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1987-02-14T10:42:59Z
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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

HISTORY WORKSHOP

THE MAKING OF CLASS

9 - 14 February 1987

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TITLE: Political resurgence in the Orange River Colony, and the Brandfort Congress of 1904

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POLITICAL RESURGENCE IN THE ORANGE RIVER COLONY, AND THE BRANDFORT CONGRESS OF 1904

> If the people could have but the half or the quarter of their claims paid they might at least live, and if ... the Government wants to make the people satisfied, that is the only way. A starving population cannot feel pleased.[1)]

> I have come to the conclusion that certain cases of injustice do actually exist and they are of greater frequency than perhaps can be attributed to ordinary human errors of those in whose hands the decision rested ... I also realise that even if we were to do so and decided that we should distribute further sums of money there is not in our possession the necessary funds where with to make any further payments.[2)]

> Fortunately the better class have ceased to believe in or hope for compensation, but the poorer and more ignorant still look to it to make a start, and the long deferred day when the claims are paid will be one of bitter wailing through the length and breadth of the land. It has been a cruel mockery to raise such false hopes, attended with an elaborate machinery, and publicly to ask men to send in detailed claims and summon them repeatedly at cost of time and money to give evidence, and all for a pittance, for nothing, or for worse than nothing.[3)]

This paper has a two-fold purpose: firstly, it proposes to examine whether class cleavages in the Orange River Colony offered the potential for a reconstruction favourable to British interests; secondly, it focusses on the prevailing view that the victory of the republican Orangia Unie party in the 1907 election was a foregone conclusion.

The established interpretation has portrayed the Free Staters of the nineteenth century as a nation of self-sufficient isolationists living in a 'model republic.'[4] Contemporary accounts often support the opinion of J Bryce who wrote, 'In the Orange Free State I discovered in 1895, the kind of commonwealth which the fond fancy of the philosophers of the last century painted. It is an ideal commonwealth.'[5] J A Hobson was similarly impressed '... the Free Staters knew what they were doing and what they wished. They are proud of their country and have good reason for their pride ... they have built up one of the most successful nations the world has ever seen.'[6] Amongst the most praised features of the republic was its homogeneity, whereby 'almal het tot dieselfde sosiale stand behoort, almal was veeboere en landbouers, sonder 'n noemenswaardige kloof tussen arm en ryk'--- everyone was of the same social standing, all were either pastoralists or agriculturalists, with no noteworthy distinctions between rich and poor.[7] The populist nature of the state extended to its government, which was 'altyd bereid om die burgers te help om vraagstukke te bekamp' --- always prepared to assist its burghers.[8]

Only recently and largely as a result of the work of Timothy Keegan, has this teleological perspective been replaced with the knowledge that the economy of the OFS had reached a crisis point in the 1890s, being confronted with a decline in self-sufficiency, an influx of speculative capital and alienation of land.[9] We now know that as a result of capitalisation within the Free State, and the corresponding crystallisation of classes and development of state structures, widespread accumulation and dispossession had occured prior to

the Anglo-Boer War. The extent of this process being revealed by the fact that as early as 1853, some 139 landowners owned 2,500,000 acres of land in the Free State, whilst in 1896 there were already 2,363 heads of families too poor to purchase their own weapons.[10] The Anglo-Boer War was to reveal just how far societal dislocation had progressed. The records of 'protected burghers', those who either remained neutral or actively fought for Britain show that some 28% of the population rejected the republican cause.[11]

In the post-war period the traditional interpretation of the homogeneity and pro-republican stance of the Free State population is reasserted in works examining the election of 1907. This election brought to power Abraham Fischer with J B M Hertzog as his Attorney General and Director of Education. The 'easy' victory of the Orangia Unie party has encouraged the view that the period of British reconstruction was a brief ineffectual interlude after which the republicans, with the blessing of the burghers, merely resumed their task of governing. This attitude is reflected in the following account of the new government:

> In the Orange River Colony, on the other hand, conciliation was not the policy of the Government. Unlike Het Volk, the Orangia Unie had no incentive to woo English-speaking voters, for the overwhelming majority of the Orange River Colony electorate was Afrikaners. Furthermore there was no Botha in the smaller colony.[12]

This statement assumes that the coming to power of the Orangia Unie was inevitable, that the Afrikaner majority was in such accord that no other outcome was possible. More recently P Rich has come to adopt a similar position regarding the victory of the Orangia Unie. Whilst recognising the potential class divisions within Afrikanerdom, he believes that the threat posed by divisiveness amidst a heterogeneous environment led to such divisions being subsumed within the context of the nationalist struggle:

> The existence of a class of poor whites in a

> racially divided context ... can be seen as one crucial factor that destroyed any possibility of exploiting divisions within Afrikanerdom between Hensoppers and Bittereinders and the potential class cleavages that these differences suggested. Instead, economic differences tended to get masked over in a cleavage defined along "national" lines.[13]

This conception is in direct contradiction to the views of Donald Denoon who believes that the dispossessed did offer the reconstruction government the potential to split Afrikanerdom along class lines. Denoon wrote:

> Milner's paternalistic contempt for Afrikaners as a whole, and his conviction that nationality over-rode every other interest, immunised him against overt malice. If he had been vindictive, and had diverted the government's resources to the patronage of the bijwoner class, the consequences ... might have been very serious indeed.[14]

It was Milner's short-sightedness as a result of his own innate nationalism and racism, which led to the failure to take advantage of the opportunities offered by class divisions within Afrikanerdom.

