argument underlay the importance of the four diamond companies to the Treasury. The Premier paid a 60 per cent profits tax, whil the other producing companies paid nearly 25 per cent, but the alluvial producers were effectively taxed only 10 per cent on their profits.[32] Thus the bulk of state revenue in respect of the diamond industry came from the diamond mines and not from the alluvial producers.[33] When in December 1926 the replacement was cut to £5,5 million, the Premier company in which the state held a half interest, bore the brunt of the reduction.[34] Again in June 1927 the Conference Producers agreed to limit the quota to £5,5 million for the

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[30] TES 953, F5/251, 'Alluvial Diamond Production', G.M.R. to Minister of Finance, 'Alluvial Production 1926', 12 January 1927.

[31] Ibid.

[32] TES 953, F5/251, 'Alluvial Diamond Production', G.M.R. to Minister of Finance, 'Alluvial Production 1926', 12 January 1927.

[33] TES 953, F5/251, 'Alluvial Diamond Production', A.P. McLaughton, Commissioner for Inland Revenue, to Secretary for Finance, Ref R14/29, 'Revenue Estimates 1927/28: Diamond Mining', 11 December 1926.

[34] TES 862, F5/73, 'Conference', p.10.

remaining six month period.[35] This revenue was extremely important to the Pact's budget, for in 1928 over one-eighth of the total state revenue came from the diamond industry.

The response of the mining companies themselves to the Lichtenburg discoveries was muted until November 1926, when De Beers passed a resolution to the effect that it was essential to watch the alluvial development and that the company should from time to time 'buy up farms in likely areas in order to prevent as far as possible a recurrence of the Lichtenburg finds'.[36] But the major incentive to follow this new policy came from the announcement by Dr H. Merensky of the discovery of the alluvial deposits at Alexander Bay in Namaqualand in late 1926, which were 'the richest alluvial finds in diamond history'.[37] Prospecting work carried out by the discoverers resulted in a parcel of stones weighing 12 240 carats, with an average weight per diamond of two carats, the entire parcel being valued at £154 000.[38]

By December 1926 the mining companies had been rapidly brought into line by the Diamond Syndicate's replacement offer and now joined in a chorus of disapproval at the irresponsible manner in which the Pact government was administrating the resources of the state by its alluvial policy. This campaign began symbolically with the arrival of Sir David Harris, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and Solly Joel in Cape Town aboard the Arundel Castle in late November. The diamond magnates embroidered on their theme of the irresponsible handling of the

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[35] Ibid., p.26.

[36] T. Gregory, Ernest Oppenheimer, pp.168-169.

[37] T. Gregory, Ernest Oppenheimer, pp.168-169.

[38] Ibid.

broader interests of the state and public, Solly Joel stating that he could not understand the government 'being so foolish as to allow these indiscriminate proclamations which were only damaging their permanent industry and encouraging a floating population which in a very short time must be on the poor lists and practically starving'.[39] Sir David Harris beat the same drum: 'Our Government seems to have encouraged overproduction, and that will have a serious effect, not only on the alluvial producers, but on everybody, particularly South West Africa.'[40] This campaign played skilfully on the fact that the alluvial diggings were attracting 'poor whites' in large numbers to Lichtenburg, and the claim that this was exacerbating the 'poor white problem'. The Pact, for its part, was unwilling to commit political suicide by bowing to the demands of 'Hoggenheimer' and friends for what amounted to direct state interference to limit the output of the diggers. Similar arguments advanced in 1924 and 1925 had failed and there was no reason to suspect in late 1926 that Hertzog and his Cabinet would change their minds.

Oppenheimer resolved upon more direct action to limit the growth of the diggings. He sent the geologist Dr P.F.W. Beetz to Lichtenbury to ascertain the extent of the deposits.[41] Acting on his advice, Oppenheimer approached Joel in November with an offer to acquire a number of farms which lay along the line of the Treasure Trove/Grasfontein gravel run. For £100 000 Oppenheimer and Joel personally acquired, with mineral rights, five farms lying to the east of Uitgevonden and Grasfontein - Christinas Home No.324, Kaalbult No.7, Leadpan No.392, Diepholte

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[39] The Star 30 November 1926.

[40] The Star 29 December 1926.

[41] T. Gregory, Ernest Oppenheimer, pp.176-178.

No.176 and Doornplaat No.305 - and two of the many subdivided portions of Grasfontein, the Lewis and Marks-owned farm. To conceal their tracks, they formed a company, the High Level Gravels Limited, to undertake these purchases, and appointed one of their auditors to act as its director on their behalf. These alluvial acquisitions were never worked; they were closed off from the public by the new landowners who would not give permission for prospectors to put a spade to the ground.[42]

In the sphere of marketing Oppenheimer also called in his markers. David Russell, the Chairman of the Treasure Trove Diamond Company who purchased Uitgevonden in 1926 and who made heavy investments in the Grasfontein subdivisions, began to channel the results of digging and prospecting on his Reserve claims through the Syndicate. He was Oppenheimer's diamond buyer on the Vaal River diggings during the early 1920's.[43] Russell was also instrumental in selling portions of Grasfontein to the High Level Gravels, and it was suggested that his purchases there were funded by Oppenheimer to keep the Reserve claims from being worked. This assertion was given substance by the failure of the Treasure Trove Company to work their Reserve claims on Grasfontein until late in 1927.[44] Little is known of the manner in which Lewis and Marks disposed of their production from their farms. But in January 1927 Oppenheimer noted that Lewis and Marks were antagonistic to Syndicate approaches to sell their output to them.[45] However by May 1927 it seems as if

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[42] Ibid.

[43] MNW 985, mm1654/29, P.A. Rivas to F.W. Beyers, 'Private and Confidential', 25 June 1929.

[44] MNW 985, mm1654/29, P.A. Rivas to F.W. Beyers, 'Private and Confidential', 25 June 1929.

[45] T. Gregory, Ernest Oppenheimer, p.177.

they had overcome their dislike of the Syndicate, for Lewis and Marks began marketing their diamonds through the new Alluvial Combine set up by Oppenheimer and Joel for the specific purpose of funding purchases of alluvial diamonds.[46]

The last two months of 1926 were of crucial importance in dictating the Ireton and Thom initiative, for some intervention was required to break the ensuing log-jam. While the diggers enjoyed a financial windfall, the government was drawn in two directions: it felt the need to honour its promises to the community by allowing more digging, whilst being hard-pressed to protect its revenue sources by limiting digging. Oppenheimer, on the other hand, was finding it extremely difficult to combat the effects of the Lichtenburg production on the international market, as we can see from the staggering amounts of working capital the Syndicate was tying up to absorb the Lichtenburg production. November and December 1926 were crucial months for the diamond magnates, and the obvious reluctance of the Pact to intervene signalled the need for a new strategy.

For the Pact things were looking equally bleak. Hertzog and his Cabinet colleagues may have been in a position to ride the crisis until production from Lichtenburg 'naturally' declined in volume and value. They were not to be so fortunate. In December 1926 news of the Namaqualand discoveries was released, once again raising the spectre of the imminent collapse of the international diamond market through the emergence of yet another uncontrolled alluvial deposit at which the diggers cast their envious eyes. The overproduction problem thus proved most intractable. As Oppenheimer pointed out to Beyers, the Minister of Mines in February 1927, there was always the chance of new discoveries and for this eventuality the state needed to have

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[46] Ibid.

powers for 'throwing open the ground, or allocating it by lots, or working it themselves'. It also needed to have the power to limit alluvial production to a defined percentage of the mine production.[47] This was the signal for the Ireton and Thom initiative.

The Diggers' Advocates: Ireton and Thom

It needs to be stressed that Ireton and Thom were not merely the shadows of their principals, nor, as future incidents were clearly to demonstrate, their dupes. The funding which Oppenheimer and Joel provided this partnership with in December 1926 was apparently given with little clarification and with no exchange of guarantees. The motivation was probably little more than to prevent Ireton and Thom from falling into the pay of the local diamond buyers, who were quick to spot the advantages of intervening in local community politics. Nor did this funding give the diamond magnates much purchase over their activities, which were always self-interested. Many of Ireton and Thom's activities in the next twenty-four months were only peripherally related to the interests of their sponsors. But ultimately the money was well spent. Ireton and Thom did gain the ear of the Government by putting themselves forward as the representatives of the small diggers. They maintained their public legitimacy in the face of attempts by other class representatives to discredit their standing. Finally, through their public campaign in the interests of the bona fide diggers, and through their legal actions, they shaped the form of the Precious Stones Bill introduced by the Pact in 1927 in ways which served the interests of their backers. This was achieved by agitating for the exclusion of the landowners of alluvial farms from the

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[47] MNW 886, mm525/25, 'Comments', E. Oppenheimer to F.W. Beyers, 'Memorandum. Private and Confidential', 7 February 1927.

sphere of production, the elimination of private companies and syndicates, and the expropriation of their property on the Reserve claims (which they claimed by right of subdivision) through retrospective legislation. All this was said to be in the interests of the small man, the bona fide digger, for whose use the proclaimed diggings were now exclusively reserved. Yet on a more fundamental level the Act enshrined the principle of control over the production of alluvial diamonds, and thus brought this independent community within the community of diamond producers - an outcome that was in the economic interest of the Diamond Syndicate and the established Conference Producers. The interests of monopoly were thus asserted by the Pact through this piece of controversial legislation, at the expense of the interests of local capitalists, and the independent producers.

Ireton and Thom were not initially associated with the early signs of popular protest on the alluvial fields and were therefore not the authors of such protest, although they had prospected at Bakers from the inception of digging in the district in June 1926.[48] Nor were they the sole authors of popular protest in the following two years. There was a well established tradition of protest which these two opportunists skilfully manipulated to their own political advantage. One of traditions was the illegal rush, by which diggers expressed displeasure at the owners of farms and their prospectors in working out large areas of gravel prior to proclamation. In May 1926, for example, diggers at Roodepan in the district illegally rushed the farm when the mining officials delayed the proclamation in defiance of the law in this regard.[49] Diggers

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[48] The Star 9 November 1926.

[49] The Star 17 May 1926, 19 June 1926.

threatened to do the same on the Lichtenburg fields prior to the Elandsputte proclamation.[50] Similar rumours - now pinned on Ireton and Thom - were mooted in October 1926, prior to the Witklip and Wondergat proclamations. In the same month Ireton and Thom were the intitiators of an illegal rush of the trading Reserves at Bakers, which many diggers felt had been unfairly allocated to the owner of the farm.[51] Early in November 1926 they were pinpointed by officials as the source of rumours that the proclamations of Witklip and Wondergat had been issued with the aim of distracting the public from the Grasfontein subdivisions of that month.[52] They also championed the cause of the small, under-capitalised digger, stranded through financial stringency on the public areas of the farms, who considered themselves the victims of unscrupulous landowners and prospectors who had monopolised the best deposits prior to the proclamation of these two farms.

Ireton and Thom did not explicitly direct their attention to the subdivision of Grasfontein until popular protest gained momentum in late October and early November 1926. This spontaneous popular reaction at the A&E subdivision of Grasfontein was a result of a combination of disappointment at the digging results on the public areas of Witklip and Wonderyat, and, exaggerated rumours about the richness of the Grasfontein reserve claims. On 2 November 1926 a meeting of the Lichtenburg Diggers Committee was broken up by a group of

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[50] The Star 19 June 1926.

[51] The Star 2 June 1927.

[52] JUS 430, 3/148/27, 'Police report on Diamond Diggings-Ireton, Thom and van der Merwe', A.E. Trigger, Divisional Criminal Investigation Officer, Witwatersrand Division to Deputy Commissioner, S.A.P. Witwatersrand Division, Ref. 1655123, 're: Agitators on Diamond Diggings - Ireton, Thom and van der Merwe', 7 February 1927.

dissenting diggers who accused the largely well-off committee members of being 'fast asleep' in protecting the property rights of the diggers on Grasfontein.[53] The following day an enormous open air meeting of over 5000 diggers at Bakers declared their indignation at the evasion of the spirit of the law by the A&E, and elected a two man delegation to see the Minister of Mines in this regard. These two delegates were Ireton and Thom, and their message to the Minister was that the diggers intended to rush Grasfontein unless steps were taken by the Government to test the validity of the subdivisions.[54]

No clues are given as to how Ireton and Thom were delegated, but from this point they put themselves forward as the small diggers' representatives. They were, of course, not the only candidates for this honour and their activities were always fiercely contested by the members of the legally constituted Diggers Committee, who considered that all diggers should raise any grievances with them. Their legitimacy was constantly called into question by the representatives of the companies and the syndicates, and by the government officials. For example, man 'well connected' in mining circles regarded their work, interestingly enough, as that of 'two agitators who were well-known for their malevolent propaganda during the Rand Revolution of 1922'.[55] Colonel J. van Eyssen, Manager of the A&E properties at Lichtenburg, declared that Ireton and Thom were a 'distinctly foreign element on the diggings', and that their agitation was simply mischievous: 'There is not the slightest doubt that the subdivision of Grasfontein in spite of the outcry it aroused proved a real blessing to the diggers as a

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[53] The Star 2 November 1926.

[54] The Star 3 November 1926.

[55] The Star 6 November 1926.

whole,' wrote van Eyssen.[56] He was also convinced that 'these two men... were invited to meet the Magistrate at Lichtenburg in private' where they were warned that they were being closely followed by the authorities, that their speeches were being reported, and that they should 'cease their disturbing propaganda' in spite of Thom's denials that this meeting ever occurred.[57]

The idea of rushing Grasfontein held little attraction to many diggers. Although there was 'general disappointment' regarding the subdivisions, very few diggers 'would participate in any illegal rush or would support leaders who advocated violence... and unless something illegal had been done by the owners in sub-dividing the farms they were going to respect the owners' rights'.[58] Many commentators expressed their disapproval at this radical solution in terms of the notion of 'respectability': a syndicate digger stated, for instance, that 'the threat to rush Grasfontein did not represent the opinion of any responsible men on the fields', and that the diggers' deputation to Pretoria 'was not financed by the respectable diggers'.[59] Government officials offered similar opinions: officials of the Mines Department stated that the diggers were a 'decent crowd', and that they were law-abiding and would not associate themselves with 'hot-headed' fellows who wanted to make an illegal rush.[60]

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[56] The Star 11 November 1926.

[57] The Star 6 November 1926, 9 November 1926.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

The brief moments of Ireton and Thom at the helm of the unsteady and stormy bridge of digger politics depended upon their popular support. They embarked upon a programme of public action to test the validity of the subdivision policy of the local capitalist entrepreneurs on the fields, who were seen to monopolise large areas of the ground with the help of the mining officials. These capitalists were new interests in the alluvial game, stated Thom in March 1927, and as a result it was necessary for diggers, who had always promptly obeyed orders given by the officials, to challenge the mining regulations.[61] This resulted in the already mentioned threat to rush Grasfontein unless steps were taken to restore the lawfully guaranteed rights of the public on this alluvial farm.

On behalf of al. diggers Ireton and Thom applied for a Supreme Court interdict regarding the Grasfontein subdivisions on the grounds that the whole farm had been prospected by an employee of A&E in June 1926 and therefore that the owners could not subdivide the farm. This interdict was rejected on 4 March 1927, the day on which Grasfontein was proclaimed, because 'the applicants had waited until the eleventh hour and fifty-ninth second before asking for an interdict'.[62] On 24 March 1927 Thom pegged trading sites on portion L2 of Grasfontein, a subdivided portion of the farm owned by the Carrig Diamond Syndicate, for the purpose of testing the legality of their exclusion from public pegging.[63] After an intial conviction, the Supreme Court overruled the decision of the magistrate in Thom's favour. The result was a minor rush on all the Lichtenburg farms, as diggers pegged claims on other trading

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[61] The Star 24 March 1927.

[62] The Star 4 March 1927.

[63] The Star 24 March 1927.

Reserves which had been specifically set aside from public pegging by the Mining Commissioner. 'The provisions of the Ordinance of 1903,' stated Justice S. Krause of the Supreme Court in regard to this case, 'as to the rights acquired by the public were very distinct. The word 'administration' could not be held to imply a power to establish rights independently of the provisions of the Statute.'[64] The Supreme Court thus held that 'public rights' had been illegally given away to private interests and these should be restored to the public. On 25 May 1927 Thom pegged claims on the owners' Reserve on portion L1 of Grasfontein, to test whether the Supreme Court would once again hold that the rights of the public on the farm had been ignored by the owners but his test case in this regard failed.[65] Two days before this Thom pegged a machine site on the Reserve area of Donaldson and Carlis's property on Welverdiend, claiming that this area had been illegally set aside from public pegging and in this case the Supreme Court upheld his claim.[66] In early November 1927, in anticipation of the passage of the Precious Stones Act, Thom pegged claims on the Owners' Reserve at Grasfontein, giving as justification 'the determination of the Government to press for the passing of the retrospective clauses, especially as they apply to the limitation of the owner's reserves to 250 claims', thereby anticipating the government's determination to restore to the diggers their public rights.[67]

From at least early in March 1927, Ireton and Thom were acting for backers other than Oppenheimer and Joel. Their

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[64] The Star 23 May 1927.

[65] The Star 12 September 1927.

[66] The Star 12 September 1927.

[67] The Star 4 November 1927.

pegging of the trading reserves at Grasfontein in March 1927 and the subsequent Supreme Court test case was funded by some local storekeepers on the diggings who did not want to pay the exorbitant rents charged by the landowners of the farms. Neither were their activities in the latter part of 1927 in the interests of Oppenheimer and Joel, for their illegal pegging of the Reserve claims on Grasfontein in November took place on claims which Oppenheimer and Joel had purchased through the High Level Gravel, and through David Russell of Treasure Trove. There is no evidence available which links Oppenheimer to Ireton and Thom from March 1927. The test cases they initiated were meant only to give them legitimacy as the defenders of the rights of the public and they became popularly known as the 'diggers' advocates'. This status gave them great opportunities for private gain, and they accumulated 50 reserve claims on Verlies, and 12 on Welverdiend, valued collectively at some £20 000.[68]

The test cases on their own were insufficient to generate public support for Ireton and Thom and, as we have noted, their rise to public prominence was contested by others who claimed to be serving the same ends. The threat to rush Grasfontein was not a step to be taken lightly, nor were diggers uniformly accepting of this threat to subvert the law. Some limitations on the form of popular protest need therefore to be mentioned. It seems that the politics of the diggings community was bound up with some notion of the rule of law, and the legitimacy of public actions was determined largely by popular conceptions of legality. We can trace this theme through most popular protest on the diggings in these months. Discontent at the Elandsputte proclamation in June 1926 was aimed at the illegal distribution of diggers' licences to those newcomers who applied for them after the expiry of the two week deadline. The Mines Department

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[68] The Star 14 August 1928.

officials were also blamed for not enforcing the law with regard to diggers who rushed without licences.[69] At the Roodepan rush diggers were prepared to justify their illegal action 'because of the delay in the publication of the official announcement proclaiming the farm as public diggings'. At the Treasure Trove proclamation in August 1926, the most notable feature was the lack of supervision and the presence of the law'.[70] The threat to rush Grasfontein was also expressed in terms of legality: 'there is grave dissatisfaction at the procedure adopted by the owners of the farm which the owners completely justify.'[71] The diggers' deputation to the Minister in that month was entrusted to carry the message that the threat of the illegal rush was only intended to force the government to reconsider the legality of the procedure of subdivision and to have it altered in law.[72] In response to the advice of the Minister of Mines 'to obey the law', Ireton and Thom instructed their lawyers, Advocate A.S. van Hees and Oswald Pirow, to take action in the Supreme Court to test the validity of the owners' subdivision of the farm into 15 portions.[73]

Thus all the public actions taken by Ireton and Thom in 1927 had the ostensible purpose of protecting the public rights of diggers through the courts. One of the limitations on white popular protest within the Union in this period was therefore that, within the boundaries of an electoral system, there was a need to legitimate protest within the boundaries of the law. In

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[69] The Star 9 June 1926, 10 June 1926.

[70] The Star 19 August 1926.

[71] The Star 3 November 1926.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

the case of Ireton and Thom this was achieved through their skilful manipulation of the concept of public rights ostensibly already guaranteed by law and parliament. This brings us to another limitation facing white popular protest and its initiators. Ireton and Thom felt, more keenly than observers realised, the need to stay within the boundaries of the law, for their ultimate end, as they had stated in November, was to gain entry into public office on the diggers' vote, in the Provincial Council elections of March 1927. A further limitation needs to be mentioned and this was their need to align themselves at least formally with the policies of the Pact government, for the diggers' constituencies in the western Transvaal had consistently voted for the National Party from its advent in 1915, and the Pact was therefore 'their government'. All their public appearances in this period were undertaken under the banner and protection of the National Party.

At their public meetings on the diggings Ireton and Thom fully articulated their particular package of anti-monopolist and small man populist demands. These highly emotive and action-packed public meetings were the means by which they delivered their messages to the diggers and they in turn were instructed by their constituency. The use of the open-air meeting was their response to the many challenges to prove their bona fides as the diggers' representatives. The first of such meetings, held on 10 November 1926, is a good example of this. They were challenged by the Minister of Mines to prove their legitimacy. At this open-air meeting at Grasfontein some 7000 diggers congregated to elect the partners unanimously as the diggers' representatives, 'with the power to take any action they deemed necessary' to protect the rights of the diggers. At this meeting Thom and Ireton reported back on the reaction of the Minister to their demands for the reversal of the subdivisions policy on that farm. Thom's speech had two central themes: the need to stay within the law, and the need to look to the government for support. 'We have heard a lot about our

taking the law into our own hands and rushing Grasfontein (he stated), but we are not going to do it. The Government has said that we must not break the law but must bring the matter before the Supreme Court.... we must behave ourselves. We must have the Government with us; we must stand by the Government, for so long as we are fair to the Government so will the Government be fair to us.' Tielman Roos, Chairman of the Transvaal National Party and M.P. for Lichtenburg, had declared that the subdivisions were intended to 'bend and evade the law'. Following this tacit support from an influential Nationalist minister, and with a promise by the Minister of Mines, F.W. Beyers, to introduce the legislation which would rectify the matter, the diggers roundly applauded the deputation and gave them a mandate to collect subscriptions 'so that the diggers could fight for their rights'.[74]

The plotholders were described at this meeting as the 'capitalist termites'. Lewis and Marks, explained Ireton, in 'pre Boer War days had got a grip on the country and had secured 75 per cent of the farms. Now they were not satisfied and wanted more. Were they to waste for nothing that blood and sweat they had shed in the war?' Ireton's performance was followed by that of General 'Manie' Maritz, the 'Nationalist lion', who agreed that the diggers needed to support the government. 'The real enemy of the digger,' declared Maritz, 'was not the Government but the capitalists. It is the bloodsuckers who are cutting up the ground. They are our masters.' Maritz slipped easily from this theme to that of the 'Jewish conspiracy': 'Who is the biggest bloodsucker in the country?' he asked, and in the same breath replied, 'The Jews are coming into the country, the Boer country, by the thousands. Jerusalem is here already.' Maritz's outburst struck a popular note at the meeting, though not with

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[74] The Star 11 November 1926.

Ireton and Thom and not with the government, whose views Maritz was expected to present at the meeting.[75]

The usefulness of the agitation of Ireton and Thom to Oppenheimer and Joel emerges very clearly at this eventful public meeting. The audience made repeated reference to the fact that it was the companies and syndicates and the landowners operating on Grasfontein who were responsible for the rapidly escalating conflict, because they were stealing the rights of the public. This dissatisfaction with the landowners was, as we have explored earlier, only one aspect of Oppenheimer's strategy to curtail the diamond production from these diggings. The other was his support for a the small digger against the local capitalists. Of fundamental importance in this latter alliance was Oppenheimer's explicit support for the 'white labour' policy of Ireton and Thom. If white labour only were allowed on an alluvial claim, he reasoned, the exploitation of the deposits would be less intensive, and this would discourage the investment of capital in digging operations by investors. This would result in the permanent strangling of diamond production from the alluvial diggings which would prevent overproduction and therefore competition with the established diamond companies.[76]

Ironically, the details of this white labour policy were worked out by the very producers who, in the long run, would be so detrimentally affected. The working out of these details began on 23 December 1926 at a meeting held at Bakers, that was

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[75] The Star 11 November 1926, 6 November 1926, 13 November 1926.

[76] TES 862, P5/73, 'Conference', Memorandum, E. Oppenheimer to F.W. Beyers, 'Notes on the World's Diamond Production, 1924', no date.

called to debate what action was necessary to speed up government initiatives on the subdivision question. The plotholders were maligned 'as the enemies of the nation and of the people'. The companies and syndicates were singled out as being responsible for the exclusion of diggers from the rich gravel on Grasfontein, for the overproduction scare and for the 40 per cent decline in the price of rough diamonds. It was the plotholders 'who had bought the plots to keep their fellow-men off the farms (and) It was the duty of the Government to look after the bona-fide digger and (it) had been promised that this would be done as soon as the necessary legislation had been passed. Meantime it was a scandal before God that the digger was being kept off the farm.... They did not want to start a revolution and did not intend to, but with the help of the Government they would put the digger in his rightful place.'[77] This was very familiar rhetoric, but then Thom and Ireton, probably acting as promotors for the owner of a neighbouring farm, Vexlies (who desired to prospect his farm and work his Reserve claims immediately), announced that a deal had been struck between them and the government that the farm would be opened to prospecting if the work there would be undertaken by white labour only: 'Only white men will be allowed to work there. That will give us all work for the six or seven months that litigation (on Grasfontein) will be proceeding.'[78] Hearty applause greeted this announcement from the crowd.

This policy, which had now been so clearly endorsed by the diggers, revealed which diggers were supporting Ireton and Thom. They were the 'new chums', those amateur diggers who had left the cities and the farms in the hope of making sudden fortunes

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[77] The Star 24 December 1926.

[78] The Star 24 November 1926.

and who, because they lacked sufficient capital would not be taken on by the large capitalist enterprises as prospectors and tribute workers to work the Reserve claims. Some of them had been disappointed at the Bakers, Wondergat and Witklip proclamations. Others with no capital to work the deep areas, or to purchase Reserve claims, were also prominent in their camp.[79] The demands of these diggers reflected their class position rather closely. They demanded that all diggers (prospectors and tributors) on the subdivided portions of the farms (on Reserve claims) be taxed on the same scale as the existing diamond mines; that the subdivisions be declared null and void; that diggers' licences be limited to those Europeans who earned their living through digging only - and that rich farmers, speculators and other moneyed elements be excluded from digging altogether. They also demanded that any further prospecting be carried out by white labour only, with a minimum of 8 'native labourers', and only one claim for each digger.[80]

All these demands were taken up in the Precious Stones Bill introduced by Beyers, the Minister of Mines, to the House of Assembly in January 1927. They had not appeared in any of the draft alluvial diamond legislation introduced by the Pact between 1924 and 1926, and were clearly taken up by them only when their value became apparent in late 1926. The agitation so skilfully engineered by Ireton and Thom therefore provided the Government with convenient scapegoats - the 'capitalist pests' - for the introduction of this controversial legislation. These were the local capitalists who had invested in the farms as landowners, or who had purchased Reserve claims on the

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[79] The Star 12 November 1926.

[80] The Star 31 November 1926, 24 December 1926.

subdivided portions of Grasfontein and Welverdiend. From this point, the Pact justified its alluvial diamond policy as being in the interests of the small man. Superficially this appeared to be so. Numerous letters to the Minister of Mines throughout 1927 bear witness to the widely held belief amongst diggers that the Pact was, by supporting this policy, protecting the small man from the 'capitalists'. Just whose interests were dictating policy become clearer only once the provisions of the Precious Stones Act were implemented after November 1927.

Conclusion

The alluvial diggings, now the Utopia of the small man, protected by legislation from capitalist competition, satisfied the needs of monopoly capital from a number of angles. First, as early as 1924 Oppenheimer stated that one of the ways of controlling the output from the alluvial fields was for the government to take the power through legislation to restrict the use of 'coloured labour' on the alluvial areas, rather than to tackle the private rights of landowners head-on. The effect would be that only whites would be employed, and instead of the use of large gangs of labourers on the better-paying concerns on the alluvial diggings, a few whites might be employed by the more enterprising diggers, and the recovery would probably be very much reduced.[81]

The policy of one-man one-claim; the restriction of the use of black labour, and the elimination of the companies and syndicates formed the core of both the diggers' demands and the needs of monopoly capital at this particular juncture. This

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[81]TES 862, F5/73, 'Conference', Memorandum, E. Oppenheimer to P.W. Beyers, 'Notes on the World's Diamond Production, 1924', no date.

intersection meshed rather neatly with the political needs of the Pact, masquerading as the vehicle for the aspirations of the small man in his struggle against the capitalists. It was the local capitalists on the fields - both the owners of the Reserve claims on the various subdivided portions of the farms and the prospectors and large-scale digging concerns who were the victims of the populist policies of the Pact. We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that in pursuit of this policy, the Pact was not selflessly supporting the small man, but ensuring the dominance of monopoly capital in the sphere of diamond production. In this piece of legislation therefore, the Pact was working 'hand in hand' with the diamond magnates, and as D.F. Braslin asserted, the provisions of the Precious Stones Act were in favour of the 'big interests' and 'to h... with the small sprats'.[82]The bonds which were forged in this period of crisis between the South African state and the diamond magnates grew more strong, and their interest more common over time. This particular incident seems to underline the belief of R. Milliband that whenever the modern state intervenes there 'in an exceptionally strong position compared with other groups, will businessmen be found to influence and to determine the nature of that intervention'.[83]

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[82]MNW 886, mm525/27, 'Comments', C.D.F. Braslin to F.W. Beyers, Minister of Mines, 4 June 1927.

[83]R. Milliband, The State in Capitalist Society, p.54.

Chapter Four

COMMUNITY POLITICS ON THE LICHTENBURG FIELDS, 1926-1929

> The unlucky one, the ignorant and the oppressed have only one conclusion to come to, and that is that they have been beaten again.... the poor digger has been beaten so often that he has lost faith in anything being run straight for his benefit. He has been beaten from forming small syndicates; he has been beaten from obtaining employment from small companies; he has been beaten from obtaining financial support from the buyers who are mostly on the spot almost daily; and last, but not least, he has been beaten from participating in one of the richest known alluvial fields in the world - namely Namaqualand - on the ground that to have a lot of poor diggers there would make conditions worse than before and cause greater starvation than at present exists.[1]

Introduction.

This chapter examines digger politics between December 1927, when the controversial Precious Stones Bill became law, and the June 1929 general election. In that election a relatively unknown candidate, A.J. Swanepoel, the President of the Diggers' Union of South Africa (DU), a Lichtenburg resident and diamond buyer on the diggings, won the Lichtenburg seat for the NP. He had no political credentials before he arrived on the diggings after resigning his commission with the SADF in 1926, and kept a low profile in local politics until his election to the executive of the DU in April 1928. He was elected President of the DU in August 1928. In July 1928 a meeting of Nationalist delegates on the diggings resolved to nominate him to oppose Tielman Roos, the 'Nationalist Lion' and long-standing National Party (NP) member for Lichtenburg (14 years), leader of the

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[1] The Star 3 October 1928.

Transvaal NP and Minister of Justice in the Pact cabinet, because of the treatment of the digging community by the NP. In October 1928 Roos, using all his political muscle, narrowly secured the official nomination for his Lichtenburg seat. Swanepoel, however, refused to capitulate and announced his intention to stand as an Independent Nationalist candidate: 'He was a staunch nationalist but (he) contended that an Independent had a better chance than a party of criticising the NP leadership.' In November 1928 Roos summoned the District Committee of the NP and withdrew his candidacy for the Lichtenburg seat. His decision, he said, was 'to give the diggers a chance to have their own representative in Parliament'. Swanepoel was then nominated by the NP district committee and in June 1929 he won the seat for the NP in a three-cornered contest.[2]

This exciting rural political battle in a western Transvaal constituency in the late 1920's allows us to examine the local political consequences of the Pact-sponsored programme for the rationalisation of the alluvial diamond digging industry. This rationalisation was accomplished through the agency of the Precious Stones Act. As a result of this policy the digging community was transformed: their former rights were severely circumscribed, including the right to produce as many diamonds as they could sell, and to have unfettered access to new deposits of gravel within the Union. As a privileged community of independent white producers, they considered this policy change to be a betrayal because they depended upon a close relationship with the state for the survival of these rights.

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[2]This paragraph on A.J. Swanepoel is gleaned from the following sources: H. Reitz (ed.) Die Nasionale Boek, Pretoria, 1932, pp.521; J.P. Brits, Tielman Roos: Sy Rol in die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek, 1907-1935, Pretoria, 1979, pp.232-234; The Star 12 April 1928, 26 April 1928, 4 June 1929.

This relationship defined the content of their political ideology which stressed their antipathy to the 'money-bags' whose centralising and monopolising proclivities threatened their privileged access to 'public' property. It also defined their racial attitudes towards 'persons of colour' who were simply seen (and used) as labourers, without the legal right to own claims or to handle diamonds. Indeed for some diggers even this was too much, and they wished for a strict white labour policy to be followed on the diggings.

The support and patronage of the state is of central importance in understanding the politics of this community. From 1924 their relationship with the Pact government was very close. Almost 95 per cent of the white diggings population were Afrikaners, nearly 70 per cent came from the rural areas of the Transvaal, and the majority of them had voted for the NP in the 1924 election.[3] Indeed the NP saw the digging community in the south-western districts of the Transvaal as an important section of their rural support and promised continued state protection to them, extended and continuous proclamations of more alluvial gravel, and the eventual throwing open of the Native Reserves to prospecting (which the SAP had always opposed). The four western Transvaal constituencies of Christiana, Ventersdorp, Lichtenburg and Wolmaransstad formed the hub of the NP support in the Transvaal platteland, and it was in these western districts that the digging community was centred.[4] In another nine

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[3]The Star 14 February 1927; Die Kerkbode 4 May 1927.

[4]A. van Niekerk, 'Social Structure and Rural Politics: National Party Support in the General Election of 1915, with special reference to the constituencies of Lichtenburg and Wolmaranstad', unpublished Honours essay, University of Witwatersrand, 1984, pp.3-4; see also T. Clynick, 'Chiefs, Concessionaires and Diggers on the Tlaping Alluvial Diamond Diggings in the Taungs Reserve, 1895-1923', unpublished paper presented to the University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop Conference, February 1987.

constituencies in the Union the digging community was said to have had an important impact.[5] This makes the relationship between the digging community and the Pact an important area of analysis. The Pact's relationship with this community was severely strained by the passing of the Precious Stones Act in December 1927. This chapter examines the political effects of this on the NP and its support on the Lichtenburg diggings.

Diggers were obviously not passive political actors in this period, as has been asserted by some historians. Because the digging community was represented politically by Tielman Roos until 1929, and thereafter by a candidate who stood as a Nationalist, it was assumed that the diggers had a harmonious political relationship with the NP leadership.[6] Contemporaries had a different view: they did note political activity amongst the diggers but characterised any political deviance from the NP party line as South African Party (SAP) propaganda. Independent candidates who stood for 'diggers' interests were also seen as doing so because of SAP propaganda. Tielman Roos warned diggers that 'through the influence of the SAP vide we shall again hear the Independent candidates who desire to represent certain sections.... The duty of the NP is plain - vote for the Nationalist candidate where there is one put up, but if there is no Nationalist candidate, vote for the candidates of the Labour Party.'[7] Yet the SAP's involvement in politics on the diggings was minimal, as Smuts acknowledged in 1929, and the SAP

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[5] The Star 20 October 1928.

[6] See for example A.E. Krause, 'Die Lichtenburgse Alluviale Diamantdelwerye, 1928-1945: n' Sosio-Ekonomiese Geskiedenis', M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 1986; J.S. Kotze, 'Geskiedenis van die Wes-Transvaalse Diamant-delwerye', M.A. dissertation, Potchefstroom University, 1972.

[7] The Star 18 January 1927.

never seriously contemplated gaining the allegiance of the diggers.[8] Thus when NP spokesmen placed the blame for digger dissatisfaction on SAP propaganda, local digger politicians denied the charge as crude attempts by the party to explain away genuine local political grievances against the Pact government. This conflict between the party and its popular base thus tells us much about this ambivalent relationship and of the political consciousness of the digging community, said to have consisted of 'poor whites' who had little power of their own to determine their political fortunes.[9]

Political developments on the diggings before December 1927 clearly revealed the vulnerability of the NP on the question of their popular legitimacy and the genuineness of their desire to protect the small man. An example of this was the response of the NP to the popular movement associated with Ireton and Thom.[10] In 1927 the NP was outreached by the demands of this local diggers' movement which sought a viable political and economic programme for the marginalised digging community. Initially, popular support for this movement was limited to spontaneous demonstrations for more ground and dissatisfaction with government officials on the diggings. Soon more ambitious demands were made for the state to interfere in the free market by expropriating the Reserve claims of local capitalists, and establishing a 'small man's diggings' for white diggers only. These demands were made within the ambit of the Pact's political and economic programme, which purported to serve the interests of the 'poor white'. All these schemes of the diggers were

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[8]The Klerksdorp Record and Western Transvaal News 25 October 1929.

[9]See for example R. Davies, Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa, 1900-1960, Brighton, 1979.

[10]See Chapter 3 above.

dependant upon the patronage of the state and the support of the Pact, and this clearly limited their manoeuvrability. Because of this limitation Ireton and Thom could not turn their popular rhetoric into a viable political programme, and were, therefore, not able to enter into the realm of party politics. And despite frequent suggestions from disillusioned diggers, Ireton and Thom did not jettison their allegiance to the NP until late 1927.

Once the ramifications of the new alluvial policy became clear, many diggers threatened to follow their own class interests outside of the NP, which they felt was unsympathetic to their needs. These themes became especially important following the passage of the Precious Stones Act in December 1927. This chapter therefore begins with an examination of the impact of the Act on the Lichtenburg digging community. It then examines its effects for the nature of digging politics, and finally it examines the political implications for the NP.

The Precious Stones Act

The Precious Stones Act was the NP's political statement to the digging community. It clearly demonstrated a determination to control the worst excesses of local capitalist entrepreneurship, and to bring the small, bona fide digger under the patronage of the state. The price paid for this was heavy - total state control of the nature, scope and form of alluvial digging within the Union. The extent and nature of this control was only revealed after the Bill became law, when the betrayal of the digging community by the Pact became clear.

Even while the Act was being guided over its last hurdle at the Joint Sitting of the Houses of Parliament early in November 1927, impoverished diggers, driven by hunger for more ground, insisted on what they saw as their public right to dig on the Reserve claims on the Lichtenburg farms. On 4 November Thom addressed "the largest gathering that has been seen on

Grasfontein': because Minister Beyers had given his word that the Precious Stones Bill would be passed without any amendment, the diggers, he announced to the consternation of the mining officials, could peg the ground on the owners' Reserves on Portions S, T, and U of Grasfontein in anticipation of the Act throwing the ground open to the public. 'With a cheer resembling that at the start of a great rush, the meeting broke up and diggers sped for the portions named.' This display of popular justice horrified Beyers, the Minister of Mines: 'the pegging of the owner's and discoverer's claims on S, T, and U of the farm was altogether illegal and when the new Bill was passed pegging would still be illegal,' he stated. It was only with the greatest of difficulty that diggers were persuaded to refrain from digging on their newly acquired claims on the Reserves of Grasfontein. Beyers was not popular. 'The Minister... had sent so many messages that 'they did not know where they stood', and because of this, stated Thom, he would refuse to pull up his pegs.[11]

More bad news was to follow. The Regulations published under the new Act revealed the full extent of the government's design fundamentally to alter the character of alluvial digging. First, although the Act eliminated the activities of local capitalists, Beyers, for fear of encouraging digging, made no provision to throw their Reserve claims open to public pegging. Second, he prohibited all prospecting in the Union for a period of one year. Finally, he announced that the Namaqualand deposits would be withdrawn from public pegging and nationalised. They would be worked by 'poor Namaqualanders' for wages in a state-run enterprise. *Thus at one stroke Beyers* brought this *independent* industry to an abrupt halt, and dashed all hopes that the rich deposits of alluvial gravel at Lichtenburg and on the coast of

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[11] The Star 4 November 1927.