In terms of the historiographical controversies outlined above, this paper seeks to show that following the war neither the republicans nor the reconstruction government were able to claim hegemony within the Orange River Colony, until the period of reconciliation which followed the Brandfort Congress of 1904. It is suggested that the existence of a substantial bloc of disaffected burghers did present the British government with the possibility of making political inroads into the Orange River Colony. That, amidst the devastation caused by the war, the potential to alter the political complexion of the colony came to depend upon the provision of adequate relief and compensation.

Where the 'protected burghers' were concerned, the Milner

Regime made substantial efforts to co-opt this class, but financial constraints left it unable to provide the full compensation for damages promised during the war. The failure of the reconstruction government, either to relieve the distress of the people, or to provide acceptable compensation for the 'protected burgher' class led to widespread grievances. The republicans were able to build on these grievances, and by means of a campaign of conciliation, to create the base of support seen in the 1907 election.

When the Anglo-Boer War ended, the 'ex-burghers' and 'protected burghers' came face to face in an atmosphere of extreme bitterness and recrimination. The feelings of the majority of 'ex-burghers' towards the 'protected burghers' were conveyed by Eugene Marais, editor of Land en Volk when he wrote on 17 October 1902:

> The feelings of hate ... are deep as the ocean and wide as the God's earth ... We hate these people from the depth of our hearts because they besmirched our honourable name. It is not possible to forgive and even less to forget.[15]

The bitterness between these two groups was encouraged by the special consideration given to 'protected burghers' by the reconstruction government. In August 1902 Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams declared that although most of the 1,920 National Scouts who fought for the British were bywoners, 'we ought to do something more for them than for the ordinary bijwoners.'[16] During his visit to South Africa in 1903, Chamberlain assured the hensopper generals, Andries Cronje and Pieter de Wet of his support, 'The British Government cannot and will not desert those who have been its friends. We dont want to make distinctions, but we recognise our duty to those who stood by us in troublous times.'[17] As a result of these feelings of indebtedness, rentfree loans were made available to 'protected burghers.' During August 1902 an amount of £38,000, 30 waggons and 30 spans of oxen were distributed amongst this class. In February 1903 each of the 'protected burghers' was given £50, or animals in

lieu of that amount.[18] Some 250 'protected burghers' were also given employment by the South African Constabulary as translators, guides and plain-clothed detectives.[19] Finally, some 71 landless 'protected burgher' families were included in the Land Settlement scheme in the Orange River Colony.[20]

Despite such rewards, the wealthier and influential 'protected burghers', those with property and possessions waited anxiously for compensation. At Vereeniging the British government agreed to set aside the sum of £3 million for 'ex-burghers' in payment of war losses and receipts issued by the republican governments during the war. A year later a fund of some £2 million was instituted by the British government specifically for 'protected burghers' who had been promised full and fair compensation for war losses. The loyalty of this class came to depend upon the payment of such compensation, and as we shall see disappointment was to lead to widespread defection to the republican cause.

Despite their hatred of each other, the bittereinders and 'protected burghers' did have one thing in common, and that was a desire for recovery amidst the devastation that was the Orange River Colony. The 'burnt earth' policy of the British army had left thousands homeless and without a livelihood and food itself was scarce, particularly after the drought of 1903. Some idea of the extent of the destitution may be gathered from the report of the magistrate of Frankfort following a tour round his district in 1904. Of the 169 farms visited, only one family was still receiving relief, despite the fact that well over half the families were existing only on mealies with occasional vegetables. The magistrate appealed for the provision of relief in the case of seventeen families, where the condition of elderly burghers was 'absolutely desperate' and verging on starvation. The predicament of the burghers is shown by the fact that in the two years since the war, only 5 of the 169 homesteads had been rebuilt. The magistrate wrote:

> The homes are still unrepaired. I found only 5 houses rebuilt (i.e. more or less as they

> were before the war). The people are living in the back portion of the house and the front portion, that is the part between the gables, is practically not used. The position of the bywoners is of course at present such that they are unable to repair their houses to any extent, and the landowner, big and small, is so loathe to bond his farm that he has at present no cash to rebuild.[21]

In many cases the burghers retained their land and almost nothing else. In order to purchase the bare necessities of life many burghers turned to mortgaging their property. On the farm Goedehoop, the owner W J Pretorius living with his wife, father-in-law and six children, was in the process of bonding his property because then, 'they would get some meat.' Of the 159 privately owned farms in this district some 50 had been bonded in the two years since the war.

The distressed conditions documented in the case of the Frankfort district, were common throughout the Orange River Colony. In an extensive tour after the war, Emily Hobhouse provided a graphic account of the widespread destitution. Having visited Bloemfontein, Boshof, Brandfort, Thaba Nchu, Koppies, Heilbron and Jacobsdal, she wrote to her aunt ' ... but I shall weary you --- all along the route, wherever we stopped, the condition of the people was the same --- mealies only and those at the last ebb; a famine of money everywhere.'[22] Amidst such widespread poverty the question of government relief and compensation for war damage came to dominate the outlook of the people. The poor sought food and shelter, whilst landowners lived in hopes of compensation which would save them from bonding their properties.