Namaqualand would be thrown open to the diggers, and that further prospecting would open up new deposits throughout the Union for them. He furthermore decided strictly to control the numbers of new diggers, by limiting the issue of new licences, and restricting the scale of digging operations allowed on a public alluvial digging: 'There are too many diggers,' he said, 'and there must be fewer' and new regulations would help to limit and scatter the diggers.[12]

Thom was outraged. At the eleventh hour the Minister had betrayed the poor diggers and made a present of the diggings to the capitalists. The Minister, he stated, had made a big mistake and 'they were tired of the word of a member of the Government who did not carry it out'. The Precious Stones Act, the testament of good will to the small digger, was now 'the most laughable in the history of the country as it was intended to help Mr Solly Joel, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and the diamond magnates'. Thom's sentiments were echoed by other local leaders because on this issue of more ground all diggers were for once united in opposition. Beyers intended to cut down the number of diggers by limiting the availability of new ground, and this touched the digging community as a whole. The 'new Mussolini', Beyers, the Minister of Mines, was blamed for this state of affairs and resolutions were passed at various meetings throughout the diggings calling for an explanation from the Minister, or for his resignation.[13]

This betrayal was the result of 'broken promises' by the Pact, and not mere neglect of duty, as critics had perceived the

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[12]The Star 13 December 1927. For background see the following: The Star 12 October 1927, 3 December 1927, 20 December 1927, 21 December 1927.

[13]The Star 12 November 1927.

treatment of the digging community in the previous 18 months to be. The tenor of digging politics was altered by this barrage of regulations: "Bombshell for the Diggers", ran one headline and "Desperation and Indignation" another.[14] Nonplussed at the intentions of the Act, and incensed at the 'Mussolini-type' attitude struck by Minister Beyers, the diggers exploded into political activity. This ranged from the proponents of direct action, [illegible] threatened to seize more ground before Christmas, and who [illegible] published a 'Committee of Action' to do so, to the more moderate stylists of the deputation and the petition.[15] In contrast to earlier protest, this betrayal of trust resulted in wholesale disaffection of diggers towards the NP. Diggers without ground, or working in partnerships and shares with other diggers on the exhausted public areas of the fields, felt this betrayal very keenly. The restrictions, ran one report, created a welter of privation, and the poverty was increasing daily:

> The people are without food; hundreds of families have had a bad time during Christmas and are in a state of absolute depression at the outlook for the New Year.... Nationalists, of whom there are thousands on the fields are blaming themselves for being such fools as to accept the guarantees that the interests of the small man would be looked after and that there would be no further pandering to capitalistic interests. Before the Diamond Bill was sent through these men placed so much reliance on the sincerity of the Government that they accepted the promises made to them by Minister Beyers... that they passed a vote of confidence in him, and the Government, but today they realised that the bread is being taken out of their mouths and that they have been bluffed.[16]

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[14] The Star 14 December 1927.

[15] The Star 29 November 1927, 3 December 1927, 13 December 1927, 20 December 1927.

[16] The Star 31 December 1927.

A.J. van der Merwe, a professional digger and spokesman, captured these feelings neatly in December 1927: 'I am an old Nationalist', he said, 'and always thought that when a Nationalist Government came to power the poor man would get his rights.' Instead he faced the possibility of becoming a 'white kaffir - that was to say, a poor white'. The NP had betrayed the poor for an alliance with the mining capitalists, and this was shown by the establishment of the state diggings in Namaqualand.[17] 'We don't want a state diggings,' it was stated at Welverdiend in the same month, 'as we are not going to work for kaffir wages, as they do on the railways. If these fields are handed over to the big men we shall have to work as slaves, and the profits will be reaped by the foreigners.'[18] Clearly then, these marginalised diggers felt that the Pact, or specifically the NP, had betrayed their trust.

The arrival of the Police Mobile Column on the Lichtenburg diggings in December 1927 forestalled the proponents of direct action, and the government struck a vital blow for law and order when they finally secured a conviction against Thom for his role in pegging the Reserves of Welverdiend in November 1927. Thoms' conviction meant the cancellation of his digger's certificate and he was expelled from the Lichtenburg diggings.[19] Yet this clear signal from the government that they were not prepared to tolerate 'trouble-makers' ushered in a new, rather more complex, period of political activity which posed a more fundamental

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[17] The Star 22 December 1927.

[18] The Star 20 December 1927.

[19] MNW 900, mm2442/27, 'Essenburg. Grasfontein Storekeepers's Association. Request for Interview with Minister in connection with rents', Minute, Mining Commissioner Klerksdorp, 30 November 1927.

challenge to the political hegemony of the NP than had the inchoate efforts of the opportunists.

The Diggers' Union of South Africa

The Diggers' Union of South Africa was launched on the Lichtenburg diggings in August 1927. The early history of this popular organisation is stormy and confusing. It was launched after the statutory diggers representative body, the Lichtenburg Diggers' Committee was abolished, because of fears that it was being taken over by 'radical' diggers in May 1927.[20] The DU was overshadowed by the advocates of direct action in the months which preceded the passage of the Precious Stones Act in December 1927.

The DU was initially only supported by claimholders, about one-quarter of the total diggers in November 1927.[21] It called for an orderly programme of new proclamations and for 'more' government on the diggings. Thom's message of direct action was far more attractive to the marginalised diggers at this time and so the DU languished in the backwaters of local political life, distinguished only when their meetings were broken up by Thom

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[20]MNW 479, mm588/27, 'Lichtenburg Diggers' Committee. Charge of Extortion and Abolition, 1927', Report by G. Borcher, Secretary for the Board of Control for Alluvial Diamond Interests, 'Inspection Report of Offices of Diggers Committee, Lichtenburg district', 15 March 1927; C. Jack, Acting Mining Commissioner to Under Secretary for Mines, Ref. mcc37/27, 'In connection with Nominations for election of Lichtenburg Digger's Committee', 11 May 1927; The Star 2 November 1926, 11 November 1926, 28 May 1927.

[21]MNW 898, mm2332/27, 'Report of meeting Mining Commissioner Klerksdorp. Question of Proclamation of new Ground', 'Notes of a meeting held in the Minister's Office between representatives of the Lichtenburg Digger's and the Honourable Minister for Mines on Wednesday 23 November 1927 at 3 pm'.

and his supporters, or by some other advocate of direct action.[22] Following Thom's untimely political demise in December 1927, the DU was reorganised on a more systematic basis, collections of membership fees began, branches were set up on the local diggings and a constitution was drawn up.[23] Its programme now explicitly addressed the interests of the small man, because the Minister had capitulated to the interests of the diamond magnates by closing Namaqualand, disallowing prospecting and by attempting to disperse the diggers.

The new President of the DU was F.J. Rheeders, a former member of the old Orange Free State volksraad and well-known farmer-digger at Lichtenburg, who saw the need for diggers to speak with one voice in order to obtain redress: 'If we approach Mr Beyers as one man', he stated, 'he must listen to us.' Therefore, he said, 'let us form a big body in order that we may make our influence felt.'[24] The DU's programme called for the proclamation of more ground and the reversal of the decision to declare the Namaqualand fields - the richest alluvial fields in the world - out of bounds to the diggers, and this was its drawcard. By late December the Diggers Union was 'on the eve of great changes' as digger politics were reorganised in the wake of the government's breach of promise.[25]

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[22]See MNW 898, mm2332/27, 'Report of Meeting', J. Senekal, President Delvers Unie to Minister for Mines, 17 November 1927; MNW 892, mm1866/24, 'Dissension of Diggers' Committee/Union October 1927 over deputation to Minister of Mines', 'Memorandum of Interview with Mr Z.J. Senekal, House of Assembly, 18 October 1927', Ref. mmct811/27; The Star 3 December 1927, 12 October 1927.

[23]The Star 29 December 1927.

[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid.

The DU's rise to political prominence in 1928 resulted directly from the callous treatment of the digging community by Beyers, and the Pact cabinet. Their responses to the digging community read as a combination of bad timing and a comedy of political errors. The DU initially stuck to its constitution, and kept its nose out of party politics, although the majority of its members were Nationalists, or had supported the NP at the last election.[26] The DU was therefore an organisation of producers drawn together by common interests, and therefore 'all diggers were members of the Diggers' Party'.[27] In the first few months of 1928 it seemed as if the community would treat their betrayal as a purely 'domestic concern'. This was neatly illustrated at a DU meeting held at Potchefstroom in February 1928. The Chairman, J.P. Nel, was a Nationalist supporter who stated that the diggers must not be afraid to criticise the government even if they were Nationalists: 'If they saw injustice being done to the People of South Africa it was their duty no matter what their Party to air their grievances.'[28] These discussions then centred on the person of the Minister of Mines, rather than the NP in general and moves were soon afoot in Nationalist circles to 'upset Mr Beyers' apple cart', for the Minister was 'too buckram and unbending' in the attitude he had taken up towards the diggings.[29]

The 'buckram' Minister proved a most difficult opponent. A veritable flood of deputations was despatched to plead with him to reverse his decision to declare Namaqualand a state diggings. The DU was particularly vocal. Early in December 1927 a

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[26] The Potchefstroom Herald 28 February 1928.

[27] The Star 29 December 1927.

[28] The Potchefstroom Herald 28 February 1928.

[29] The Potchefstroom Herald 6 March 1928.

deputation from the DU representing 10 000 diggers was sent to see the Minister: "Providence (had) indicated a solution to the poor white problem in the discovery of diamonds in Namaqualand,' stated the petitioners, and 'They were the property of the State and the public.'[30] Rheeders, president of the DU, warned Beyers that if he went ahead there 'would be trouble'. Beyers agreed to lay the matter before the Cabinet and promised to open new ground for diggers before the New Year. These promises were vague and the delegates were not satisfied.[31] A meeting of the Union at Welverdiend on 20 December demanded that Beyers 'visit the diggings and thereby become personally acquainted with the poverty and distress prevailing'. In the event of the Minister refusing 'the meeting resolved that the diggers should proceed to Pretoria in mass to interview him'.[32] The opinion of the meeting was that 'Mr Beyers seems determined to exterminate us' and that 'the poor white problem has been dropped in the interests of the millionaires'.[33] Another stated that 'In the Bill there was far too much power vested in one man - the Minister of Mines.'[34] The meeting sent a telegram to the Minister: 'Mass meeting of Diggers urgently requests you to appoint a Commission to inquire into the one sided application of the diamond law as the result of which serious consequences may follow and starvation unworthy of any government.'[35]

On 24 February the Cabinet officially rejected the DU's

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[30] The Star 13 December 1927.

[31] Ibid.

[32] The Star 20 December 1927.

[33] The Star 22 December 1927.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid.

demands, but announced that within three weeks certain areas on Grasfontein would be proclaimed as a restricted alluvial digging.[36] Five days later the Department of Mines closed down the last remaining company on the Lichtenburg diggings, Welverdiend Diamonds, throwing at least 500 diggers out of wage work.[37] Max Theunissen, chairman of the DU Relief Committee, ascribed the increase in poverty on the diggings directly to the *government's policy: 'I cannot refrain from expressing* the view (he said) that the same policy of drift, which was attributed to the Smuts Gvt (sic), particularly in regard to the 1922 strike, is now being worthily carried out by the present Government, through the medium of the Minister of Mines.'[38] It was freely stated that 'as Minister Beyers op die delwerye durf verskyn, hy verskaer sal word.... Die gevoel is oor die algemeen baie verbitterd want die mense redeneer dat die Regering die delwerye will dood druk deur die delwers uit te honger.'[39] A tremendous wave of anti-government sentiment grew and large gatherings were practically unanimous in their desire to overthrow the present Government.[40] Avowed Nationalists were loudest in their condemnation and were determined to 'throw all

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[36]NMW 898, mm2332/27, 'Report of Meeting', Telegram, Minister for Mines to W.C. Brink and F.J. Rheeders (President, DU), 24 February 1928.

[37]NMW 901, mm2525/27, 'Secretary Native Affairs re Application of Section 73(2) D/S Act 44/27', Commissioner of Police to Secretary of Mines, Ref. SAP1/179/27, 'Precious Stones Act No.44 of 1927', 29 February 1928; The Potchefstroom Herald 30 March 1928.

[38]NMW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings (Poverty on the Diggings)', *M. Theunissen, Chairman, Relief Committee, to the* Lichtenburg Magistrate, 're Pauper Relief', 29 February 1928.

[39]Die Burger 1 March 1928.

[40]The Potchefstroom Herald 9 March 1928.

their political influence into the scale against what they saw as a policy of spoliation'. The DU urged that members of the House of Assembly representing digging communities should resign notwithstanding the fact that their organisation was purportedly apolitical.[41]

The Transvaal Nationalist MP's were reported to be behind the 'wire-pulling', and they stated that Bayers ought to be replaced by 'Mr Roos (who) is the only Minister who has the patience, tact and courage' to settle the digging problem.[42] Advocate A.S. Van Hoes, a high-ranking official in the Transvaal NP, visited all the evil on the Minister of Mines, who, he urged, should resign if he failed to lift the ban on prospecting.[43] The Transvaal Nationalists were more concerned when the Delimitation Commission reported the digging population in the western Transvaal was included within several constituencies and not a single compact constituency.[44] In the Lichtenburg constituency diggers constituted 60 per cent of the total number of voters. The digging question lay 'Like a Pall over Parliament', stated the Potchefstroom Herald in March 1928.[45]

There were local ripples of this discontent as well. In Ventersdorp the shortage of alluvial gravel at the Droogepan and Reismierbult diggings resulted in the local branch of the NP indulging in some 'vigorous criticism' of the Minister of Mines and his restrictive policy. This vocal objection was taken up by

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[41]Ibid.

[42]The Potchefstroom Herald 6 March 1928.

[43]The Klerksdorp Record and Western Transvaal News 3 February 1928.

[44]The Potchefstroom Herald 11 May 1928.

[45]The Potchefstroom Herald 6 March 1928.

the Potchefstroom Town Council, which expressed similar sentiments.[46] A deputation from these diggings, led by Mrs H.H. Steyn, 'the most prominent leader of the Women's National Party in the Transvaal', was despatched to see the unfortunate Minister, bearing a petition which appealed for more ground and signed by 90 per cent of the claimholders on the diggings. Other western Transvaal local branches began to sponsor their own programmes for the alleviation of distress occasioned by the policies of the Minister. The Klerksdorp branch of the NP also 'requested Minister Beyers to repeal the restrictions regarding prospecting of private farms, as also the restrictions on people who may legally dig'.[47]

Beyers was unbending. The proclamation of parts of Grasfontein in March 1928 as a 'Restricted' digging was a dismal failure. More than 4000 'deserving' diggers took part in the lottery for claims, and only a 1000 were successful. Despite this, and the scale of deprivation which was highlighted, at the close of March 1928 Beyers reiterated his government's intention not to reconsider their Namaqualand policy.[48] The political results of this policy, he felt, would be negligible and he was convinced that the diggers would always vote for the NP: 'It would be an act of folly on the part of the diggers to vote for (the SAP), a party to which the Diamond Syndicate owed allegiance.... The diggers would therefore always oppose the Oppenhoimer party.'[49] Beyers was correct in thinking that

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[46]The Star 8 May 1928, 10 May 1928, 15 May 1928, 18 May 1928,19 May 1928, 22 May 1928; The Potchefstroom Herald 15 May 1928.

[47]The Klerksdorp Record and Western Transvaal News 5 April 1928.

[48]The Potchefstroom Herald 30 March 1928.

[49]The Diamond Fields Advertiser 14 June 1928.

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[48] The Potchefstroom Herald 30 March 1928.

[49] The Diamond Fields Advertiser 14 June 1928.

diggers would not support the SAP; but his calculations did not include the possibility that diggers would abandon the NP.

That the diggers' plight was growing desperate in the middle months of 1928 was illustrated by events leading to the Kadalie Strike in June 1928, involving 35 000 African labourers across the entire length of the diggings.[50] On Friday 15 June a meeting of the DU resolved that because of the falling price of diamonds, due they stated to competition from the state diggings in Namaqualand, a blanket reduction in the wages paid to claim workers was in order.[51] On Monday 18 June some 5000 workers on Grasfontein came out on strike in protest against this, the ultimate cost-cutting alternative of the marginalised digger. On Tuesday the movement spread spontaneously to other sections of the fields, and by Wednesday the entire area of the diggings was idle. Rapid consultation between the Director of Native Labour, Major H.S. Cook, the DU, and the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union followed in an effort to resolve the crisis. On Friday the DU rescinded their decision of a previous week and the strike was terminated, but it had raised a number of important issues. The marginalised diggers could hardly afford to pay 'living wages' in a declining market, argued the DU, without the prospect of getting more ground.[52] Many of the diggers, although not all, were not in a position to pay any wages on a regular basis, and one of the complaints of the

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[50]JUS 421, File No. J/978/26, 'Faction Fight at Alluvial Digging Transvaal 1926. Native Strike at Diggings (June 1928)', 'Report of Meeting held in South African Police Office, Elandsputte', 20 June 1928. See also H. Bradford, 'The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa in the South African Countryside, 1924-1930', Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985, pp.239-246.

[51]The Star 18 June 1928.

[52]The Diamond Fields Advertiser 2 June 1928.

strikers was that the majority of employers failed to pay wages in months when no finds were recorded. All the blame for the strike was placed on the diggers by the authorities.[53] The DU for its part blamed the alluvial policy of the Minister of Mines who restricted the proclamation of new ground and marketed the Namaqualand diamonds in competition with the Lichtenburg production, when the argument for the restrictive policy was overproduction.[54]

At the end of July 1928 the diggers presented a petition to the Transvaal NP Annual Congress that 'Government, and if necessary Parliament, close the Namaqualand diggings and prohibit the export of all Namaqualand diamonds', and recognise that their policy was leading to poverty and destitution for the digging community which supported at least 40 000 whites (whilst the mining companies, which were benefiting from this policy, employed fewer than 7000 white workers).[55] The Congress was unsympathetic, and Roos's reaction was particularly disheartening: 'The Namaqualand fields had been proclaimed for the sole reason of enabling the poor whites there to obtain employment,' he stated and if the diggers' representatives 'carefully considered' their objections to this policy their grievances 'would be dissipated'.[56]

Matters began to move rather rapidly from this point. In August 1928 the DU held its first Annual Conference and elected a new Executive. A.J. Swanepoel was nominated as the new

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[53]JUS 421, File No. 1078/26, 'Faction Fight', 'Report of Meeting', 20 June 1928.

[54]The Star 18 June 1928, 25 June 1928.

[55]The Potchefstroom Herald 24 July 1928.

[56]The Star 6 August 1928.

President of the DU.[57] 'The DU,' commented the press, 'has now put its house in order, and the election of Mr A.J. Swanepoel as President is an indication that the Union is as active as ever, and is likely to make its presence felt in the near future.'[58] Swanepoel declared his political testament at this meeting: 'I am a Nationalist... and one of the workers who placed the party in power. Today I am still in favour of the principles of the party, but I am no worshipper of persons.' The diggers, he continued, had a duty to remove any wheel in the party machinery that was loose, and if they did not remove the present Ministeri. :struction then the capitalists would reign over the small man. Their remedy, he concluded, lay in the ballot box. 'Away with Beyers,' agreed the Congress. 'Away with the Government, and away with the whole of the National Party.'[59] These sentiments were widely held, and immediately following the Congress, plans to get representation in Parliament were announced by members of the DU.[60]

At least three members of the DU executive announced plans to stand as Independent candidates. One of them, Captain Max Theunisson, chairman of the DU Relief Committee, reasoned this way: Why shouldn't the diggers, who represent one-twentieth of the population, not be represented by their own man, who would not be bound 'hand and foot' by the decisions of a caucus? 'Mr Beyers, Mr Roos, the Cabinet, and the whole of the Nationalist Party were responsible for the plight of the digging community,'

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[57] The Star 2 August 1928.

[58] Ibid.

[59] The Star 6 July 1928. See also The Star 2 August 1928, 7 August 1028, 6 September 1928 for further confirmation of these feelings.