The provision of relief must be viewed within the context of Milner's reconstruction strategy as a whole. Convinced that the political complexion of the ORC was irredeemably republican, Milner focussed his efforts on transforming the Transvaal into

a pro-British colony.[23] This narrow focus was to lead to reconstruction being afforded a lower priority in the ORC which in turn was to have far-reaching effects on the perceptions and loyalty of the people. We can observe a number of important distinctions in the manner in which reconstruction was carried out in these two colonies. In the first place, whilst Milner and Chamberlain considered using their powers of expropriation to provide land for British settlers, this policy was never implemented in the Transvaal. It was feared that such a policy would create bitterness and unrest which might threaten reconstruction. In the ORC in contrast, a policy of expropriation was applied and created a great sense of grievance.[24] Further evidence of the lower priority afforded to reconstruction is provided by the nature of the relief programme implemented in that colony. Whilst a permanent solution to the 'poor white problem' and rural dispossession was envisaged in the northern colony, the farm, irrigation and railway relief works implemented in the ORC were intended for the provision of temporary relief only. The collapse of all the relief works in the ORC between 1904-1906 undermined the credibility of the government and dispossessed thousands of burghers who had then to be supported by the community.[25]

A further significant difference between reconstruction in the ORC and the Transvaal lay in government attitudes to commercial agriculture. In the Transvaal Milner soon realised that there was no possibility of sufficient British settlers being encouraged to achieve his political objectives. As a result his government provided supports for the larger 'progressive' landowners, hoping that rural transformation under their auspices would reduce the cost of living and so assist the mining industry --- the fulcrum on which his development strategy hinged. In the ORC the reconstruction of commercial agriculture was not afforded a high priority. The local repatriation commissions advanced the relatively small amount of £65,879 in loans on first mortgage, although the orphan chamber did advance further small amounts. The emphasis of reconstruction expenditure in the ORC was on short-term relief in the form of

supplies, with some £323,000 being distributed in this form.[26]

As a result of Milner's belief in the intractability of the ORC population as a whole, his plans for the ORC focussed specifically on British land settlement. The target of this land settlement was Afrikaner predominance in the rural areas. Milner wrote, 'The man who thinks we intended to outnumber the Boers on the land is an ass. But a greater ass is he who thinks that is is no use attempting to leaven because you can't outnumber them ... '[27] By the end of the Crown Colony period some 691 settlers had been brought into the region, and an amount of £1,200,000 expended on this project. A further £500,000 was advanced during that year to ORC settlers. By 1912 the land settlement scheme in the two republics had cost £2½ million and between 2,000-3,000 men, women and children had been assisted.[28]

Milner's colonisation efforts were to provoke great bitterness amongst all classes of burghers in the ORC. 'Protected burghers', republicans and those of British descent alike, were incensed at the preferential treatment extended to 'outsiders', whilst so many of the inhabitants were struggling to survive. A resolution of the Brandfort Congress of 1904 read:

> The Congress of Brandfort expresses its deep conviction that the Government has not the right to import from outside this Colony one single new settler, and to support the same in the manner in which this has been done hitherto, namely at the expense of the people, as long as the old inhabitants have not been saved from the ruinous consequences of the war, and as long as the settlers already imported are still dependent for their existence upon the support of the Government.[29]

Perhaps it was The Friend which came closest to portraying the feelings of the population with regard to the settlers. In an article of 2 March 1905 it wrote, 'This is a pet scheme of Lord Milner's, run by him under the idea that British

settlers brought into the Colony would prove a loyal backbone to a disloyal body ... If Government had put aside some of their numerous farms for poor Boers, and given each family a plough and oxen, it would have conferred far more benefit on the Colony than by introducing men who do not know the country, and who still have their experience to buy.' The land settlement scheme can thus be seen as an important factor in the erosion of support for the reconstruction government.

It was those grievances created by compensation, however, which were to become the most damaging to the Milner regime, and to undermine the opportunity of reconciling 'protected burghers' to the British cause. During the war this class had been promised 'full and fair compensation' for all damage suffered. There was no hope that the extravagent expectations aroused by the 'protected burgher fund' could be met by the British government. Instead of the promised £2 million, the Central Judicial Commission finally received £1,936,376 3/5d. The numerous claimants made a pro rata system of payment the only alternative and it was decided to pay 10/- for every £1 claimed. At this rate, however, the fund was able to compensate only a relatively small number of the claimants and it was in an effort to reduce their number that very stringent conditions were applied. If any close relative of a 'protected burgher', a brother, father or uncle had continued fighting against the British, the claim was nullified. A further limitation was imposed by declaring whether the claimant had rendered any material aid to the British forces during the war.[30]

The cause and extent of 'protected burgher' grievances may be gathered from two accounts written by Emily Hobhouse during 1903. As it was the 'protected burghers' who began the campaign of political resurgence in the ORC, it is important to understand the mainsprings of their grievances, and these accounts are therefore included in their entirety:

> A few "Protected Burghers" were paid out in Jacobsdal. One man, Lombard, came to me; he was very sorry for himself. He had surrendered

> under Roberts; life and property was thus to be protected. After this his flocks were all taken, his house burnt, and his wife taken to Kimberley camp ... he claims £1,300 and has been told £300 is his share with £20 deducted for rations since leaving camp.
>
> So he has £280 lawyers fees to pay, his living for the past year as well, and had £130 to begin life upon ... I could not pity him very much because having £130 to begin upon he is in clover compared to most Boers; but I mention his case to show exactly how Lord Roberts' promises worked out ... And if these things are done in the green tree ("Protected Burghers") what will be done in the dry.[31]

The fate of the 'protected burghers' elicited sympathy from neither friend nor foe, and their anger grew at what they considered was the dishonesty of the British government reneging on promises made to them during the war. Discussing the predicament of a community of 'protected burghers' Emily Hobhouse wrote:

> The population of the village, however is mostly handsupper and scout, and these are all difficult to deal with and intensely dissatisfied. They sacrificed principle and honour and fidelity to their country to save their properties, for they were rich and now they find their goods also destroyed or seized and the compensation promised by Lord Roberts, for which mess of pottage they sold their birthrights, comes out or is coming out only a shadow of itself. They are furious and I hear they mean in a body to prosecute the Government (?) ... They think if they can't get sympathy and can't get respect, at least they'll try for the money.[32]

In this manner the failure of the British government either to provide effective relief, or to meet the expectations of

all classes of burghers regarding adequate compensation, created a fertile field of grievance. An exasperated Milner was to remark, 'Compensation has, on the whole, been rather a curse than a blessing. You give a man a pound, and he hates you for it, because he asked for four and expected two, and all his neighbours who have not got anything hate you equally.[33]

We turn now to the Brandfort movement in order to show that there was little political unity in the ORC before the end of 1904; that the republicans were unable to motivate political resurgence until the grievances of the 'protected burghers' presented them with the opportunity to reconcile conflicting class interests in the colony.