[60] Ibid.

he continued. 'The party had not come up to the mark' and it was time for a change.[61] M.C. Brink, the second DU candidate, put this decision in context. If the diggers could establish an Independent Diggers Party in the Western Transvaal and in Namaqualand they could have the political muscle to swing some 15 constituencies, which number would be sufficient to 'turn the scales' on digging questions in Parliament itself. Brink was an SAP man, and his decision to stand as an Independent Digger candidate was brought about by Smuts's refusal to commit himself to supporting the Namaqualand digging scheme which Brink saw as the solution to the 'poor white question'. A.J. Swanepoel, in contrast to these two men, was a committed Nationalist:

> (Mr Swanepoel) is a good Nationalist and a staunch Afrikander, and above all, he is not an attorney or an advocate - the past has proved that we have 95 percent too many of these people representing the voters. What we want in Parliament are practical men - men who place the interest and welfare of the people and the country before that of honour and position. I am sure that Mr Swanepoel is that stamp of man. His being a resident of Lichtenburg means a lot. I have always advocated local representation. It is so ridiculous that a constituency should be represented by a man because he is a good speaker and advocate. As things are today, and being governed by a caucus, we want a local man.[62]

Swanepoel's decision to stand as an Independent Nationalist was only arrived at because the District Committee of the NP resolved to renominate Tielman Roos for the Lichtenburg seat.[63] Between August and November 1928 Roos and the NP waged a strong campaign to recapture the political support of the

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[61] The Star 6 September 1928.

[62] The Star 10 August 1928.

[63] The Star 8 August 1928, 16 August 1928, 17 August 1928.

digging community. But Swanepoel was nominated by the NP branches on the diggings as their candidate for the constituency.[64] This move caused a 'political sensation' because the Lichtenburg constituency was almost entirely merged in the diggings.[65] 'This means (an observer noted) that if Mr Swanepoel's name is included in the purely party nomination (sic) there is every possibility of the Nationalists voting in his favour instead of for Mr Roos.'[66] The political ramifications of this were manifold. The possibility of Roos 'falling foul' of the diggers would be 'most undignified' for such a senior member of the party and a severe blow to the party prestige.[67] On the other hand, Swanepoel was determined to stand for the seat even should the NP District Committee not nominate him: 'he proposes to contest the seat as an Independent Nationalist, as he does not intend that the decision of the caucus shall be binding on him....'[68]

Roos and the diggers

Every effort was thrown behind Roos's campaign to recapture the diggers' vote. Beyers, the unfortunate Minister of Mines, was summararily retired, and Roos was appointed Acting Minister in his stead. With the personality of Beyers thus conveniently excised from the public eye, Roos hoped that he could assume the mantle of the saviour of the digging community. His campaign was

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[64] The Star 22 November 1928.

[65] The Star 2 August 1928, 16 August 1928.

[66] The Star 22 November 1928

[67] Ibid.

[68] The Star 2 August 1928.

summed up by one simple headline: 'Mr Roos's Pot of Honey'.[69] He arrived at Lichtenburg in August 1928 bearing metaphorical gifts for the diggers whom he thought could be easily bought, by promises of new ground and a relaxation of the 'Tzar-like' attitude of Beyers. The DU, which met with the Minister, presented a memorandum of 13 points and Roos agreed to all points without any reservation.[70] He agreed to proclaim 19 unproclaimed portions of Graafontein formerly held by the local capitalists. 'When I was in Cape Town,' commented Swanepoel sourly, 'Mr Beyers said that any further proclamations at Welverdiend were impossible.' Now it was miraculously achieved in a single moment. 'Yes (he continued) the election is drawing near.'[71] Roos also readily agreed to the throwing open of Goedgedacht and Holfontein farms in the Ventersdorp district for diggers on the Roodepan diggings who had been agitating furiously for the opening of more ground in the area to relieve their distress. He agreed to investigate the problem of 'removing undesirables' from the locations on the diggings and a more stringent application of the pass law on the diggings.[72] And with a final flourish he stated that so impressed was he with the 'schemes of reorganisation of the Diggers' Union' that he would consider an official allowance to the Union for the good work they had done.[73] He also had gifts for his constituents who were not diggers. He temporarily dazzled the Lichtenburg Town Council and the Chamber of Commerce by promising to support a scheme for the proclamation of the

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[69] The Star 20 September 1928.

[70] The Star 10 August 1928.

[71] Ibid.

[72] The Star 20 September 1928.

[73] The Star 20 September 1928.

Townlands (which had been prospected nearly 18 months before), thereby hoping to satisfy the local retailing and commercial entrepreneurs who had developed extensive interests in supplying the digging community.[74] These capitalists constituted one of the fastest growing sections of the local economy and their continued prosperity was closely tied to the fortunes of the diggers themselves. On the more significant questions of the Namaqualand scheme and of state control of production, however, Roos was deathly silent.

Roos's silences were ominous for the future of the digging community. His 'pot of honey' offered no long term solutions, for the government had declared itself in favour of monopoly control of the diamond industry. As one digger put it, 'the riches are being kept for the Government and the capitalists.'[75] The government's policy, it was clear, was 'to close all the Transvaal diggings', and to visit the costs of control on the poor diggers.[76] This underlying hidden agenda became clearer towards the conclusion of 1928. The much-vaunted Welverdiend proclamation was a total fiasco: the area of ground available was insufficient for the thousands of diggers who took part in the ballot for claims, and diggers who drew claims were offered up to £300 for their claims.[77] At Goedgedacht and Holfontein there were similar problems. Roos's promises to the DU that the state's diamond production from Namaqualand would not affect the ruling price for Lichtenburg stones was belied by a drop in price of local stones of between ten and twenty per

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[74] The Star 18 August 1928.

[75] The Star 16 August 1928.

[76] Ibid.

[77] The Star 9 August 1928.

cent in November 1928.[78] Theunissen, one of the Independent Digger candidates, declared that the diggers were 'bluffed into the recent vote of confidence in Roos 'by promises which would never be fulfilled, and by the slaughter of a few fat oxen, which provided a meal for hundreds of hungry diggers, who became Roos's supporters for the day.' 'Now', he continued, 'they are hungry again and not one of the Minister's promises has materialised, and as soon as the Lion is nominated for Lichtenburg they will probably vanish in smoke.'[79]

Swanepoel was also unimpressed with the Minister's promises. Roos, he stated, had only made these concessions because the DU had hammered him repeatedly on these issues.[80] As for the Pact's commitment to the poor white, they were determined to turn the diggers into 'white kaffirs' - workers on relief schemes on starvation wages - such as those poor Namaqualanders on the state diggings. 'We want ground,' he added. 'We don't want to work like kaffirs.... We want to be self-supporting.'[81]The government, continued Swanepoel, had failed to deal adequately with the question of poor whites, for when the Pact came to power in 1924 there were an estimated 120 000 poor whites and of these only 25 000 had been employed on the railways but 'at such a wage that they and their off-spring would remain poor whites forever'[82] If the Caucus of the NP voted for Roos, stated Swanepoel, he would stand as an Independent Nationalist: 'I want you to vote for the man who can

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[78]The Star 6 November 1928.

[79]The Star 6 September 1928.

[80]The Star 20 September 1928.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Ibid.

do his best in the interests of the digging community'.[83] In November rumours swept the diggings of the formation of a new party, the South African Workers Party, and Swanepoel was mentioned as its initiator.[84] He had presented a memorandum of the diggers' grievances to the SALP earlier in the year which gave substance to the rumours that he would meld the 'National Council group of the Labour Party' with 'working class Nationalists' to form the basis of this new party.[85] This raised the possibility that dissatisfied independent working class Nationalists would make gains in constituencies where the workers vote predominated.

When the SAP advised diggers at Lichtenbury to support the Independent candidates, Roos felt obliged to reconsider his nomination to the seat. His decision was certainly also coloured by events in Namaqualand at this juncture. A group of 'Radical Lichtenburgers', led by the now notorious Thom of Grasfontein fame, had variously decamped from the Lichtenburg fields to Port Nolloth, the nearest settlement to the state diggings. There they agitated and protested against the NP's policy, threatening to 'storm' the diggings unless a hearing were given them.[86] An Independent Nationalist, the Reverend D.P. Steenkamp, announced his candidacy there as an Independent Nationalist for Namaqualand at a stormy meeting at the port town, declaring himself entirely disillusioned with the NP and the standing Nationalist MP for Namaqualand. The meeting 'not only passed a

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[83] The Star 20 September 1928.

[84] The Star 2 November 1928.

[85] South African Labour Party Collection, Annual Conferences, KR19, Special Conference, 8 July 1928, 'Address by Fraternal Delegate Swanepoel (DU)': The Star 2 November 1928.

[86] The Star 11 December 1928, 5 January 1929, 7 January 1929, 8 January 1929.

vote of no confidence in the Government, but... demanded that the Government resign'.[87] Clearly then, the digging question was proving a real embarrassment to the NP, and was having severe political ramifications. The government took the diggers' threats seriously, and police reinforcements in the form of the Natal Mobile Column were speedily despatched to Fort Nolloth to forestall direct action.

In December 1928 Roos conceded the seat.[88] The diggers, he stated, ought to have their own representative in Parliament. Roos himself was offered the [illegible]hal seat, and Swanepoel was nominated and then elected by a large majority to stand in the elections as the NP candidate for the Lichtenburg constituency.

Conclusion

Roos's withdrawal from the Lichtenburg seat which he held for an unbroken period of 14 years was thus highly significant for the fortunes of the NP on the diggings. Popular digger sentiment which had forced Roos's withdrawal in favour of the president of the DU was vindicated by Swanepoel's victory in the general election of June 1929. He was elected with a majority of 743 votes over his nearest rival as M.P. for the Lichtenburg constituency.[89] His victory clearly signalled the strength of the DU as a vehicle of political mobilisation. The NP's capitulation to the 'voice of the people' was thus reluctant and fraught with problems, and Afrikaners on the diggings were mobilised by 'bread-and-butter' issues, as much as by ideology.

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[87] The Star 1 January 1929.

[88] The Star 22 December 1928.

[89] The results of the election were: A.J. Swanepoel (NP), 1421 votes; Taljaard (SAP), 678 votes; M.C. Brink (Independent Diggers' candidate), 632 (The Star 14 June 1929).

This episode in the 1929 general election campaign qualifies our understanding of the nature of NP political support in the Transvaal countryside. Swanepoel stood initally as an Independent Digger' candidate and he was prepared to stand as an Independent Nationalist candidate. [90]The NP took this threat seriously enough to press for Roos's nomination for a seat elsewhere, in order to retain the allegiances of the diggers. This is important, as it has been accepted that Roos's withdrawal from the Lichtenburg seat, a seat he had held continually from 1915, was due to non-political reasons, rather than to political pressures from within his constituency.[91] Swanepoel's nomination and subsequent election reveals a degree of dissatisfaction with Roos, the leader of the Transvaal NP, and by implication, with the entire NP, at an extremely crucial political juncture. Impoverished white voters in this rural constituency translated their economic grievances into political grievances with a great deal of sophistication and insight. The NP's appeal as the 'traditional' vehicle of the Afrikaner poor was brought into question by the diggers, who were quite prepared to support an Independent candidate, and it seems therefore that the NP was not the unqualified political home of the Afrikaner poor, during the period of the Pact government. The NP, in its unfamiliar role as the ruling party, entered into a public compromise with the representatives of monopoly capitalism, and the embodiments of the 'Anglo-Jewish' capitalist

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[90]The Star 30 August 1928.

[91]It is unclear as to why this incident is treated so briskly by Brits in his study of Tielamn Roos. He fails to mention the opposition of the diggers to Roos's candidature as being a factor in his decision to stand for Bethal, and he accounts for Roos's change of heart in terms of illness only. See J.P. Brits, Tielman Roos, pp.232-234.

class.[92] The local effects of this alliance were immediate and manifold, and it was this popular discontent which the DU, and its President, A.J. Swanepoel mobilised and drew upon. Firmly rooted in the economic and social realities of the diggings, the DU provided the machinery and infrastructure for political recruitment and mobilisation of diggers. The 'voice of the people' was on occasions powerful and did not respect persons or parties.

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[92] N.G. Garson, 'The 1924 General Election: a turning point in South African history?', paper presented at the African Studies Association of Australia and the Pacific and the Australian Historical Association held at the University of Sydney on 28 August 1982.

Chapter Five

DIGGING YOUR WAY INTO THE WORKING CLASS: UNEMPLOYMENT AND CONSCIOUSNESS AMONGST THE AFRIKANER POOR.

'...experience over many years has proved that the non-professional digger is not prepared to exchange an indolent, carefree existence for one demanding regular work under supervision.'[1]

'The General (Smuts) stated that the Government's treatment of the alluvial diggers had been brutal and callous in the extreme. The Government had posed as the poor man's friend and as champion of the small diggers; in fact they had made his lot harder than it had been under the SAP Government....'[2]

Introduction

Afrikaner proletarianisation has prompted a number of studies on the diggers at Lichtenburg.[3] The creation of a dependent

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[1] VWA [illegible], file no. sw79/1, 'Alluvial Diamond Diggings. Removal o. Diggers from the Diggings', Memorandum by Under-Secretary for Social Welfare to Secretary for Social Welfare, 'On Memorandum prepared for Cabinet re' removal of Diggers from the Diggings', 23 October 1940.

[2] MNW 935, mm2516/28, 'Petitions re Suspension of Precious Stones Act No.44 of 1927', Pamphlet 'The SAP and the Alluvial Diggings (Extract of a speach delivered [illegible] General Smuts at Ventersdorp 21 May 1929)', 5 June 1929, uitgegee deur Louis Esselen, General Secretary SAP, 183 Pretoria, Printed by Wallach's P. & P. Co. Ltd., Andries Street, Pretoria.

[3] See for example the Report of the Commission on The Poor White Problem in South Africa, 5 volumes, Stellenbosch, Pro

wage working class, unemployment and povert_ amongst diggers has been viewed as unproblematic. These accounts draw on the classic exposition of this process by the Carnegie Commission: 'After an initial period of boom, the richer fields became more and more exhausted and many diggers who went there became further impoverished, and their families were all subject to the psychological influences of the general conditions of life on the diggings and the type of mentality which developed there.'[4] Without exception these accounts have ignored the relationship on the diggings between Afrikaner poverty, class interests and the state. The successes of a class of professional diggers, and the relegation of the victims to the dustbin of history, has thus been explained largely in terms of market rationality and the economic resourcefulness of the individuals themselves. In this explanation the state plays a neutral role, and the influence of class interests and of capital'sts is omitted from the equation. Individuals are thus seen to be entirely responsible for their fortunes and their failures, particular character traits are attributed to the poor, and their consciousness is simply deduced from these categories. The poor white becomes the object of analysis, rather than of the forces which have formed him. [5]

Ecclesia, 1932); Union Government Commission, unpublished, Report of the Committee of Investigation into the Conditions on the Alluvial Diamond Diggings, 1937.

[4] R.W. Wilcocks 'Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus', Volume 3 of the Report of The Commission on the Poor White Problem in South Africa, p.100. See, for comparison, the 'Second *Interim Report of the Unemployment Commission*', *p.4, U.G.* 34-1921, and the Select Committee on European Employment', SC 9-1913.

[5] C. van Onselen, 'The Main Reef Road into the Working Class', in Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914, Volume 2, New Nineveh, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1982.

This is clearly inadequate: the process by which diggers were impoverished is dominated by the theme of class in the period 1926 to 1929. This dissertation has demonstrated that class interests and conflict generated by opposing interests was the motor-force driving politics on the diggings. The diggers did exhibit a well-developed consciousness of their interests: local capitalists (the landowing companies, the syndicate and company promotors) did monopolise the richest claims on the farms in the pursuit of profit; the small diggers did resist this through an alliance with the large diamond mining magnates and the state between May 1926 and December 1927. [6] In an earlier chapter we examined how this temporary alliance between the small diggers, the state, and the diamond magnates broke down when these vulnerable producers -the new petty bourgeoisie- were frozen out of the sphere of production in the pursuit of monopoly control over alluvial production, through the agency of the Precious Stones Act.[7] Diggers formed their own political organisation, the DU, to articulate their own particular interests in the political sphere. It is therefore unlikely that there was no relationship between Afrikaner poverty on the diggings, the broader economic interests of capitalist classes, and the state in this period.

In this chapter we focus on the fortunes of the most vulnerable and seemingly powerless sections within the community. We examine how the Precious Stones Act affected the Afrikaner poor on the Lichtenburg fields, and how these Afrikaners saw their circumstances and perceived their plight before the onset of the Great Depression in 1929. In the first

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[6] See Chapter 3 above.

[7] See Chapter 4 above.

section of the chapter we focus on the nature of poverty on the diggings from the first discoveries in May 1926 until December 1927. In the second section we explore the specific effects of the provisions of the Precious Stones Act on the white proletariat on the diggings. In the final section we examine how the unemployed diggers perceived their plight, and consider the schemes which they hoped would bring them relief.

Casual poverty on the diggings

There was always a measure of white unemployment and poverty on the diamond diggings. Thus J. Celliers, a digger of 35 years standing, candidly agreed that *if government relief* to the diggers ever became unnecessary then the millennium would have come to pass.[8] This was because the diggings were an irresistible magnet to both the rural and the urban white proletariat of the country. This process was part of a wider pattern whereby impoverished Afrikaners in the western Transvaal took temporary wage work off the farms in the midst of the agricultural crisis of the 1920's. Macmillan's observations are interesting here. Writing in 1930, he stated that 'Whole families of the poorer class uproot themselves from what homes they have, to 'settle' for months or years (on these diggings) *in huge camps*, in tin shanties, 'shacks' of any sort, tents or even waggons, with no secure water supply, no sanitation-none of the amenities of "White Civilization".'[9] In times of abnormal *distress in the countryside the* agricultural proletariat flocked to the diggings in great numbers.[10] In July 1926 over 1300

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[8] The Star 17 July 1926.

[9] *W.M. Macmillan, Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History*, London, 1930, p.106.

[10] 'Abnormal distress considerable in all districts... *primarily* due to drought and locusts during the last 2 or 3

white farm workers from the Transvaal rural areas were said to be seeking refuge from drought on the diggings.[11] The Zeerust Magistrate reported in mid-1926 that practically every indigent in his district was away at the diggings.[12] The Ventersdorp Magistrate noted a steady flow of unemployed from his, and other districts, to the diggings. [13] Significantly some 60 to 75 per cent of farmers in his district were there too, for the diggings were most attractive to struggling small farmers, whose activities dominated agricultural production in the 1920's. These farmers constituted 60 per cent of the diggings population, demonstrating the dependence of the farming class on informal ways of making a living in order to retain their grip on the rural economy in this period.[14]

Many Afrikaners arrived on the diggings impoverished, but there was also a degree of local poverty which resulted from the nature of digging itself and not from agricultural distress. The diggings, as we have shown elsewhere, were 'for those possessed of considerable capital'.[15] The successful digger was a professional, with life-long experience, up-to-date machinery,

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years. Many farmers from districts in vicinity of diggings have drifted thither, and have generally met with little success.' Some 500 persons were reported to be living from 'hand-to-mouth' on the diggings at Christiana. ARB 200, Ref. LB555 Part 1, 'Unemployment. General (part 1)', Memorandum, 'Abnormal Distress. Transvaal, 1925'.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] TPS 60, TA 2/13857, 'Unemployment. Departmental Unemployment Committee', Memorandum from 'C.N.O.' to the Acting Secretary, Ref. LB511/4, 7 July 1926.

[15] The Star 22 January 1927. See also Chapter 1.

and money to see him over the bad patches. Or, in a process which became marked on the Lichtenburg fields, he was a speculator with reserves of capital with which to buy up Reserve claims, to set up companies and to engage wage workers.[16] The 'New Eldorado' attracted the unemployed, and down-and-outs from all over the Union, such that one observer complained that Lichtenburg was becoming 'a happy hunting ground for life's failures and unfortunates'.[17] In the first six months the unemployed from the Witwatersrand and from the small towns of the Transvaal constituted ten per cent of the population on the diggings.[18] While some Afrikaner proletarians began digging by rushing for claims on the proclaimed portions of the farms, and were successful, others found a livelihood indirectly from the claims, as supervisors and foremen for professional diggers, from bantam-sorting and water-riding, or wage employment in the retail sector of the local economy.[19] There was also much informal economic activity, which ranged from the running of shebeens (the sale of liquor was prohibited on the diggings), the illicit sale of liquor to the locations and illegal diamond buying.[20]

The economic fortunes of these Afrikaner proletarians was fully dependent upon the state of the local digging economy.