The first signs of political resurgence in the ORC came in the second half of 1904, when a petition was addressed to the Lieutenant-Governor Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams. A group of 'protected burghers' in the Harrismith district was reacting to rumours that the compensation fund was practically insolvent and sought reassurance that their claims would still be processed. The evasive reply of the Lieutenant-Governor did little to assuage their fears.

The Harrismith petition led to a meeting of 18 concerned people at the house of N Vermaak in Brandfort on 17 September 1904. Of the 18 people at the meeting all but two were 'protected burghers', whilst of these two, J P Marais fled to Basutoland during the war. The only 'ex-burgher' was J J van Rensburg who acknowledged that he was not there in hopes of compensation, for as an 'ex-burgher' he had no expectations in that regard. His reason for attending the meeting was that many 'protected burghers' owed him money and he sought reassurance that he would be paid.[34]

At the Vermaak meeting various resolutions were passed deploring the unsympathetic attitude of the government in the

light of its response to the Harrismith petition. It reiterated the fear of many 'protected burghers' that they would not be paid out. Those in attendance decided to call for a national convention or volksvergadering, in order to present their case, and to pressurise the government into fulfilling its obligations to them.

A week later on 24 September 1904, the so-called Vlotman Manifesto was issued. J Vlotman had been chairman of the Vermaak meeting. A 'protected burgher' he was angered by the fact that he had only received 75% of his claim. In terms of Lord Roberts' amnesty, he believed that he was legally entitled to full compensation. Originally issued in the form of a handbill, the manifesto was published in The Friend newspaper of 28 September 1904. It noted:

> We feel that the misery in our country has reached a climax. Many farmers are suffering the extreme of poverty, and even formerly wealthy persons are everywhere to be met who stand on the brink of bankcruptcy. We are also conscious that this wide spread misery is largely due to the way in which our Government had thought fit to make certain promises in regard to compensation, and also the way in which these promises have been interpreted and carried out ... The number of grievances is legion. Destitution increases day by day.[35]

In an effort to provide more widespread support for what was essentially a 'protected burgher' movement the manifesto promoted unity:

> Brandfort has given you the right example. All classes of the poor population have there met together, without distinction. The spirit of unity is once more in our midst, brought here by our sufferings.[36]

It remained to be seen whether the Vlotman Manifesto would provoke any response from the republicans.

The next stage of the protest was precipitated by a message sent through the resident magistrate of Brandfort, inviting all the signatories of the manifesto to meet with the Lieutenant-Governor and inform him personally of their grievances. This meeting took place on 3 October 1904.

Goold-Adams was keen to subvert the Brandfort movement, and to prevent it from growing in influence. In later correspondence with Milner, however, he pointed to his dilemma. At the time of the meeting he was well aware of the ineptitude and even corruption of the Central Judicial Commission in dealing with compensation claims. He was also aware that rumours of the closing of the compensation account was correct. Thus his room for manoeuvre was extremely limited.[37] It was perhaps for this reason that he adopted an aggressive, blustering stance during the meeting. The official correspondence refers to the 'severe rubbing down' which the delegates received.[38]

Far from allaying the fears of the 'protected burghers', Goold-Adams only succeeded in confirming them. In the face of direct questioning, the Lieutenant-Governor was forced to admit that the compensation account was almost closed. He also revealed that compensation claims had been rejected in cases where close relatives of 'protected burghers' were bittereinders. When confronted with the high price of cattle provided by the repatriation department he could only argue that such was the market price when the animals had been purchased, and although these prices had depreciated the government could not be held responsible.[39] This statement revealed the contradictory basis of the government's relief efforts whereby such 'relief' as was given was to be repaid at market prices.

Mr van Rensburg, one of the signatories then referred to the crux of the grievances held by the 'protected burghers'. He pointed out that the amnesty offer issued by Lord Roberts had promised protection and full compensation for all damage suffered after surrendering. This promise it seemed, was not being honoured. Once again the Lieutenant-Governor was forced

to agree. He replied 'that when Lord Roberts made that proclamation it was that it would be compiled with as far as possible. It was at a time when it was impossible to protect property.'[40] In other words the British government was not going to honour the amnesty offer.

The meeting with the Lieutenant-Governor only served to confirm the fears of the 'protected burghers'. 'After the remarks that had fallen from the Governor', Mr Vlotman noted, 'there was little to expect with regard to the claims.'[41] The Brandfort movement now became committed to political resurgence and to confrontation with the government, in an effort to force a reconsideration of their grievances. It also seems that it was at this stage, once the meeting with the Lieutenant-Governor had revealed the potential for confrontation, that the Brandfort movement became subject to new initiatives.

Soon after the meeting, a second circular entitled 'The Grievance Agitation' and signed by J Visscher, editor of The Friend was distributed throughout the ORC. This circular was sent in the first instance, to burghers known to be sympathetic to the republican cause.[42] The fact that Visscher himself signed the circular, and that it was aimed at republican sympathisers, indicates a new phase in what had formerly been a 'protected burgher' movement. The involvement of The Friend newspaper was also important. This paper had been bought in 1904 by a syndicate whose directors included the leading republicans, A Fischer , J B M Hertzog, Dr Alfred Ramsbottom, C H Wessels, C G Fichardt and Jack Brebner. As a result of its efforts in support of the republican cause the paper ran short of funds because as Arthur Barlow the editor at that time wrote, the new directors 'thought more of politics than of business. They were using the paper to build a golden bridge into a new Cabinet ... Politics, not profit, was their aim.'[43] Shortly afterwards Louis Botha came to the rescue of the newspaper with £8,000, '... for national purposes.'[44] David Graaff (father of Sir George de Villiers Graaff) was to provide a further £2,000.[45] Visscher with his well known republican

views was appointed editor in March 1904, and the paper took its place alongside De Volksstem in Pretoria, Het Westen in Potchefstroom, The Krugersdorp Herald, the Natal Afrikaner and the Highveld Herald. These newspapers were all purchased during the same period, with the intention of creating the right climate for the political revival of republicanism.[46]

In the second circular Visscher went to great lengths to promote the idea of unity. A common cause was to be established between 'ex-burghers', 'hensoppers' and 'national scouts'. The circular promoted the idea of a volkskongres which '... is to be general and shall embrace all sections of the people.' The obvious fear was that if the 'protected burghers' were alienated, the raison d'etre of the movement would be lost, and it would collapse. A temporary committee was to be established in each district '... including if possible an even number of ex burghers (wild Boers) and protected burghers filling up with a war official, and if practicable, also a representative of the National Scouts.'[47] The circular added that in the case of National Scouts, only those should be chosen who had repented of their actions and were prepared to declare their repentance in open-meeting.

This arrangement was mutually beneficial to all parties. A pro-republican structure was grafted onto the former 'protected burgher' movement, whilst at the same time 'protected burghers' were given the opportunity to present their grievances in a national forum, and to be reintegrated into the community. Finally the National Scouts were also offered the opportunity to atone for their 'sins'.

Following the circular, attempts were made at conciliation all over the ORC. A confidential report presented to Goold-Adams pointed out that the 'wild Boers' were suddenly 'professing a great friendship for the Handsuppers and National Scouts' and 'these individuals were now welcomed back to the fold.' The personal example of General de Wet was held out to the people. The rebuilding of his farmhouse was carried out by Cornelius

Lombaard, who as a National Scout during the war, did 'excellent work' with the British forces of Bruce Hamilton and Damant. The pre-war friendship between De Wet and Abraham Spies also continued after the war, despite Spies being 'one of the best men we had in the FID' --- the Field Inteliigence Department --- a National Scout operation. The correspondent provided numerous examples of efforts at conciliation including:

> an instance ... where an influential Justice of the Peace who had been at variance with his neighbours, both in and since the war, was invited to and attended a dance given specially in his honour by a family who are known, as also are their relatives to be the most ardent of "patriots". This man was received most warmly by all present and the breach which existed between him and the wild Boers in the neighbourhood was healed.[48]

In this manner the Brandfort movement attempted to heal the effects of societal transformation which had followed the mineral revolution. In the post-war environment, with most burghers in bleak circumstances, the British government was seen to have failed in its efforts at reconstruction. Many burghers now came to see their only hope in political unity, and a return to republican government.

During November 1904, events moved to a climax, and it was decided to hold the volkskongres at Brandfort in the south west of the ORC. It was here that the movement had crystalised amongst 'protected burghers' and here that it had its most immediate support. The government believed the volkskongres was located at Brandfort because this town was close to the eastern constituency of General Hertzog. Brandfort was also close to the offices of The Friend newspaper at Bloemfontein.

Meetings were held throughout the ORC to elect delegates to the congress. Resident magistrates were asked to attend these meetings and to forward comments to the Lieutenant-Governor. It appears from these reports, as was to be expected, that

districts with a high concentration of 'protected burghers' and Prinsloo surrenders showed the greatest interest in the proceedings, i.e. Bethlehem, Brandfort, Fauresmith, Harrismith, Ladybrand and Phillipolis. Elsewhere in the ORC meetings were considered unrepresentative and poorly attended. An indication of the lack of interest, particularly amongst 'ex-burgher' districts is shown in the case of Frankfort, where no representative was chosen at all. This district opposed the Brandfort Congress and its attempt at political resurgence.[49]

On the eve of the Brandfort Congress the Lieutenant-Governor wrote a report to Milner. Far from criticising the delegates to the congress, Goold-Adams believed that amongst them were 'a large proportion of fair-minded and moderate men ... not politically anti-British.'[50] The motivation behind the movement he saw as stemming from the very real grievances which existed among the burghers regarding compensation. Goold-Adams acknowledged that because of the sheer scale of the compensation exercise, 'mistakes were absolutely inevitable.' Yet his tour through the south-eastern portions of the ORC had convinced him of gross irregularities.

He pointed out that whole districts had been adversely effected regarding compensation, because of 'hasty or irascible officers'. Many widows had been excluded from the 'protected burgher' funds, even though their husbands had died after surrendering. In a number of cases he had found that regional compensation boards had not applied the same criterion when dealing with applicants. Finally, he pointed out that burghers had been blackmailed into accepting much smaller compensation payments because they were told that if they did not accept, they would have to take the chance of a much greater loss in the final distribution.[51]

Goold-Adams pointed out that he had been able to investigate and redress only a very few of the glaring cases of irregularity brought to his notice, and that 'a considerable number will have to go unredressed.' During the meeting with the Brandfort

representatives he had personally supported their grievances, but believed it 'impolitic to expose the basis of the CJC.' The only equitable solution he believed, was to appoint a commission of inquiry into the CJC. This course of action though, might ultimately prove a greater source of embarrasment to the government, if the CJC was found to have been as inconsistent as he suspected. In that case, the government would not have the money available to affect large scale redress.