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[16] The Star 31 December 1926.

[17] The Potchefstroom Herald 2 July 1928.

[18] The Social and Industrial Review, 1, No.2, May 1926.

[19] See Chapter 2.

[20] See for example The Star 1 September 1927,'The Shebeen Menace', 15 July 1927, 8 December 1927, 'Life at the Diggings. Liquor System of the Diggings': MNW 898, wm2332/27, 'Report of Meeting Mining Commissioner Klerksdorp', 'Notes of Meeting held in the Minister's Office', 18 November 1927, Opinion of Lt. Colonel De Beer.

Within the first year of the diggings observers noted general prosperity amongst the diggers, and a conspicuous absence of large-scale unemployment. 'Everyone seemed to be making money,' stated one of these reports, as the local economy remained buoyant and boom conditions ensued.[21] Even in the midst of such optimism, however, there was much generalised poverty and low standards of living within the community - casual poverty, as it was termed. A soup kitchen, for example, at Welverdiend was necessary in the winter of 1927 for needy children, and it was continued during the following summer because of the growing number of paupers. Reports from the schools in 1926 and 1927 noted low levels of nutrition and cases of scurvy and rickets, these diseases being associated with poverty, whilst some children were unable to attend school through lack of suitable clothing.[22]

The generous policy of proclaiming as public diggings all farms under prospect followed by the Pact throughout 1926 provided ample ground for the diggers in the first six months of digging. Thereafter suitable ground became scarcer. Initially many of the destitute pegged claims in the rushes on proclamation day and joined the ranks of the independent diggers, the new petty-bourgeoisie, who constituted the bulk of the diggings population. The rank and status of these small independent commodity producers was transient and the nature of their production was simply extractive and low budget. When the shallow and extremely rich claims on Bakers and Elandsputte were

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21 The Star 5 June 1926.

22 MNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings (Poverty on the Diggings)', Ref. mmct654/30, Memorandum Lichtenburg Mining Commissioner to Secretary for Mines, 26 March 1928. See also A.E. Krause, 'Maatskaplike Toestande op die Lichtenburgse Alluviale Diamantdelwerye, 1926-1929', in Contree, No.19, 1986, pp.16-24.

exhausted by October 1926, this volatile class of producers cast around for more ground of similar potential. From December 1926 and throughout 1927 these diggers attempted to expropriate the privately owned claims of the companies and syndicates on the surrounding farms. [23] When this expropriation was delayed because of the lengthy passage of the Precious Stones Bill through Parliament in 1927, they resorted to more direct action to secure more gravel. The Pact, which in 1926 proved so willing to act as the patron of the small digger and to proclaim as many of the farms as had been prospected, thus began to question the wisdom of their alluvial policy in 1927 and no new farms were proclaimed between March and August that year. In addition the market price for rough diamonds slumped dramatically in mid-1927, and a sharp check in the trajectory of the local economy was noted.[24] Digging operations were shut down, shopkeepers closed up, numbers of the unemployed men, and their wives and children, began sorting bantoms - the cast away gravel from the sorting tables - as an informal livelihood, and petty crime associated with IDB and ILD increased significantly.[25] This growing unemployment and the shortage of shallow gravel on the fields fuelled the growth of a radical digger's movement which advocated the seizure of the claims of 'money-bags' and which grew extremely impatient with the failure of the government to cater for their narrow, sectional interests. The government's reluctance to make more ground available resulted in a sharp increase in destitution amongst this class of producer. By November 1927 the situation on the diggings was very dangerous, according to Colonel de Beer, and major

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[23] See Chapter 3 above.

[24] The Star 5 July 1927, 6 July 1927.

[25] MNW 896, mm2332/27, 'Report of Meeting', 'Notes of Meeting held in the Minister's Office', 18 November 1927, Opinion of Lt. Colonel De Beer.

concessions to this constituency of small, marginalised, diggers would be necessary to prevent class war from breaking out.[26] Many of the new white bourgeoisie thus hovered dangerously on the brink of the reserve army of labour from whose ranks they had been reprieved by timely alluvial discoveries.

The passage of the Precious Stones Act.

December 1927 was a nightmare month for the diggings proletariat. The passage of the Precious Stones Act affected them in very specific and direct ways, and many of these Afrikaners were thrust immediately and traumatically into the ranks of the unemployed. The proletariat was sharply differentiated from those diggers who had a firm grip on the means of production - the claims, the machinery, the expertise and the working capital. These included the professional diggers, farmer-diggers with land and capital resources, buresucrats and civil servants from the towns and cities, middle-class professionals, and the self-employed. The professional diggers on the Reserve claims were not affected by the passage of the Precious Stones Act in December 1927, because the Act did not expropriate claims belonging to individuals, only those held by companies.[27] Mobility and resources thus allowed this class some shelter from the worst effects of the Act but many diggers on the knife-edge of unemployment were rather less fortunate.

The Afrikaner workers at the base of white digging society were the immediate victims of the Act. When the regulations for the closing down of the companies became valid on 31 December

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[26] Ibid.

[27] The Star 31 December 1927.

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[26] Ibid.

[27] The Star 31 December 1927.

1927 the Welverdiend Diamonds Limited, African and European, and Treasure Trove Company, and many of the smaller syndicates began discharging 'hundreds of white men and thousands of natives' whom they had employed to work their ground. Some 500 to 600 white families were affected.[28] The closing of Welverdiend Diamonds alone threw 111 white (and 500 black) workers out of employment.[29] These unfortunate Afrikaners thrust into the ranks of the unemployed now found their one source of informal livelihood closed to them when bantom sorting was outlawed to those who did not possess diggers' certificates, or own claim licences, by the Act. The scale of bantom sorting in these months gives an idea of its importance to the livelihood of digging families. During December 1927 and January and February 1928, Donaldson and Carlis sold 3884 bags of bantoms at prices ranging from 50/- to 12/6.[30] After a major struggle the Mines Department authorised the sale of bantoms and some 1700 women took out certificates to sort bantoms within a month.[31]

For the small digger, operating on a hand-to-mouth basis, the Act was disastrous. Already by November 1927 the shortage of ground was critical and there was a significant increase in shareworking and partnerships between diggers of this class, who

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[28] Ibid.

[29] MNW 901, mm2525/27, 'Secretary Native Affairs re Application of Section 76(2) of Precious Stones Act 44/27', Commissioner of Police to Secretary for Mines, Ref. SAP1/179/27, 'Precious Stones Act No.44 of 1927', 29 February 1928.

[30] MNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings', Memorandum Mining Commissioner Klerksdorp to Secretary for Mines, Ref.mmct654/30, 're Conditions on Lichtenburg Alluvial Diggings', 1 April 1930.

[31] MNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings', Memorandum from Mining Commissioner Lichtenburg to Secretary for Mines, Ref.mmct654/30, 26 March 1928.

attempted to cut down working expenses by undertaking their own manual labour and pooling resources.[32] Other diggers began shareworking with African workers, in this way paying a fixed proportion of increasingly irregular finds from diamond digging rather than regular wages.[33] Wage work by diggers of this class also became more common, whereas in earlier months it had been unheard of.[34] Some of these diggers began to work for backers - who were generally diamond buyers and storekeepers on the diggings - who took a percentage of the profits in return for lending capital. The Act outlawed backing by preventing persons who lent capital from holding interests in claims.[35] At Lichtenburg this prohibition forced those companies who

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[32] The Star 1 December 1927: MNW 901, mm2529/27, 'P/S Act No.44/27, Section 73(4). Partnerships', Minute, Mining Commissioner Barkly West to Minister for Mines, 'Partnerships', 21 February 1928.

[33] J.J. Booyens, 'Die delwersberoep. n' Ekonomiese analise met verwysing na die Lichtenburgse diamantvelde', M.A. dissertation, University of South Africa, pp.46-48; J.S. Kotze 'Geskiedenis van die Wes-Transvaalse Diamantdelwery6, M.A. dissertation, PUV, 1972, pp.167-168; N.J. Scheepers, 'n' Kulturubeeld van die spoeldiamantdelwersgemeenskap van Suid-Afrika', D.Litt. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1950, pp.25-26.

[34] Of 4633 diggers who applied for claims on Grasfontein for the ballot of March 1928, 432 sold diamonds for over £300, and 4291 for less than this figure in the six month period prior to December 1927 (MNW 903, mm2604/27, 'P/S Act, 44/1927- Forfeited claims under Section 73', Acting Secretary for Mines to Mining Commissioner Klerksdorp, 'Forfeited Claims under Section 73', 15 December 1927).

[35] This was also a common practice on the Vaal River diggings in the Cape Province. Immediately, backers on the the Vaal River diggings discharged their shareworkers, and large numbers of coloured and white diggers in the Barkly West district were thrown out of employment in December and January 1928. See Precious Stones Act, Section 88, Chapter 9, sub-section 4; The Star 21 November 1927, 23 November 1927, 24 November 1927.

backed diggers on their Reserve claims to discharge them.[36]

The small digger, already in a most insecure position, was pushed nearer the edge of the economic precipice by those provisions of the Act that limited his access to new ground, and this insecurity led him to resent the priveleges of the fully employed wage-worker: 'Ik wil u net dit se (sic.),' stated one such digger at Welverdiend to the Minister for Mines, 'dat die mense wat by die Welverdiend Diamonds gewerk het nie so arm is... (hulle) is honderd persent beteraf dan menig ein (sic.) van ons.'[37] Similarly these diggers objected to paying regular wages to black workers who thereby received a regular reward in the form of the weekly wage for their labour whilst the digger-employer had to absorb all the losses of unprofitable digging.[38]

Following the passage of the Act an immediate increase in the level of unemployment and poverty was noticeable. In October 1927 the Mines Department was supporting only 100 indigent diggers. This number increased over the following five months. By November the number of paupers had risen to 125 and by December 1927 to 190. In January this number increased to 225, in February to 300, and by March to 530. Of 530 paupers on the lists of the Lichtenburg Magistrate in March 1928 were some 140 workers of Donaldson and Carlis at P-Kopje from Welverdiend.[39] By 1 March 1928 Die Burger estimated that 25 per cent of the

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[36] The Star 31 December 1927.

[37] MNW 898, mm2370/27, 'P/S Act, 44/1927', J. Krause to Minister for Mines, 4 January 1928.

[38] The Star 25 June 1928, letter of Geo. S. Twigge, Bakers, to the editor,'The Troubles of the Diggers'.

[39] MNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings', Lichtenburg Magistrate to Provincial Secretary, Ref.105, 23 March 1928.

diggings population 'ontheer die allernodigste'. This growing poverty was said to be caused by the shortage of ground: 'Ons vra nie onderstand nie,' said a small digger in March 1928, '...ons wil grond he wat ons kan werk. (sic.)'[40] It is clear that the legislation which closed down the companies and syndicates had a more immediate impact than the shortage of gravel and had repercussions beyond the dismissal of wage-workers. Some two-thirds of diggers prior to the Act worked on percentages with the companies, or in partnership with other diggers on company land. These diggers were thrown off the Reserve claims when the government closed the companies. The Act did not set down procedures by which these Reserve claims could be redistributed. Three months were to elapse before the first batch of these claims was made available to those diggers who had no ground to work, or who had earned less than £300 in the six months before December 1927.

The small diggers were understandably irate at this forced unemployment. 'Die gevoel,' stated a report on poverty at Welverdiend, 'is oor die algemeen baie verbitterd, want die mense redeneer dat die Regering die delwerye wil dooddruk deur die delwers uit te honger.'[41] Government officials tried to deny that this was the case and claimed that 'sulke toestande was daar altyd op alle delwerye en sulke toestande sal daar altyd wees solank as daar delwerye bestaan.'[42] This was not easily done. When on 10 March 1928 the Lichtenburg Magistrate met delegates from the DU and churchmen involved in private relief work (including the Dutch Reformed, Apostolic, Full Gospel Churches and the Church of England, together with the

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40 Die Burger 1 March 1928.

41 Die Burger 1 March 1928.

42 Die Burger 2 March 1928.

Salvation Army), they were adamant that this poverty was most unprecedented, and that they could not cope with the new circumstances.[43] Representatives of the Apostolic Church, for example, said that fully 10 per cent of the members of that Church were in indigent circumstances. Similar reports were given by the representatives of the other churches. The Magistrate denied all knowledge of the seriousness and significance of this: the scope of government relief was more than adequate to meet the situation; the government did not need assistance for this work from private bodies; and the police, who investigated the applications for relief, had assured him that the situation was under control. 'After what he had told them,' he continued, 'he felt sure that those present would agree with them that the question of poverty really had sympathetic treatment.' He then warned the DU and the chuches against involving themselves in the granting of indiscriminate relief to the poor. The granting of relief was 'a doubtful expedient and one which could be resorted to only in really genuine cases'. The clear implication was that the reports of widespread poverty on the diggings in the months after December 1927 were nothing more than propaganda.[44]

On the same day as this complacent Magistrate chastised the deputation, F.D. Devine, a professional digger and member of the DU, returned to Johannesburg with another story:

> He described pitiful scenes of families living in squalor and misery: emaciated children in rags which would be despised by houseboys, and careworn mothers trying to cook from scraps a frugal meal to enable

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[43] NNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings', 'Interview of Lichtenburg Magistrate with Deputation from Churches and Relief Committee', 10 March 1928.

[44] Ibid.

> dejected husbands to wrest precious stones from the earth with inadequate equipment.

More significantly though, he described how some 600 to 700 diggers did 'not know where to get their next meal' from because there was no ground. 'As far as the eye can see the machinery is standing idle,' but still the government did not come to their aid.[45] By March widespread unemployment was described: 'Whole families of the humbler diggers,' ran a report, 'unable to afford natives, are content to earn a few shillings a day sorting for bantoms (illegally). At Carlisonia, for instance, 'bantom' seekers have been gladly buying up old gravel which has had six separate sortings... for 12s. 6p. a bag. Mother and children are inspanned and the whole family seeks feverishly for the tiny bantoms on which their daily bread depends.'[46] By April 1928 the situation was no better. Some 8 000 certificated diggers were unable to dig because they could not obtain ground. They and their dependents represented a white population of 25 000 'practically all of whom are unemployed, and many of whom are in abject poverty and on the verge of absolute starvation'.[47] The DU in April 1927 now provided relief to 700 families in addition to those drawing relief from the Magistrate's office, expending £1200 contributed by the Provincial Administration for this work.[48] Many other diggers had been given free rail tickets to return to their homes.[49]

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[45] The Star 10 March 1928.

[46] The Star 10 March 1928.

[47] The Potchefstroom Herald 27 April 1928.

[48] The Star 9 April 1928.

[49] Ibid.

It is thus clear that the passage of the Precious Stones Act had an immediate impact on the levels of unemployment on the diggings. In the longer term though, the Act exacerbated the shortage of gravel needed to support those marginalised producers who were balancing on the precipice of wage work.[50] The Act did not create the shortage of gravel at Lichtenburg. The diggers themselves had extracted large quantities of the gravel from the scattered deposits. The companies and syndicates had worked out their Reserve claims before the passage of the Act. Thus the Mining Commissioner in December 1927 had reported that on Grasfontein, 'owing to the long period having lapsed since the granting of Owner's and Discoverer's certificates on (the) farm all claims of any value in the names of Corporate Bodies have been disposed of or worked out' except for those that D. Russell held for Oppenheimer on two portions of the farm.[51] The High Level Gravels, Oppenheimer and Joel's dummy company, had also tied up much of the remaining gravel on adjoining farms[52], whilst the government ban on prospecting *throughout the Union for one year from December 1927 prevented* the discovery of any new deposits.[53] We now turn to consider the long term impact of the new alluvial policy on the diggings proletariat following the passage of the Act.

Structural poverty and the sequel of the Act

The diamond companies and syndicates at Lichtenburg were

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[50]See Chapter 4 above.

[51]MNW 898, mm2370/27, 'P/S Act, 44/1927', Memorandum, Acting Mining Commissioner for Lichtenburg, F.J. Mathews, to the Under Secretary for Mines, Ref.mcc.430/27, 3 December 1927.

[52]See Chapter 3 above.

[53]See Chapter 4 above.

permanently excluded from the sphere of production by the Act, and the diggers working for them as wage or share workers were dismissed. Most of these diggers clearly favoured the throwing open of the rich company-held Reserve claims to relieve unemployment rather than the alternative of wage work.[54] Even those wage workers at P-Kopje demanded claims on the kopje as an alternative to the company's being allowed to re-open its operations there.[55] The companies pressed hard in 1928 for the scrapping of this legislation and they used white impoverishment to pressure the Pact. Thus the manager of Donaldson and Carlis's operations at P-Kopje, pointing to the poverty and starvation amongst their former employees, presented a petition from 'the poor' at Welverdiend to re-open the company operations. But the signatories of this petition had been blackmailed by the company into signing it: the company is thier... bezeg om die arme mense te vorseer om hulle hame op die petisie te teken, anders zal hulle nie meer dan die mense bantoms verkoop nie.... as hulle nie hulle naam op die petisie teken nie, dan kan hulle ook nie bantoms kry nie.'[56] A proportion of the young and able-bodied workers from the village of Carlisonia were absorbed in the Grasfontein rush of March 1928, but the majority of these diggers remained at Welverdiend, where they recommenced work on old ground without much success.[57] Round the company's plant at Welverdiend lived a number of elderly people who had made a

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[54]The Star 10 March 1928.

[55]Ibid.

[56]MNW 898, mm2370/27, 'P/S Act, 44/1927', J. Krause to Minister for Mines, 4 January 1928; MNW 898, mm2527/27, 'Telegram from 'Welverdiend Diggers' to the Minister for Mines, 3 January 1928.

[57]MNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings', Report by Officer Commanding SAP, Elandsputte to Lichtenburg Magistrate, Ref. E.P.47/28, 'Povarty on the Diggings', 18 March 1928.

living from the bantoms and it was amongst these people that great distress was noted.[58] Many impoverished diggers, with their families and children, gathered at Welverdiend in the hope that the government would re-open P-kopje and this pool of poverty at Welverdiend was the object of much attention.[59] In April 1928 poverty there encouraged the DU to pass a resolution that 'In view of the great distress prevalent at Welverdiend where people have remained in the prolonged hope of the mine being reopened, we respectfully and urgently request the Minister of Mines to open the whole of the farm Welverdiend for pegging and that P-kopje be proclaimed open ground.'[60] Eventually Donaldson and Carlis were allowed to re-open their company operations on P-Kopje employing only white labour at the rate of 7s. 6d. per day.[61]

The case of the small diggers was also taken up by the DU. In early February 1928 a 'Poor Whites' Relief Committee (RC) was set up by the DU, with Max Theunissen, a former prospector and shareworker on company ground, as its Chairman.[62] The RC aimed to capture the support of the marginalised digger who walked on the economic tightrope which separated the small independent producer from the proletariat, and it demanded relief for these diggers from the government in the form of more ground. Theunissen stated that the increase in poverty in 1928 was

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[58] Ibid.

[59] See for example The Potchefstroom Herald 27 April 1928.

[60] Ibid.

[61] MNW 898, mm2370/27, 'P/S Act, 44/1927', J. Krause to Minister for Mines, 4 January 1928.