The extent to which the Brandfort Congress had become a platform for republican aspirations was made visible on the eve of the meeting, when the important steering committee was chosen. This committee was to introduce the subjects for debate, and to forward the conclusions arrived at by the delegates to the government. Judge Hertzog was appointed chairman, with E R Grobler as vice-chairman. A representative of the southern district of Phillipolis, Grobler had been chairman of the old Free State Volksraad, and a former Hoofd-Commandant in the republican army. Thereafter, he had surrendered and become a 'protected burgher.' His election was thus an attempt to bridge the gap between 'ex-burghers' and 'protected burghers', as was the appointment of J Vlotman, as honorary chairman in recognition of his earlier efforts in forwarding the movement. Finally J Visscher was made secretary.[52]

The government attempted to discredit the conference through the medium of the Bloemfontein Post. On the opening day the newspaper published an article pointing out that the gathering was far from representative and had been engineered by political opportunists. It stated that there were 'no intelligent Afrikanders' present.[53] This attack set the tone of the first day, as delegate after delegate attempted to prove the representativeness of the congress. The English-speaking mayor of Harrismith, A Caskie reflected the desire of the delegates to prove their sincerity. Humonously he told the audience that 'when he left Harrismith he certainly had expected to meet respectable people in this Congress, but had since read that they were people without influence and respectability, and he almost feared he

was going to be like the man who went down to Jericho and fell among thieves (laughter).'[54]

The now acknowledged leaders of the congress, ex-generals Hertzog and De Wet went to great lengths to deny any responsibility for the volkskongres, the mainsprings of which they said emanated in the widespread distress afflicting the people. General Hertzog went so far as to declare that he had known nothing of the congress until two weeks previously, believing that separate congresses were to be held amongst 'ex-burghers', 'protected burghers' and settlers.[55] The 'protected burgher' origins of the movement were not denied, and Pepler, the delegate for Modderrivier noted that it was 'Lord Roberts' paper lyddite shells (his offer of amnesty), which had caused such dissention amongst the burghers during the war, and which now brought the Congress together.'[56]

For the congress to be successful, the earlier moves at reconciliation between 'ex' and 'protected burghers' had to be cemented. It also became apparent during the congress, that attempts were being made to draw English-speakers into the movement in order to diffuse yet another potentially divisive power bloc. The congress was characterised by sustained appeals for unity. The deep divisions within the society which the war had revealed, were to be forgotten. Instead, a return to the republican government of the past was promoted, as offering the only alternative to the failure of British government. The republic had shown that the Afrikaner was capable of solving his own problems, all that stood in the way was disunity and the British government. De Wet, amongst many others declared, the deeds of 'hensoppers' and joiners were to be forgiven:

> even if I hated those persons at the time so that I could not bear their presence --- a thing I have not the least thought of at present, as I call them all brothers --- (cheers) --- I would still say that with regard to compensation they are entitled to twenty shillings in the pound.[57]

The Brandfort Congress also included an appeal to heal the socio-economic grievances within the society between the educated burghers, predominantly from Bloemfontein and the south-east, and the rest of the society. De Wet pointed out that the Free State army had been led by well-educated people:

> my experience was, that the flower of our army consisted, with few exceptions --- as of my class, the "Takhaars", of men of education (cheers). The educated young burghers were the flower of our army. A firmer proof, in support of education, we cannot picture ... [58]

De Wet was referring to the sundering effects of the societal transformation which had occurred and was appealing for unity and understanding to overcome these effects.

It was Hertzog who summed up the conclusions of the Congress and presented the delegates with the alternative of republican self-government. 'The people of the ORC were the people of the OFS. The OFS had had a government which was recognised throughout the world as a "model government".' He asked what the British reconstruction period had achieved:

> After the war the new Government inherited a complete legislation, and if they had only followed it, if they had merely stepped into the shoes of the men whom they succeeded, and had continued on the same line the people would have been satisfied: but what have they done? They tried to introduce innovations and thought we were not quite up to date with the latest European ideas. They have accumulated debts and spent our capital in royal fashion. When the capital is spent, we will be called upon to pay it. Under those conditions we have every right to demand self-government to demand that we be governed as we were before.[59]

Hertzog concluded that what was needed was a return to the past, and to a 'model government' which would restore prosperity.

On 20 June 1905 a second volkskongres was held at Bloemfontein and the pattern of this congress was similar to that at Brandfort. It, too, was characterised by frequent appeals to unity amongst 'ex-burghers', 'protected burghers' and English speakers.[60] Where the Bloemfontein Congress went further, was to accept recommendations for the setting up of a volksparty to achieve self-government. From this time on future congresses were held under the auspices of the Orangia Unie party.[61]

On the 20 November 1907 the first self-government election was held. Far from being a walk-over, this was an acrimonious and bitterly-contested election. The English-speakers were largely united by their fear of the coming to power of republican extremists. Much of the English-speaking vote was concentrated in Bloemfontein and was split between the pro-Imperialist and pro-capitalist Constitutional Party led by Sir John Fraser, and the Labour Party. Financial support for the Constitutional Party came from Sir Lionel Phillips who put the Bloemfontein Post at the disposal of this party.[62] The Labour Party formed on 23 July 1906 mainly represented railway workers fearful of losing their jobs to Afrikaner workers and 'poor whites' should the Milner patronage system be replaced. This party was absorbed by the Constitutional Party during 1907.

The Orangia Unie attempted to split the English-speaking vote by promoting racial unity. English-speaking republicans such as Dr Ramsbottom made impassioned pleas for 'the two greater sections of the population to trust each other.' Such attempts at conciliation were undermined, however, by the failure of the round table conference in 1907 between the Orangia Unie and the Constitutional Party aimed at reconciliation. After the conference General Hertzog declared that 'Die Konstitusionele Party moet vernietig word. Ons moet sy kop afkap'. --- The Constitutional Party had to be destroyed and its head cut off.[63]

The English-speaking vote largely remained united in voting against the republicans. The Constitutional Party won

4 of the 6 seats in Bloemfontein, losing one seat by only 2 votes. Dr Ramsbottom who was put forward as the Orangia Unie candidate for Bloemfontein City, an English-speaking stronghold was defeated; the appeals for racial unity had fallen prey to Imperial and class sentiments.

The Afrikaner vote was also split along class lines. It remained to be seen whether the Orangia Unie would be successful in its attempts to co-opt the 'protected burghers' and dispossessed. The republicans made promises to the 'poor whites' and others of a 'back to the land' strategy, should they be elected. Industrial schools were to be built for 'poor white' children and labour colonies were to be set up on the lines of the Kakamas colony at the Cape. A solution to the 'poor white problem' was also to be sought 'deur werkverskaffing' --- through job creation.[64]

The 'protected burghers' and other Afrikaners who did not support the republicans were not represented by an established party. The difficulties in setting up such a party amidst the post-war bitterness that characterised the Afrikaner community can be surmised. Neither did the pro-Imperial and almost anti-Afrikaner stance of the Constitutional Party have much appeal for this middle ground. The Orangia Unie was able to gain great advantage from the lack of organised opposition within the Afrikaner community, which came to be represented by Independents. Of the 38 seats in the Free State legislature, the Orangia Unie won 14 seats unopposed, which was close to 40% of the vote. Two independents were also elected unopposed which meant that 45% of the vote was accounted for before the election began. The republicans with their superior party organisation had taken control of all the southern districts, most of the south western districts and the extreme northern districts. Independents, however, came to power in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Jagersfontein, Koffyfontein diamond mines, and in the wealthy tobacco-producing Parys-Vredefort-Heilbron north-western districts.[65]

The election, in reality, thus involved only 22 of the 38 seats which were concentrated in Bloemfontein (6 seats), and in the central and wealthy eastern 'conquered territory' districts. Of these 22 districts the Orangia Unie took 14 seats, or 59% of the contested vote. Some 8,859 people voted for the Orangia Unie, whilst 6,75 people or 41% voted for other candidates. Outside of Bloemfontein, the towns of Harrismith and Kroonstad elected non-republicans. It was in the 'conquered territory' districts of Ladybrand, Thaba Nchu and Wepener, however, where independents were the most successful. These districts had the largest concentrations of 'protected burghers' during the war, Wepener with 56% of its population, Thaba Nchu 36% and Ladybrand 30,5%. It seems that the republicans had not been able to co-opt the population of these wealthier and more cosmopolitan districts.[66]

The two-fold purpose of this paper was to assess whether the Orange River Colony population offered the potential for a reconstruction favourable to British interests; and to decide whether the victory of the Orangia Unie party in 1907 was a foregone conclusion. This research has shown that the republic was sundered by capital accumulation and dispossession prior to the Anglo-Boer War. According to official statistics some 28% of the population was to defect from the republican cause during the war, although the real percentage was likely to have been much higher. Following the war bittereinders and 'protected burghers' faced each other in an atmosphere of mutual hatred. This environment did offer the potential for British inroads into the Orange River Colony, had the reconstruction government proved viable and addressed post-war poverty and demands for compensation. The focus of the reconstruction government, however, was determined by Milner's belief in the pro-republican complexion of the ORC, and financial exigiencies, left it unable to provide the substantial support which might have co-opted the 'protected burgher' and dispossessed classes. Contrary to the opinion of some historians, the success of the Orangia Unie party in the 1907 election was not a foregone conclusion, as the bitterly contested campaign was to prove.

Faced with a societal rift going back to the Basuto Wars and earlier, the Orangia Unie party forced its followers into wide-spread and probably painful efforts at compromise with 'protected burghers', the dispossessed and English-speakers alike. It had earned its victory in the 1907 election.

APPENDIX A

Central Judicial Commission Record of Protected Burghers and ex-burghers in the Orange River Colony[67]

	Protected burghers	Ex-burgher	%
Bethlehem	291	1161	20,4
Bethulie	260	706	26,9
Bloemfontein	433	1489	22,5
Boshof	105	1144	8,4
Edenburg	96	353	21,3
Fauresmith	166	1014	14,0
Ficksburg	444	301	59,5
Frankfort	124	874	12,4
Harrismith	247	1059	18,9
Heilbron	135	915	12,8
Hoopstad	112	799	12,2
Jacobsdal	112	218	33,9
Kroonstad	302	1577	15,9
Ladybrand	337	767	30,5
Lindley	126	623	16,8
Phillipolis	not available		
Rouxville	211	1113	15,9
Senekal	not available		
Smithfield	286	613	31,8
Thaba Nchu	212	371	36,3
Vrede	129	607	17,5
Vredefort	97	987	8,9
Wepener	328	257	56,0
Winburg	832	2116	27,8
	5385	19066	

Some 28,2% of the population fell into the 'protected burgher' category.