[62] MNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings', M. Theunissen, Chairman DU Relief Committee to Chief Magistrate Lichtenburg, 're pauper Relief', 29 February 1928; The Star 5 April 1928, 9 April 1928.

structural and not casual, and was exacerbated by the Pact's alluvial policies: '...the position is now assuming such huge proportions that it would call for some drastic action on the part of the authorities, to avert a serious calamity.'[63] The RC professed to be above politics, but, as a sub-committee of the DU, it was not. White poverty was the most important drawcard of the DU which enabled it to drag itself back into the limelight of popular politics on the diggings in early 1928 after it had taken a back seat to the proponents of direct action.[64] Criticism of the Pact's alluvial policy and the DU's demands for fresh ground made this association inevitable. Thus the RC's ominous first communication to the authorities by its Chairman, and benefactor, Max Theunissen: 'The Diggers Union being a non-political body, I am not desirous of entering into political controversies with anybody', he said in regard to the Pact's alluvial policy, 'but I cannot refrain from expressing the view, that apparently the same policy of drift, which was attributed to the Smuts Government... is now being worthily carried on by the present Government.' He pointed out the potential radicalism which an organisation of the poor possessed to counter government intransigence: after all is said and done, he noted, 'of the two evils, a man would certainly rather be shot, than be starved, to death.'[65]

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[63]MNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings', M. Theunissen, Chairman DU Relief Committee, to Chief Magistrate Lichtenburg, 're Pauper Relief', 29 February 1928.

[64]See Chapter 4 above.

[65]MNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings', M. Theunissen, Chairman DU Relief Committee to Chief Magistrate Lichtenburg, 're Pauper Relief', 29 February 1928.

The RC, and its ambitious chairman, Theunissen (who used the RC to forward his own political ambitions[66]), undoubtedly exaggerated reports of starvation and poverty amongst the diggers for political purposes, which prompted the Mining Commissioner to complain that 'the present agitation appearing in the press generally regarding the poverty on the diggings is to a certain extent propaganda and is being used as a handle against the Government for not throwing open more ground, especially Namaqualand.'[67] The Mining Commissioner could not have been more correct. In the words of Smuts: 'the Government (by means of the Act) had turned off the tap': by restricting new proclamations, banning prospecting, and finally by declaring Namaqualand out-of-bounds to individual diggers. It was thus using the power of the law against the unemployed which it had attracted to the diggings.[68]

The DU wanted nothing to do with relief schemes which offered wage work. There is evidence though that the unemployed themselves were not averse to taking this form of relief if circumstances warranted it.[69] Nevertheless the DU claimed a membership of 25 per cent of all diggers at Lichtenburg in March 1928, and 40 per cent by May of the same year, and we can surmise a fair degree of support for their plans for 'relief'

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[66]See MNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings', Telegram Mining Commissioner Klerksdorp to Lichtenburg Magistrate, 9 March 1928, which details the political aspects of Theunissen's welfarist concerns.

[67]MNW 918, mm496/28, 'Lichtenburg Diggings', Memorandum Lichtenburg Mining Commissioner to Under Secretary for Mines, 12 March 1928.

[68]The Potchefstroom Herald 3 March 1928.

[69]For example see The Star 10 March 1928.

from these figures.[70] The DU was hugely influential amongst the small diggers, and even Beyers implored the President of the DU to use his influence to encourage diggers to take up relief work at 2s. 6d per day. The DU's opposition to this type of relief was made clear when Rheeders leaked news of this plea to the Press and highly embarrassed the Minister of Mines in the process.[71]

The question of opening new ground for the diggers was a complex issue. The first strand in this was the failure of the expropriated company claims to provide a livelihood to the diggers. The distribution of these claims on Grasfontein by ballot in March 1928 was disappointing.[72] Of some 4000 applicants all of whom had no ground, only 1000 were successful in drawing lots for claims.[73] This, and the unimpressive results obtained from these claims, lent substance to rumours that the Reserve claims on Hendriksdal, Ruigtelaagte and De La Reys Stryd were equally worked-out and would not provide a livelihood for the diggers.[74]

The second strand was that of prospecting. The question of allowing prospecting was tied up with that of Namaqualand, for if Beyers 'permitted prospecting to go on in the Western Transvaal he would have to allow it in Namaqualand with the

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[70] See Chapter 4 above.

[71] The Potchefstroom Herald 27 March 1928; The Rand Daily Mail 23 March 1928.

[72] The Potchefstroom Herald 27 March 1928.

[73] See footnote 36 above.

[74] The Star 10 March 1928; The Potchefstroom Herald 27 March 1928.

result that diamonds would become practically unsaleable'.[75] The LJ was unconvinced by the Minister's logic. First, it claimed that the government's year long prohibition on prospecting throughout the Union would not affect production because the syndicates and companies which had dug under the guise of prospecting at Lichtenburg had already exhausted the gravel before the regulations were published. The argument from overproduction was thus flawed, and this claim was reinforced by plummeting production figures for the fields from November 1927. When Beyers promptly suspended the publication of these monthly production figures, the DU became deeply suspicious.[76] On 27 March 1928 a telegram was despatched to Roos protesting at the prospecting prohibition and the Precious Stones Act in general by the 'largest ever gathering seen on the fields, exclusive of rushes'.[77] Clearly the government's handling of the shortage of ground was beginning to have unpleasant political consequences for it.[78]

Because of the shortage of shallow, rich gravel in the Lichtenburg district, which the Grasfontein ballot had confirmed, and the prospecting ban had made certain, the DU focused their thoughts of relief on Namaqualand, which 'Providence (had) indicated as a solution to the poor white problem'.[79] But the Pact and the DU had a fundamental disagreement as to how the area would be exploited. The Pact announced that Namaqualand would be reserved 'as a sphere of

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[75] The Star 23 December 1927.

[76] Ibid.

[77] The Potchefstroom Herald 27 March 1928.

[78] See Chapter 4 above.

[79] The Star 13 December 1927.

labour for poor whites', in terms of the Pact's commitment to a *'white labour policy' as enunciated* by the Department of Labour.[80] Smuts called this 'state socialism' which would please only the Minister for Labour, F.H.P. Creswell.[81]

The DU had a different view. This was best represented by the scheme of M.C. Brink, a DU member, and a small farmer from Coligny.[82] The Namaqualand fields, he felt, should be used as a solution to the poor white question by settling poor diggers there as independent producers; the fields were to be reserved exclusively for the needs of the poor man, who would work there independently under state protection, and not be employed as a relief worker by the state. He was not in favour of the proposed state diggings 'as this would only mean that the poor white would always be a poor white'.[83] Namaqualand belonged to the diggers and should be exploited on a sliding scale of profits for the state.[84] Dr D.P Steenkamp, the Independent Nationalist candidate who stood for Namaqualand in 1929, agreed in substance with Brink's plans for the solution of the poor white question. He did not agree with the absorption of poor whites into the railways as this 'offered little future prospects' and he preferred an adaptation of the 'American system' whereby poor whites were rehabilitated through back to the land schemes. In Namaqualand this could be achieved by throwing open the state

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[80]The Star 14 December 1927.

[81]MNW 938, mm2526/28, 'Petitions re Suspensions of Precious Stones Act No.44 of 1927', Pamphlet, 'The SAP and the Alluvial Diamond Diggings. (Extract of a speech delivered by General Smuts at Ventersdorp 21 May 1929)'.

[82]The Star 15 December 1927, 20 December 1927.

[83]The Star 21 December 1927.

[84]The Star 12 December 1928.

diggings to poor diggers where they could work as producers.[85] Wage labour at 'kaffir rates of pay' was, therefore, not the solution to the poor white question for Steenkamp and Brink. While the Merensky syndicate recovered millions of pounds worth of diamonds 'with the aid of a lot of poor sufferers, thousands of starving people had to look over the wire and see what was going on and almost perish from want'.[86] The poor whites on relief works, for example, those building roads in Namaqualand, were doing so on starvation wages - 2s. 6d to 3s a day. How could the government expect to rehabilitate them in this way?[87]

The DU adopted Brink's scheme as their own and over time, reformulated and embroidered upon it. The DU leaders, noted a police report on their activities, 'confined themselves to whetting the imagination of the diggers with wonderful tales of the richness of the diamond fields of Namqualand'.[88] These tales included the suggestion that the state should provisionally take over the diamonds produced which would then be 'sold when the time is most opportune'; the state should allow these poor whites to take out £5000 worth of diamonds, before revoking their licences, for this sum was deemed sufficient to 'put the digger on his feet' and allow him to shake the diggings dust off his feet. The state should receive no revenue from the diamonds themselves and it should revoke the

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[85] The Star 17 September 1928.

[86] Ibid.

[87] The Star 17 September 1928.

[88] NNW 930, mm2424/28, 'Report on M.C.P. Brink: Member of the newly formed Diggers' Union in the Western Transvaal', Detective Head Constable R.E. White, Office of the Diamond Detective Department, Ventersdorp, to Senior Inspector, Diamond Detective Department, 6 February 1928.

10 per cent export tax on rough diamonds. Trade on the diggings should be entirely in the hands of whites; the state *should* appoint independent diamond valuators for the diggers and finally, no Africans should be allowed on the Namaqualand diggings.[89]

Beyers was unconvinced by the DU's alternative scheme and in his abrupt, abbrasive manner informed the DU so. The proposals, he said, were impracticable and the Namaqualand diggings would be worked *in the interests* of the state by exploiting them with poor whites from Namaqualand, who would receive a good wage in the service of the state.[90] This was not acceptable to the majority of diggers: 'We won't have that. All diggers should be allowed to go to Namaqualand. We don't want a State diggings, as we are not going to work for kaffir wages, as they do on the railways,' they railed.[91]

Battle lines were clearly demarcated when the Pact Cabinet officially rejected Brink's scheme on 24 February 1928.[92] The tone of the announcement alienated everyone: 'The decision of the Government in regard to the Namaqualand deposits was arrived at after full consideration, including the scheme submitted by poor whites and diggers, and is final. The Minister is, therefore, unable to discuss this matter further with the

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[89]See for example The Star 3 December 1927, 13 December 1927, 20 December 1927, 21 December 1927, 22 December 1927.

[90]The Star 31 December 1927; The Potchefstroom Herald 6 March 1928, 30 March 1928.

[91]The Star 20 December 1927.

[92]MNW 898, mm2332/27, 'Report of Meeting', Telegram Minister for Mines to M.C. Brink and F. Rheeders (President DU), Grasfontein, 24 February 1928.

diggers....'[93] The tone of this pronouncement was somewhat diluted by the simultaneous proclamation of certain diggings in Lichtenburg as restricted alluvial diggings in terms of the Precious Stones Act. The fact, however, were clearly determined to work the riches of Namaqualand in the interests of the state and not on behalf of one section of the people.[94]

At the end of March 1928 a 30 per cent drop in the price of Lichtenburg stones was attributed to the sale of diamonds produced by the Namaqualand State Diggings to the Diamond Syndicate: 'The Diggers are asking if this is what Mr Beyers calls looking after the interests of the small man. The general feeling amongst the digging population is that the Government's policy is intending to entirely squash the digger and kill the alluvial industry.'[95] There seemed to be many examples of this intention: the barrenness of the new ground given by Beyers to the diggers by the new ballot system at Grasfontein, at Ruigtelaagte ('given up by prospectors and others as unpayable'), DeLaReystryd and Hendriksdal ('it has all been worked out.... there is little or no gravel left for new claimholders'); the *fiasco surrounding* the publication of the figures of the monthly diamond production; and the Beyers-Rheeders controversy.

These fears were added to by reports of growing poverty: Theunissen of the RC reported '791 applications in one day in early April, and many of the applicants were starving diggers who simply could not earn a livelihood because of the shortage

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[93] The Potchefstroom Herald 30 March 1928.

[94] NNW 898, am2332/27, 'Report of Meeting', Telegram Minister of Mines to M.C. Brink and F. Rheeders (President DU), Grasfontein, 24 February 1928.

[95] The Potchefstroom Herald 27 March 1928.

of gravel'.[96] Between February and April the RC received 2400 applications for food, and 1954 for medical attention.[97] The essence of the RC's relief programme was simple: 'We want sufficient ground at the earliest possible date for at least 8000 diggers.'[98] In April Rheeders articulated the substance of this digger ideology: 'We must serve ourselves (because) unless we get what we are entitled to we shall see created in South Africa two classes of people, the masters (die base)... and the hirelings. Surely we cannot tolerate that ?'[99] Beyers understood the implications of these demands, whilst disagreeing with them: 'Your scheme amounts to this: That you wish to make a small capitalist of every poor white or unemployed; and, furthermore, the State must be troubled with the administration of their capital '[100] What was wrong with that, countered the new President of the DU, A.J. Swanepoel: 'the diggers want to be independent and they want to remain independent. They do not want to work for others.' And, he continued, 'If the Government remained obstinate they uld use their organisation to compel the Government to take note of their grievances and to remedy them.... the ballot box will show.'[101]

The turning point both in terms of the DU's political resurgence, and the political defection of diggers from the NP, was June 1928. During the strike of African claimworkers in that month state officials had chastised the diggers for their

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[96] The Star 5 April 1928.

[97] The Star 9 April 1928.

[98] The Star 19 April 1928.

[99] The Potchefstroom Herald 24 April 1928.

[100] Ibid.

[101] The Star 18 June 1928.

primitive industrial relations apparatus, blaming them for the Kadalie strike.[102] The strike also coincided with the drying up of shallow claims on the Lichtenburg fields, which was probably the reason why the small diggers had decided to reduce the wages of claim workers from 25s. per week to 15/6 which issue had sparked off the strike.[103]

The shortage of shallow gravel remained acute throughout mid-1928. The Star described how 'diggers who have sampled new ground proclaimed by the Minister are returning to their "old loves" eg. Bakers, and Vaalboschputte'. Deep claims were now the rule rather than the exception, as the shallow gravel simply ran out.[104] Many diggers could not afford to work the deeper claims, and because the state had outlawed financial backing of diggers by outside lenders, deeper claims went unworked even when they were available.[105] In August the government decided to ballot the Reserve claims it had expropriated on Welverdiend. The rush for claims was phenomenal and from the Lichtenburg diggings alone 6078 applications were received, although only 1000 claims were available for distribution.[106] This indicated the acuteness of the position on the fields. Diggers' grievances were summed up by one digger: 'Recently I read in the Star a report of a speech by General Hertzog, in which he said that when the NP came to power there were over 24,000 poor whites, but today there are practically none. I do not agree with the Minster, as if he visited the diggings in the Western Transvaal

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[102] See Chapter 4 above.

[103] Ibid.

[104] The Star 28 June 1928.

[105] The Star 10 March 1926.

[106] The Star 2 August 1928.

he would find those 24,000 poor whites gathered in one place.'[107]

Economic need and bread-and-butter issues drove the diggers out of the ranks of the NP. Three DU executive committee members announced their intentions to stand against Roos because of this: A.J. Swanepoel[108], M. Theunissen, and M.C. Brink. They all based their actions on the fact that 'Mr Beyers, Mr Roos, the Cabinet and the whole of the Nationalist Party' were responsible for the impoverishment of the diggers.[109] 'The time had come for the diggings to send their own representative to Parliament,' stated Theunissen and 'their representative should be a man independent of all parties.'[110] All were dissatisfied at the Pact's relief programmes, and all contended that Roos's promise to the unemployed diggers 'was purely a political move to satisfy the party in regard to the promises made in conection with the poor white question'.[111] It is in this context that we must situate the campaign of Tielman Roos, the NP member for Lichtenburg, and Minister in the Pact Cabinet in August 1928, to win back the 'hearts and minds' of the small diggers.[112] On 17 August Roos visited his constituency, and the DU presented him with a 13 point list of demands, all of which he accepted: 'So far as words go,' noted the correspondent, 'Mr Roos capitulated to all the diggers'

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[107] The Star 22 August 1928.

[108] For biographical details see Chapter 4 above.

[109] The Star 3 August 1928.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid.

[112] See Chapter 4 above.

demands.'[113] He promised to proclaim the remaining portions of Welverdiend, Goedgedacht and Holfontein (in the Krugersdorp district), LaReysStryd, Hendriksdal and Ruigtelaagte.[114]

These promises of relief were sufficient for Roos to be given a full vote of confidence from the diggings branches of the *NP*, and probably resulted in his nomination as official NP candidate by the district Committee in late August. Theunissen for one was not impressed by his promises: 'the diggers were bluffed into (voting for Roos) by promises which would never be fulfilled, and by the slaughter of a few fat oxen, which provided a meal for hundreds of hungry diggers, who became Mr Roos's supporters for the day.'[115] 'Not one of Mr Roos's promises has materialised,' he noted in September, 'and as soon as he is nominated they will probably vanish in smoke.'[116]

Roos was as unsuccessful as Beyers was in providing long term relief to the diggers on their terms. The Welverdiend ballot was a failure: only 1000 out of the 7000 diggers who applied recieved a claim; he did not throw open the remaining 19 portions of that farm which belonged to a Lichtenburg Syndicate as promised[117]; the proclamations of Hendriksdal and LaReysStryd were failures, both farms having few traces of gravel.[118]. The Holfontein proclamation of 29 December 1928

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[113] The Star 18 August 1928.

[114] Ibid.

[115] The Star 6 September 1928.

[116] Ibid.

[117] The Star 20 September 1928.

[118] The Star 24 December 1928. These proclamations took place on 9 January 1929.

failed to satisfy Lichtenburg diggers who were prevented from taking part in the ballot at Holfontein in the Venetersdorp district because of the limitations imposed by the Precious Stones Act on those who could participate in lotteries in different mining districts.[119]

Some diggers were determined not to let their claim to the Namaqualand gravels rest. In late December 1928, and early January 1929 a group of 300 'radical Lichtenburgers', headed by the ubiquitous W.H. Thom, gathered at Port Nolloth on the Namaqualand coast to insist on the right of diggers to dig independently on the deposits.[120] They threatened to 'rush' the state diggings to peg claims on the rich deposits. They were not there, Thom explained, to stir up strife but rather to make a living: 'Since they could not do so, it was not surprising that they resorted to other measures.'[121] Theunissen's explanation for the Port Nolloth affair was that the Minster had not fulfilled his promises to give ground to the diggers.[122] Officialdom and government remained unmoved, and when rumours began to circulate that these diggers were preparing to rush the State diggings illegally, police reinforcements were rapidly despatched to Port Nolloth to maintain 'law and order'.

With this show of force at Port Nolloth, which brought to an end militant digger politics, and the nomination of Swanepoel as the 'diggers' representative' in the NP for the 1929 general election, the Lichtenburg poor were reconciled, in one way or another, with the Pact government. Yet, as we have explored in

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[119] The Star 29 December 1928.

[120] The Star 3 January 1929.

[121] The Star 8 January 1929.

[122] The Star 4 February 1929.

this chapter, the ideological differences which arose between 'the people' and 'the party' on the diggings offered rich material for political *dissent*. These became important aspects of the urban working class's struggle in the cities in a subsequent decade, as the rural poor were systematically driven from the countryside into the urban slums.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

> Race and Class (are) political abstractions, not daily actions; the actions (are) carried out by communities much smaller than either.[1]

Explanation of the political behaviour of Afrikaners in South African historiography has been dominated by the teleological use of either ideology ('race' consciousness) or 'class' (narrowly interpreted as 'economic' interest). This dissertation criticised the use of these overarching categories, which operate at the level of 'the nation' or 'economic class', to explain the political behaviour of specific groups of Afrikaners. A more 'natural' unit of social organisation to test the salience of these categories, it was suggested, was the community, for Afrikaners, as O'Meara points out, have always been 'disparate, differentiated and highly fractious' and not a homogeneous unity.[2] This criticism did not imply a rejection of the importance of either 'race' or 'class' in explaining political action. Rather, we sought to reconcile the supposed

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[1]J. Lonsdale, 'From Colony to Industrial State: South African Historiography as seen from England', Social Dynamics, 9, No.1, 1983, p.67.

[2]D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948, Johannesburg, 1983, p.6.

'dichotomy' in South African historiography by refining our analytical mesh to more manageable dimensions, drawing upon the notion that the 'experiences' of ordinary South Africans were moulded within the 'tiny and kaleidoscopic groupings' which constituted their immediate social reality.[3] This exercise was not conceived in an historical void and we drew for our inspiration upon the recent studies in the field of South African social history, of which the work of van Onselen must be acknowledged as pathbreaking.[4].

The Lichtenburg digging community, just one of these 'tiny and kaleidoscopic groupings', formed the unit of analysis in this dissertation. Our analysis followed the advice of Shula Marks, that we look at Afrikaner politics 'in terms of social structure, economic and class interests and the grass-roots level of mobilisation and party recruitment'.[5] This particular hierarchy of analysis, beginning with the material level of daily life and the social structure of the community, and only then addressing the political and ideological alliances and coalitions within the community, does not imply a hierarchy in terms of these different levels of analysis. We hold, with E.P. Thompson, that groups make themselves in conflict, and that their consciousness cannot be simply read off from their

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[3]J. Lonsdale, 'From Colony to Industrial State', p.70.

[4]C. van Onselen, Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914, 2 volumes, Johannesburg, 1982. See also the recent publication of the University of the Witwatersrand's 1984 History Workshop papers by B. Bozzoli, (ed.), Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives, Johannesburg, 1987.

[5]S. Marks, 'African and Afrikaner History', Journal of African History, 9, No.3, 1970, p.446.

objective class position in the social structure. Nevertheless, it is important that the material underpinnings of the community be established to enable the historian to weigh up the importance of the material and the ideological levels of explanation. John Lonsdale explains it in this way:

> It is clearly essential to analyse what appear to be the material necessities of any given mode of production, their internal structure and its corresponding social relations (for) class does have a strong structural component. But to stop there is to risk an ahistorical functionalism, to mistake consequences for causes.

Class structure is, he continues, not a synonym for class politics. Political activity, the various coalitions and alliances, and the concomitant myths of loyalty and betrayal that are formulated, are, on the contrary, determined by the the creative political responses of specific classes of people, in the pursuit of their own interests.[6] This dissertation has clearly demonstrated the validity of this truism for the politics of the digging community.

Our analysis of the social structure, and economic and class interest, unveiled the existence of competing class interests on the diggings, a fact hitherto obscured. The activities of a capitalist class were crucial in determining the social and economic structure of the diggings. The term 'diggers', it was noted, was simply descriptive of an amorphous and heterogeneous group of producers, who spanned the occupational gap between the professional digger - a fully fledged individual capitalist entrepreneur - on the one hand, and the impoverished and intermittently employed white wage worker on the other. In other words, the term 'digger' was not synonomous with the term 'poor

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[6] J. Lonsdale, 'From Colony to Industrial State', p.70.

white'.

Although almost the entire workforce on the diggings was African, there was a minority stratum of impoverished white workers whose political loyalties were clearly unsympathetic with the majority of African workers. We look in vain for any sign of a workers' movement amongst these wage workers. In addition, there is no evidence of a workers' movement amongst white workers only. On the contrary, the marginalised white workers identified with the independent white digger, one who could 'come with swag on his back, go to the nearest store and ask for and get credit, and by his own pluck, energy and labour elevate himself to an independent state'. This sentiment was illustrated clearly by the response of these diggers to Beyers's offer to find wage work *for them on* the Namaqualand State Diggings: 'We don't want a State Diggings,' they railed,'as we are not going to work for kaffir wages, as (*the poor whites*) do on the railways.'[7] The marginalised diggers, on the contrary, wanted to be independent proprietors: 'the diggers,' stated their spokesman, A.J. Swanepoel, 'want to be independent and they want to remain independent. They do not want to work for others.'[8]

These diggers displayed an awareness of their position in the social structure of the diggings, and identified the 'fat purses' and the 'moneyed element' as, in a sense, *standing* between them and the attainment of their desired status. They did not, however, lay the blame for their disabilities upon the capitalist system itself, but rather blamed the 'unfair'

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[7]The Star 20 December 1927.

[8]The Star 18 June 1928.

operations of specific groups of capitalists, who, they asserted, were subverting the rights of the small man. Beyers summed up this sentiment clearly in his reply to the Namaqualand scheme of the Diggers' Union of South Africa (DU), which proposed that the deposits be worked independently by indigent diggers who would be given capital to do so by the state: 'You wish,' he said, 'to make a capitalist of every poor white or unemployed.'[9]

This sentiment is important in understanding the political ideology of these diggers. The alluvial diggings became the Utopia of the 'small man'. Here on the diggings the promises of the Pact would be realised. The diggers would enjoy the protection of a sympathetic government, which would shield them from the 'capitalist pests' who monopolised the claims by the exercise of their money power. The small man would be given a chance to accumulate sufficient capital to 'set himself up as an independent proprietor' and not slip into the ranks of the unemployed poor white or be employed at 'kaffir rates of pay' on relief schemes. Legislation would ensure an equal opportunity to all citizens without reference to status or wealth. 'The policy of one-man, one-claim; the restriction of the use of black labour and the elimination of the companies and syndicates formed the core of... the digger's demands.'[10]

These demands were underpinned by a clear ideological message, that the diggers were 'the people' who had put 'the people's government' - the Pact - in power. Almost 95 per cent of the white diggings population were Afrikaners, nearly 70 per

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[9] *The Potchefstroom Herald* 24 April 1928.

[10] See Chapter Three above, pp.79-81.

cent came from the rural areas of the Transvaal, and the majority of them had voted for the NP in the 1924 election.[11] The diggers identified very closely with the NP: the majority of diggers were, and had always been, Nationalists, asserted A.J. S[illegible]apoel. And A.H. Ireton and W.P. Thom, the 'diggers' advocates', conducted their campaign against the local capitalists under the banner and protection of the NP.[12] This unspoken 'racial' assumption underlay the consciousness of the digger[illegible] movement, and contributed to the diffuse ideology that mobi[illegible] 'the people' - diggers of different standing and status - in a popular movement of great vigour. Initially, the government was identified as the diggers' patron; under the patronage of the Pact, the diggers 'would get their rights', asserted Ireton and Thom. 'We must have the Government with us; we must stand by the Government, for so long as we are fair to the Government so will the Government be fair to us.'[13] And so the diggers eagerly courted the Pact, and guided 'their' government in pursuit of the 'diggers' Utopia', by means of deputations and petitions and public meetings.

The Precious Stones Act was the NP's political statement to the digging community. However, the behind-the-scenes lobbying which accompanied the conception and drafting of this controversial legislation, drastically modified its original principle. 'The main principle underlying this measure,' explained Beyers, 'is that the alluvial diggings, subject to the interests of the State... shall remain the reserve and preserve

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[11] See Chapter Four above, p.83.

[12] See Chapter Three above, p.75-76.

[13] The Star 11 November 1926.

of the small man.'[14] In so far as this legislation eliminated the companies and syndicates, which were associated with 'the worst excesses of capitalist entrepreneurship', this principle was upheld.[15] However, the price paid for this patronage was a high one: total state control of the nature, scope and form of alluvial digging *within* the Union. Not only was alluvial digging more strictly administered after December 1928, but the government also took it upon itself to restrict the output of the alluvial diggings to a fixed proportion of the total diamond output of the Union. The Pact also committed itself to limiting the number of diggers and dispersing the community: 'There are too many diggers,' stated Minister Bayers, 'and there must be fewer.'[16]

This aspect of control and regulation was clearly not in the political interests of the Pact, and it is interesting to speculate as to why the Pact worked against its best political interests in implementing it. One possible approach, which we have followed in this dissertation, lies in exploring the class dimensions of alluvial digging. The individual digger on the Lichtenburg fields was not, in any economic sense, 'free' of the bonds of property and propriety: 'Diggers were bound in a web of interlocking commercial interests which extended, literally, from the gravel of the south-western Transvaal to the boardrooms and exchanges of the diamond world.'[17] The class interests of the local capitalists on the alluvial diggings, more especially

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[14]Hansard, Second Reading of the *Precious Stones Bill*, 25 April 1927, 2694.

[15]See Chapter Two, pp.21-50, above for details.

[16]See Chapter Four above, pp.87-88.

[17]See Chapter Two above, p.27.

those of the owners of the proclaimed farms, and the syndicate and company promotors, severely circumscribed the commercial activities of the small, individual producers. These local capitalists, who monopolised large portions of the gravel through private ownership, had all the misfortunes and trials of diamond digging visited upon them, within the first 18 months of digging. Yet behind this, apparently inchoate, public campaign against the local capitalists, yet other class interests were at work.

In December 1926 A.H. Ireton and W.P. Thom were approached in Johannesburg by the doyens of the world's diamond industry, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and Solly Joel. Oppenheimer and Joel, who between them held the controlling interest in the Diamond Syndicate and in the Union's diamond mines, wanted some assistance in 'fixing' the provisions of the new Precious Stones Bill such that the alluvial production from Lichtenburg would be reduced to a 'respectable' proportion of the Union's mine production. Underpinning this financial support to these spokesmen for digger opinion, was the magnates' belief that the promotion of a 'a white man's diggings' would eliminate two thorny problems of theirs: the immediate 'overproduction' of alluvial diamonds, and the problem of how to control production from the alluvial diggings in the long term. Neither of these problems was purely 'economic' in nature. The diggers, as we have shown, were political animals, having close ties with the NP, and quite prepared to defend their rights as individual producers. The Pact, on the other hand, was not free to ignore the demands of the diamond magnates, for the revenue from diamond mining was vitally important to the functioning of the government. Economic interest here confronted political interest

in a most direct manner.[18]

The magnates were, therefore, forced to descend from the Olympian heights of high finance (to which they have been relegated by many scholars) to the more mundane exercise of their money-power at the level of local politics. This they did with particular energy and great effectiveness. Their campaign was multifaceted, and flexible, ecompassing the financing of the popular diggers' movement of Ireton and Thom, to the floating of a dummy holding company, the High Level Gravels Ltd., which purchased five diamondiferous farms lying on the principal gravel run at Lichtenburg, and two of the subdivided portions of Grasfontein in order to keep the diggers from working these deposits. Ireton and Thoms campaign skilfully scapegoated the local capitalists - 'the capitalist pests' - as being responsible for overproduction and the ills of the diggers. And taking their cue, the Pact justified the 'new alluvial policy' - embodied in the Precious Stones Act - as a 'white labour policy' in line with their election promises of 1924. The local capitalists had their alluvial property expropriated by the state, because they had 'violated the spirit of the legislation' and 'unfairly' moncpolised the rich gravel. Henceforth they were barred from the sphere of production and became landed proprietors only.

This policy served the class interests of the diamond magnates in two ways. First, the immediate problem of the overproduction of alluvial diamonds by cutting down the company and syndicate production was solved. Secondly, the Precious Stones Act introduced state control over alluvial production, by introducing a specific production quota, and by legislating

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[18]See Chapter Three above.

local companies out of the sphere of production, which was now exclusively reserved for the small man.

The Pact's support for this policy seems to have been conditional upon the acquiescence of the digging community. And Ireton and Thoms support for a 'white labour' policy seemed to guarantee that the new alluvial policy, enshrined by the Act, was acceptable to the diggers. In this way it was hoped that both the political and the immediate economic interests of the Pact would be served. From this point onwards, however, major ideological problems grew up between the digging community and the Pact, which were expressed as disillusionment with the NP in particular. As we have seen, the diggers were not passive political pawns. When the restrictive policy of the government was made clear in December 1927, and the alluvial digging industry, in the words of General Smuts, 'had the tap turned off', a major ideological shift occurred within the digging community. 'At the eleventh hour,' declared Thom, 'the Minister of Mines had betrayed the poor diggers and made a present of the *diggings* to the *capitalists*.' This breach of faith called the credibility of the NP into question.

Initially there was hesitation in criticising the government, and criticism was therefore reserved for the individual directly responsible for implementing government policy - F.W. Beyers, the Minister for Mines. But behind every Minister there stands the party caucus, and behind the caucus, the Cabinet. And as a clearly discernible increment in the scale of impoverishment on the diggings became noticeable, so the NP's credibility was increasingly questioned. When, in December 1927, W.P. Thom was expelled from the diggings, the political vacuum was filled by the Diggers' Union of South Africa, which acted as the mouthpiece for the community. This organisation inherited the discontent which Thom so skilfully engineered for his own personal gain, and when, in February 1928, the Cabinet

officially rejected the DU's alternative scheme for Namaqualand, the political quiescence of the digging community towards the NP abruptly ended. It was freely stated that 'as Minister Beyers op die delwerye durf verskyn, hy verskeer sal word.... Die gevoel is oor die algemeen baie verbitterd want die mense redeneer dat die Regering die delwerye wil dood druk deur die delwers uit te honger.'[19]

The Pact's handling of the 'digging question' was a model combination of bad timing and political ineptitude, for the diggers gave ample notice, even so late as in October 1928, that if the NP did not 'remove the loose wheel from the party machinery', they would consider electing 'Independent nationalists' in the digging constituencies for the *forthcoming* general election of June 1929, but that they would do this only as a 'last resort'. It seems as if the NP leadership subscribed to the view that ideological differences with the South African Party would prevent a revival of the SAP on the diggings: 'It would be an act of folly on the part of the diggers to vote for (the SAP),' stated Beyers, 'a party to which the Diamond Syndicate owed allegiance.... The diggers would therefore always oppose the Oppenheimer party.'[20] And this was borne out by *utter failure of the SAP to build upon* this digger discontent with the NP.[21] Bonds of loyalty, and ties of emotion and affection to the NP would hold the diggers within the Nationalist camp. Yet three former Nationalist supporters announced their intentions to stand as Independents in protest at the NP's treatment of the digging community. In the words of

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[19] Die Burger 1 March 1928.

[20] The Diamond Fields Advertiser 14 June 1928.

[21] See Chapter Four above, p.84.

one of them, 'The party had not come up to the mark... and it was time for a change.'[22] It was 'the party' which had failed 'the people' stated Max Theunissen, the Chairman of the DU's 'Poor White' Relief Committee: 'Mr Beyers, Mr Roos, the Cabinet, and the whole of the Nationalist Party were responsible for the plight of the digging community.'[23] This 'betrayal' justified the abandonment of the party, and the pursuit of their ideals outside the strictures of being ruled by the caucus: Swanepoel declared that he would contest the seat as an Independent Nationalist 'as he does not intend that the decision of the caucus shall be binding on him'.[24]

Bread and butter issues drove the diggers out of the ranks of the NP in the last few months of 1928, yet the Independent candidates who canvassed for the diggers' vote did so by promising real economic relief to the 'digging community' but on a broad 'nationalist' ticket. As A.J. Swanepoel put it: 'I am a Nationalist... and one of the workers who placed the party in power. (And even) today I am still in favour of the principles of the party, but I am no worshipper of persons.'[25] If the party did not come up to scratch, added Max Theunissen, then why should the diggers, who represented one-twentieth of the population, not be represented by their own man 'who would not be bound hand and foot' by the decisions of a caucus.'[26] Thus although the diggers' movement was driven primarily by narrow

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[22] The Star 6 September 1928.

[23] Ibid.

[24] The Star 2 August 1928.

[25] The Star 6 July 1928.

[26] The Star 6 September 1928.

economic interests, which constituted the rationale for the growth of the DU, ideological factors exerted a suprising degree of influence on the nature of the diggers' political activity and the range of political options they were prepared to consider. As we have noted, the diggers were vehemently opposed to an accommodation with the 'Oppenheimer Party'- the SAP- on ideological grounds.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the popular choice from amongst the three digger candidates was A.J. Swanepoel, 'a good Nationalist and a staunch Afrikander'.[27] Tielman Roos's subsequent actions, in the battle for nomination, should be understood in the context of this popular nationalist support for Swanepoel. Should Swanepoel have stood as an 'Independent Nationalist', there was a distinct possibility that 'Nationalists (would) rally in his favour instead of for Mr Roos'.[28] The stature of such a well-known, 'committed' Nationalist would be dealt an irredeemable blow by such an event, which would be shatter the prestige of the party.[29] Roos succumbed to the 'voice of the people' rather reluctantly, using all his political experience and muscle to secure the official nomination for the Lichtenburg seat in November 1928. But Swanepoel, after recieving the overwhelming support of the NP digging branches in the nomination race, would not succumb to party discipline, and announced his intention to stand as an 'Independent Nationalist'. Because the 'diggers' vote' was a vital factor in some 14 constituencies, the NP caucus found a safe seat for Roos at Bethal, in the eastern Transvaal, many

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[27] The Star 10 August 1928.

[28] The Star 22 November 1928.

[29] The Star 22 November 1928.

miles to the east of Lichtenburg, and Swanepoel was offered the Lichtenburg seat by the NP district committee in his stead. No details of this negotiation are available, but perhaps Swanepoel's words to his constituency will suffice to explain his volte face, and his reconciliation with the party: 'He admitted that the present Government had made mistakes in their treatment of the diggers, but these could be rectified if the diggers sent the proper men to Parliament to point them out.... it was the duty (therefore) of every Nationalist to place their party in power again.'[30]

The involuted and tortured manner in which the Lichtenburg diggers gained political representation from the NP cannot be solely explained with reference to either material or ideological factors exclusively, as this study has demonstrated. Poor Afrikaners on the diggings, nevertheless, demonstrated a tenacity of purpose, and a clearly developed sense of their own political and economic interests, which we have traced in some detail in this dissertation. Their political alliances along the way were at times surprising and compromising, and even disastrous, but these were the 'experiences' which moulded their consciousness, and constituted their 'daily actions'.

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[30] The Star 4 February 1929.

APPENDIX ONE

THE DIAMOND PRODUCTION OF THE UNION (IN THOUSANDS)

YEAR	MINING		ALLUVIAL		TOTAL	
	CARATS	APPROX £ VALUE	CARATS	APPROX £ VALUE	CARATS	APPROX £ VALUE
1912	5016,7	9065,9	189,7	995,6	5206,4	10061,5
1913	5089,0	10269,6	211,5	1120,2	5300,5	11389,8
1914	2727,6	4910,5	147,7	576,7	2875,3	5487,2
1915	5,8	7,6	100,3	392,2	106,1	399,8
1916	2236,5	4779,8	172,1	948,6	2408,6	5728,4
1917	2791,5	6672,0	187,9	1041,8	2979,4	7713,8
1918	2457,4	6150,3	147,2	964,6	2604,6	7114,9
1919	2441,5	8994,0	215,1	2740,5	2656,6	11734,5
1920	2385,2	12321,5	227,3	2441,4	2612,5	14762,9
1921	676,5	2208,8	151,5	894,7	828,0	3103,5
1922	465,6	907,0	203,9	1359,6	669,5	2266,6
1923	1808,7	4380,4	244,4	1657,8	2053,1	6038,2
1924	2152,8	5883,0	287,6	2150,4	2440,4	8033,4
1925	2192,9	6291,5	237,2	1906,6	2430,1	8198,1
1926	2409,7	6699,9	808,3	3983,7	3218,0	10683,6
1927	2389,6	6193,5	2318,4	6198,8	4708,0	12392,3
1928	2256,2	5616,0	2114,7	11061,8	4372,9	16677,8
1929	2293,5	5766,9	1367,7	4823,2	3661,2	10590,1
1930	2244,9	5275,3	918,7	3065,4	3163,6	8340,7
1931	1472,1	2245,1	647,1	1927,4	2119,2	4182,5
1932	310,3	377,3	488,1	1302,3	798,4	1679,6
1933	15,5	9,0	491,1	1551,4	505,6	1560,4

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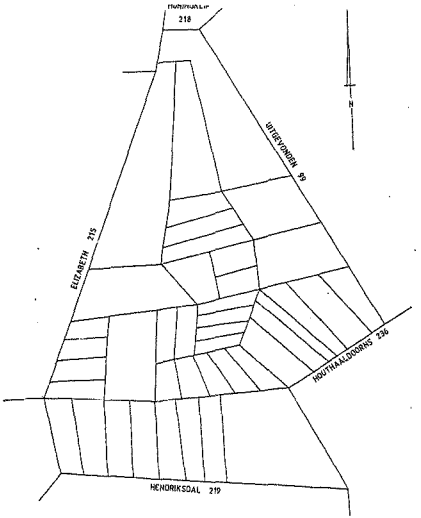
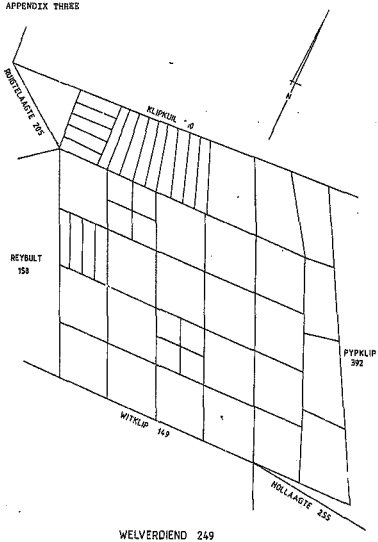
1918	3457,4	6150,3	147,2	964,6	3604,6	7114,9
1919	2441,5	8994,0	215,1	2740,5	2656,6	11734,5
1920	2385,2	12321,5	227,3	2441,4	2612,5	14762,9
1921	676,5	2208,8	151,5	894,7	828,0	3103,5
1922	465,6	907,0	203,9	1359,6	669,5	2266,6
1923	1808,7	4380,4	244,4	1657,8	2053,1	6038,2
1924	2152,8	5883,0	287,6	2150,4	2440,4	8033,4
1925	2192,9	6291,5	237,2	1906,6	2430,1	8198,1
1926	2409,7	6699,3	808,3	3983,7	3218,0	10683,6
1927	2389,6	6193,5	2318,4	6198,8	4708,0	12392,3
1928	2256,2	5616,0	2114,7	11061,8	4372,9	16677,8
1929	2293,5	5766,9	1367,7	4823,2	3661,2	10590,1
1930	2244,9	5275,3	918,7	3065,4	3163,6	8340,7
1931	1472,1	2245,1	647,1	1937,4	2119,2	4182,5
1932	370,3	377,3	488,1	1301,3	738,4	1679,6
1933	15,5	9,0	491,1	1551,4	506,6	1560,4

APPENDIX TWO



GRASFONTEIN 240

APPENDIX THREE



WELVERDIEND 249
3,900 Morgen 187 Roods

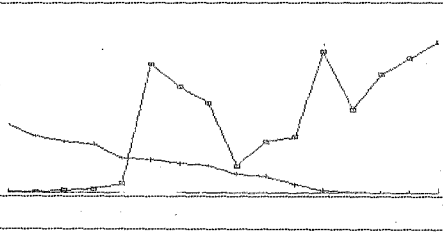
APPENDIX FOUR — CHART SHOWING MONTHLY FLUCTUATIONS IN ALLUVIAL DIAMOND PRODUCTION AND PRICES

PERIOD : JANUARY 1926 TO APRIL 1937, INCLUSIVE

I LICHTENBURG

MONTH AND YEAR	REALISED SALE VALUE PER CARAT	1926 JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	1927 JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	HIGHEST VALUE IN CARATS/ MINIMUM VALUE IN SHILLINGS	MONTH AND YEAR
OUTPUT FLUCTUATIONS	-	RISE	RISE	RISE	RISE	RISE	RISE	FALL	RISE	RISE	FALL	RISE	RISE	RISE	RISE	RISE	RISE		
CARATS		183,80	866,50	1834,25	4514,50	10458,50	10540,75	9268,25	42518,75	12695,75	36457,50	33198,50	53969,50	5384,75	11741,75	29111,00			
PERCENTAGE		43,21	71,43	188,32	165,66	229,64	100,78	84,56	27,42	29,86	23,33	24,57	48,23	9,95	16,17	30,79			

	£	S	D		
FEB, 26	4362	2	0	12	
JAN, 27	2930	2	14	0	
MAR, 26	7035	2	12	7	
APR, 26	31291	4	7	6	
MAY, 26	96211	4	6	2	
OCT, 26	176214	3	15	1	
SEP, 26	155553	3	13	7	
NOV, 26	208544	3	8	3	
JUN, 26	89640	3	3	5	
JUL, 26	171439	3	3	4	
AUG, 26	186033	3	1	4	
FEB, 27	471100	2	14	7	
DEC, 26	178857	2	10	9	
JAN, 27	376317	2	8	7	
MAR, 27	456095	2	7	5	
APR, 27	596461	2	4	-	



		221437,50 APR, 1927
		185936,00 MAR, 1927
		173804,25 FEB, 1927
		154827,50 JAN, 1927
		114570,50 DEC, 1926
		109859,00 NOV, 1926
		96971,25 SEP, 1926
		88887,50 AUG, 1926
		56130,00 JUL, 1926
		54191,00 APR, 1926
		31783,25 JUN, 1926
		7227,75 MAY, 1926
		5808,25 APR, 1926
		574,00 DEC, 1926
		567,50 FEB, 1926
		385,50 JAN, 1926

16 MONTHS 3852197	-	1327996,25 16 MONTHS
AVERAGE 320775	2 16 4	82974,50 AVERAGE

PRICE FLUCTUATIONS	-	RISE	FALL	FALL	FALL	FALL	FALL	RISE	RISE	RISE	FALL	FALL	FALL	RISE	FALL	FALL
AMOUNT		13/0	14/0	55/9	5/3	10/6	1/5	2/-	10/3	1/7	6/1	17/6	2/3	6/-	7/1	1/5
PERCENTAGE		8,57	8,81	35,31	4	13,89	1,25	1,26	14,08	2,15	9,2	25,64	4,27	12,33	13,13	1,83

LIST OF SOURCES

This list of Sources has been divided into:

I. Unpublished Sources
   A. Official Records
   B. Private Collections

II. Published Sources
   A. Official Publications
   B. Newspapers and Contemporary Periodicals

III. Secondary Sources
   A. Books (including contemporary works)
   B. Published Articles
   C. Unpublished Theses and Papers

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A. OFFICIAL RECORDS

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a. Secretary for Mines and Industries

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MNW Vol.541, File mm3077/20, '*London Diamond Syndicate*. Question whether any objection to syndicate purchasing diamonds outside the four large producers including from alluvial diggers'.

MNW Vol.573, File mm1696/21, 'Diamond Syndicate Conference of 4 Producers with Syndicate to discuss position of Diamond Industry in consequence of stagnation of trade etc.'

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MNW Vol.619,File mm1502/22, 'Brief Review of the Present Position of the Diamond Industry'.

MNW Vol.710, mm1076/24, 'Alluvial Diamond Fields. Question of Control of present Output without increasing Proclamation of Additional Fields'.

MNW Vol.716, mm1343/24, 'Diamond Industry. Proposed International Conference of Diamond Producing countries to control Production'.

MNW Vol.716, File mm1050/24, 'BOCADI. Resolution passed by re' alleged Restrictions of output of Diamonds on Alluvial Diggings'.

MNW Vol.828, File mm1053/27, 'S. Lord re' letter to DFA in connection with Budget Speech Alluvial Diamond Control'.

MNW Vol.883, File mm1360/27, '(1) Lichtenburg Diggers Committee. Election of members 1927 (2) Diggers Committee Transvaal. Rules for elections and councils of business'.

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MNW Vol.891, File mm1755/21, '*Sir E. Oppenheimer. Suggestions* regarding Production of Welverdiend and Issue of Statement by Government to reassure Diamond Trade'.

MNW Vol.892, File mm1866/24, 'Dissension of Digger's Committee/Union October 1927 over deputation to Minister of Mines'.

MNW Vol.898, File mm379/27, 'List of Subdivisions of Diamondiferous bearing farms in Lichtenburg District for purposes of P/S Act (1927)'.

MNW Vol.898, File mm2332/27, 'Report of meeting MC Klerkedorp. Question of Proclamation of further ground'.

MNW Vol.898, File mm2370/27, 'P/S Act 44/1927. Section 23. Holding of interests by corporate bodies, syndicates and associations of persons'.

MNW Vol.898, File mm2432/27, 'The "L" Diamond Syndicate Ltd. Application permission to sell claims under Section 73, P/S Act 44/1927'.

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MNW Vol.898, File mm2264/27, 'A. Orkin. Returns from showing Diamonds won on Welverdiend 249, Lichtenburg'.

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MNW Vol.901, File mm2520/27, 'P/S Act no. 44/27. Section 73(4). Partnerships. (general file)'.

MNW Vol.901, File mm2529/27, 'Welverdiend Trader's Association. Petitions regarding operations under Section 73 Act 44/27'.

MNW Vol.901, File mm2551/27, 'A. Smoorenburg. Claims purchased on area reserved for trading on Portion L2, Grasfontein No.240'.

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MNW Vol.904, File mm2676/27, 'Alluvial Diggings Lichtenburg. Proclamation of further ground Grasfontein 1928'.

MNW Vol.914, File mm231/28, 'Diamond Returns 1928'.

MNW Vol.918, File mm486/28, 'U.S. Mgoyis complaint that natives are thrown out of work on diggings as a result of Corporate Bodies and Syndicates ceasing to operate'.

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MNW Vol.930, File mm2424/28, 'Report on M.C.P. Brink: Member of the newly formed Diggers Union in Western Transvaal (February 1928)'.

MNW Vol.933, File mm2400/28, 'Diggers' Conference. Potchefstroom 24-25th April 1928. (1) Interviews granted by Minister: Steyn, A.J. Swanepoel, P. Prinsloo, O'Donovan (2) Diggers grievances (3) Bantom sorting (4) Appointment of Administration Board'.

MNW Vol.935, File mm2513/28, 'Parliamentary: Motion by Mr Hay (1) Alleviation of Distress on Lichtenburg diggings (2) Parliamentary Commission to inquire into question of Diamond Producers'.

MNW Vol.935, File mm2516/28, 'Petitions re' Suspension of Precious Stones Act No.44 of 1927'.

MNW Vol.936, File mm2549/28, 'Precious Stones Act. Commission and Inquiries'.

MNW Vol.942, File mm2997/28, 'Mr P.J. Malherbe. On the Effects of the P/S Act (1927)'.

MNW Vol.943, File mm3050/28, 'T.J. van Rooyen i/s Nuwe Bestuur Delwers Unie'.

MNW Vol.971, File mm603/29, 'Disqualification of Digger's in obtaining Claim licences in New Diggings Section 57, Sub-section 7, Act 44/1927'.

MNW Vol.981, File mm1430/29, 'Memorandum on Conditions of Lichtenburg fields pre-1926 and Legislation Concerning'.

MNW Vol.981, File mm2920/29, 'Treasure Trove Diamonds Co. re' Illegal Trading'.

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MNW Vol.988, File mm1856/29, 'J.J. Theron. Complaint re' banishment from Diggings in connection with working claims in partnership with natives'.

MNW Vol.1001, File mm2647/29, 'Minister of Labour (Col. F.H.P. Creswell) (1) Unemployment. Lichtenburg diggings (2) Suggestion that Diggers accepting Government work should surrender their licences for at least on year'.

MNW Vol.1030, File mm1591/30, 'Donaldson and Carlis, Welverdiend. Staking van Blanke Arbeiders 11 February 1930'.

b. Secretary for Native Affairs

NTS Vol.213, File 14/44, 'Molopo Reserve: Alluvial Diamond Diggings. Appointment of Headmen in charge of native interests'.

NTS Vol.217, File 34/22/F473, 'Pretoria- Bynestepoort Diamond Diggings. Strike at'.

NTS Vol.2044, File 58/280, 'Alluvial Diamond Diggings, B.O.C.'.

NTS Vol.2050, File 67/280, 'Christiana Labour District, 1913-1934'.

NTS Vol.2052, File 81/280, 'Native labour on the Lichtenburg Diggings, 1927-1942'.

NTS Vol.2092, File 149/280, 'Lichtenburg Alluvial Diamond Diggings: Native Strike 1928. Natives on Diamond Diggings- Failure of employers to meet obligations'.

NTS Vol.2093, File 229/280, 'Transvaal Pass laws (Lichtenburg)'.

NTS Vol.2536, File 218/293, 'Elandsputte, Lichtenburg'.

NTS Vol.3430, File 33/308, 'Lichtenburg: Farm "Omega" and

"Putfontein", 1912-1929'.

NTS Vol.3437, File 49/308, 'Lichtenburg Unemployment- Land Speculation'.

c. Secretary for Social Welfare

VWN Vol.229, File sw45/74-3 to 45/74-9, 'Rural rehabilitation and Housing Scheme'.

VWN Vol.247, File sw46/37, 'Investigations of a Welfare Nature. Social Survey of Lichtenburg area'.

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VWN Vol.510, File sw79, 29/9/37-27/10/39, 'Alluvial Diamond Diggings. General. Volume 2'.

VWN Vol.511, File sw79, 1/40-2/43, 'Alluvial Diamond Diggings. general Conditions on. Volume 3'.

VWN Vol.511, File sw79, 'Blanket Making SAVF Lichtenburg. Volume 4'.

VWN Vol.511, File sw79/1, 'Alluvial Diamond Diggings. Removal of Diggers from the Diggings'.

VWN Vol.511, File sw79/3, 'Alluvial Diamond Diggings. Interdepartmental Report. Volume 1'.

VWN Vol.512, File sw79/3, 'Alluvial Diamond Digging. Interdepartmental report on. Volume 2'.

VWN Vol.636, File sw95/4/1, 'Social Welfare Officers District Work, reports on'.

d. Secretary for Justice

JUS Vol.291, File 3/185/20, 'Native Disturbances. Rietkuil Diggings. Bamboespruit'.

JUS Vol.295, File 3/1007/20, 'Arrest of Natives on Alluvial Diamond Diggings. Bloemhof and Wolmaranstad'.

JUS Vol.306, File 3/62/21, 'Financial Crisis in Lichtenburg District 1921. Reports by Magistrate, Graham Cross'.

JUS Vol.309, File 3/219/21, 'Public Service Commission Report. Lichtenburg 19th July 1927. Report of Meeting Public Service Commission 28th March 1927'.

JUS Vol.355, File 3/1514/22, 'Report on Drought and Poverty at Christiana, 1922-23'.

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JUS Vol.430, File 3/148/27, 'Police Report on Diamond Diggings- Ireton, Thom and van der Merwe'.

e. Government Native Labour Bureau

GNLB Vol.23, File 1858/11/77, 'Barkly West Labour District. Re-opening 1918'.

GNLB Vol.23, File 1858/11/D77, 'Barkly West Labour District. Monthly Reports'.

GNLB Vol.87, File 3694/12/22, 'Bloemhof Labour District. Monthly Reports of Pass Officer on.'

GNLB Vol.87, File 3694/12/77, 'Native Location-Bloemhof.'

GNLB Vol.107, File 1237/13/53, 'Messrs Theron and Company. Labour at Bloemhof.'

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GNLB Vol.356, File 45/24/98, 'Lichtenburg Labour District. Strike of Natives at Lichtenburg Diggings (1928).'

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GNLB Vol.356, File 45/24, 'Lichtenburg Labour District. Reports

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GNLB Vol.356, File 45/24/98, 'Lichtenburg Labour District. Natives Trading on Lichtenburg Alluvial Diggings (1928).'

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f. Mining Commissioner for Klerksdorp

MCK Vol.2/4, File mcc211/23, 'Mr B.G. Godlonton- Suggestion concerning keeping the poor digger in the Western Transvaal'.

MCK Vol.2/19, File mcc3/3-3/5/9, 'Alluvial Diamond Diggings. Alluvial Diamond Board. Minutes of *Meetings etc.*'.

g. Secretary for Health

GES Vol.90, File 114/18, 'District Surgeon, Lichtenburg'.

GES Vol.814, File 566/13, 'Sanitation. Rietkuil Diamond Diggings'.

GES Vol.814, File 567/13 and 567/13(a), '*Sanitation.* Alluvial Diggings. Lichtenburg District'.

GES Vol.814, File 568/13, 'Sanitation. Alluvial Diamond Diggings. General'.

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GES Vol.814, File 565/13, 'Sanitation. Bynestepoort Diggings (Kameelkuil)'.

GES Vol.815, File 568/13(a), 'Sanitation. Alluvial Diamond Diggings. General'.

GES Vol.815, File 568/13(b), 'Sanitation. Alluvial Diamond Diggings. General'.

h. Secretary for the Treasury Department

TES Vol.790, File F5/80, 'Advances by Government to River Diggers on their Diamonds'.

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TES Vol.860, File F5/73, 'Conference of the principal diamond

producers'.

TES Vol.862, File F5/73, 'Conference of Diamond Producers held at the Mines Department, Pretoria on December 1st 1927. Minutes of Proceedings'.

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TES Vol.886, File F5/172, 'Alluvial Diamond Diggings: (1) Board of Control (2) Export Duty'.

TES Vol.953, File F5/251, 'Alluvial Diamond Production. Control of'.

TES Vol.955, File F5/265, 'Conference of Diamond Producers (1927)'.

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i. Secretary for the Department of Lands

LDB Vol.583, File R594/5, 'Purchase of Fodder under Promissory Note System by Farmers in Drought Distress Districts and General Drought Position and Financial Difficulties 1930-35'.

LDB Vol.1581, File R2547/1, 'Suggested Relief to Farmers during Drought and Locust Distress 1924. Parts I and II'.

LDB Vol.1829, File R3435/-, 'Committee to Investigate Drought Conditions 1927-28'.

LDB Vol. 89, File R3435/-, 'Committee to Investigate Drought Conditions 1928-41'.

j. Secretary for the Department of Labour

ARB Vol.200, File 1b511, 'Unemployment. General. Part 1'.

ARB Vol.203, File B517, 'Policy regarding Unemployment. Volume 1'.

ARB Vol.204, File B517, 'Policy regarding Unemployment. General. Part 2'.

ARB Vol.204, File B517/2, 'Scheme of Co-operative, Transvaal.

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2. Transvaal Archives Depot (Pretoria)

a. Lichtenburg Town Council

Minute Book, Village Council of Lichtenburg 1925-1932.

b. Bloemhof Town Clerk

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c. Transvaal Provincial Secretary

TPS Vol.12, File TA25/3195, 'Pauper Relief. Poor Relief on Diggings. General'.

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TPS Vol.60, File TA13857, 'Unemployment. Departmental Unemployment Committee'.

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d. Transvaal Provincial Administration

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1. Besluite en Beskrywingspunte van die SAVF, 1904-1939.

2. Korrespondensie en Jaarverslae, Maatskaplike werkster Elandsputte Alluvialle Delwerye, 1927-1930.
3. Rapport van die Delwerye Welvaartsorganisasie, 1933.

b. J.C.G Kemp Collection

1. Filo 1A, Korrespondensie (Persoonlik).
2. File 1B, Korrespondensie (Persoonlik Vetroulik).

c. J.P. Jooste Collection

1. Box 1, File 9, Diamantbeheerraad.

2. Nederduits Hervormde of Gereformeerde Kerk (Pretoria)

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1. Notules van die Kerkraadsvergaderinge van die Ned. Gereformeerde gemeente Lichtenburg, 1926-1933.
2. Notules van die Ringsvergaderinge.
   a)Ring van Zeerust, 1917-1937.
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Unpublished Reports
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2. Sinodale Kommissie, Acta en Bylaes, 1928-1931
3. Sinodale Kommissie, Bylaes, 1932-1933.
4. Sinodale Komissie, Acta en Bylaes, 1934-1937

3. University of South Africa, Special Collections (Pretoria)

a)South African Party Archives.

1. SAP Central Head Office, Congresses 1911-1932.
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3. United Party, Transvaal. Constituency Lichtenburg.

4. Johannesburg Public Library

a)Transvaal Land Owners Association

1. Minutes of Meetings.

b)South African Labour Party Collection

1. Annual Conferences: 1924-1928 (KJ1-KJ12)
   1929-1934 (LA-LZ)
2. Transvaal Provincial Conferences: 1926-1930 (Box 32-33)
3. United Party (General Elections): 1928-1931 (Box 35)
4. Transvaal Executive Council. General Correspondence, 1929-1932 (Loose File No.6)

5. Kimberley Public Library

a)T. Halliwell Collection

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b)T. Best Collection

1. Miscellaneous Manuscripts.

6. Lichtenburg Museum

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1. Manuscript, Dr. H.J. Scheepers, 'Delweryskole... Hulle het Verdwyn', typed, 3pp., no date.
2. Letter, J. Voorendyk, 2 May 1956.
3. Letter, K. Voorendyk, Ds. and Mrs P.L. Lourens (Krugersdorp)
4. Manuscript, J.W. du Prees, 'Die ontdekking van Diamante op Manana, January 1926'. 26 September 1973.
5. Manuscript, L.D.C. van Wyk, 'Mnr LDC van Wyk se ryl "Pothole" op Grasfontein; plot L21927- 1928', 2pp., no date.
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