APPENDIX B

Election of 1907, Contested Vote

		OU	%	Ind/CP	%
1. Bethlehem		1082	84%	203	16%
2. Bloemfontein North		603	82%	134	18%
3. Eastern Towns		333	56%	260	44%
4. Bloemfontein City	CP	215	60%	321	40%
5. Naval Hill	CP	176	66%	341	34%
6. Bloemfontein Railway		239	50%	237	50%
7. Bloemfontein Fort	CP	172	34%	340	66%
8. Bloemfontein Park	CP	185	37%	310	63%
9. Edenburg		407	76%	127	24%
10. Lindley		521	69%	236	31%
11. Ficksburg		455	71%	184	29%
12. Harrismith Town	Ind	116	74%	355	26%
13. Kroonstad West		697	82%	151	18%
14. Harrismith		620	68%	289	32%
15. Kroonstad Town	Ind			475	
16. Ladybrand	Ind	225	24%	710	80%
17. Senekal		762	74%	262	26%
18. Thaba Nchu		339	61%	216	40%
19. Vredefort		621	84%	115	16%
20. Wepener	Ind	154	28%	402	72%
21. Winburg South		623	72%	248	28%
22. Ladybrand Thaba Nchu		314	66%	159	34%
		8859		6075	

Orangia Unie Party: 8859. 59% of contested vote
Independent/Constitutional Party: 6075. 41% of contested vote
14934

FOOTNOTES

1. R van Reenen, Emily Hobhouse Boer War Letters (1984), Letter to Lady Hobhouse, 10 June 1903, p 193. Hereafter The Hobhouse Letters.

2. ORC CO 567, Hamilton Goold-Adams, Lieutenant-Governor of the Orange River Colony to Milner, 30 November 1904, on the eve of the Brandfort Congress

3. The Hobhouse Letters, Letter to Lady Hobhouse, 21 July 1903, p 239

4. See for instance F A van Jaarsveld, The Awakening of Afrikaner Nationalism 1868-1881 (1961), p 154, who writes:

   > A feeling of solidarity and of union made the Free Staters realize that they were a single people, and this in turn made isolationists of them

   and A P J van Rensburg, Die Ekonomiese herstel van die Afrikaner in die Oranjerivier Kolonie 1902-1907, unpub D Phil (UOVS) 1964, prologue

   > Die boerdery was in die eerste plek vir hom nie 'n middel om geld te verdien nie, maar die draer van sy huisgesin en van 'n hele lewenswyse. Die hele ekonomiese struktuur het dus verarming teengewerk

5. J Bryce, Impressions of South Africa (1900), p 314

6. J A Hobson, The War in South Africa; Its causes and effects (1902)

7. H P N Muller, Zuid-Afrika Reisherinneringen (1900), p 44 and A P J van Rensburg, op cit., p 147

8. A P J van Rensburg, op cit., p 148

9. Timothy Keegan, 'Trade, Accumulation and Impoverishment: Mercantile capital and the Economic Transformation of

Lesotho and the Conquered Territory, 1870-1920', JSAS, vol 12, no 2, April 1986

10. A Kieser, President Steyn in die krisisjare (1951), p 42 and Tim Keegan, 'Dispossession and Accumulation in the South African Interior: The Boers and the Bathlaping of Bethulie, 1854-1861', unpub paper, p 8 quoting J S Galbraith, Reluctant Empire: British Policy on the South African frontier (1963), p 271

11. List of the Archives of the Central Judicial Commission (1903-1906) compiled by Misses WJ Retief and B Kriek (1979)

12. L M Thompson, The Unification of South Africa, 1903-1910 (1960), p 34

13. P Rich, 'The Agrarian Counter-Revolution in the Transvaal and the origins of segregation: 1902-1913', in ASI working papers, 5, 1977, p 64. Although primarily discussing the Transvaal, Rich's statement is obviously equally applicable to the Orange River Colony

14. D Denoon, 'Capitalist Influence' and the Transvaal Government during the Crown Colony Period 1900-1906', The Historical Journal, XI, 2, (1968), pp 82-83 quoted in P Rich, op cit., p 65

15. Quoted in A Grundlingh's chapter 'Collaborators in Boer Society', in The South African War, op cit., p 276
See also Leon Rousseau, Die Groot Verlange (1974), p 170

16. CS 490/03 British Intelligence, quoted in A P J van Rensburg, op cit., p 240

17. The Friend, 6 February 1903

18. A P J van Rensburg, op cit., p 240

19. Cd 155/1903, p 202 and pp 194-195

20. A P J van Rensburg, op cit., pp 217-219

21. A/5116/04 Report by the Resident Magistrate, Frankfort, Orange River Colony, dated 6 June 1904

22. The Hobhouse Papers, Letter to Lady Hobhouse, 2 August 1903, p 257

23. See S E Katzenellenbogen, 'Reconstruction in the Transvaal' in Peter Warwick, The South African War (1980), p 342

24. GG 892, 17/548 Orange Free State Land Settlement Board. Report by the chairman on Land Settlement operations during the period 1 October 1901 to 30 September 1912

25. CT 144t 33/138; G B Beak, The Aftermath of the War (1906), p 206 and p 209; GOV 95, file PS 87 letter of 6 April 1904; A416 Hassard C, Orange River Colony Relief Works, pp 19-22; TKP 206, Transvaal Administrative Reports, Part 1, Administration of Burgher Camps, 10 March 1903

26. GOV 208, file Gen 19/04 Milner to Alfred Lyttelton, 14 November 1904 and G B Beak, op cit., p 49

27. Cecil Headlam (edit.) The Milner Papers, SA 1899-1905 (1933), Milner to Selborne, 14 April 1905, p 555

28. A P J van Rensburg, op cit., p 273

29. Official Minutes of the Brandfort Congress, p 142

30. Central Judicial Commission Final Report, 1906, p 37

31. The Hobhouse Papers, Letter to Lady Hobhouse, 23 October 1903, p 302

32. The Hobhouse Papers, Letter to Lady Hobhouse, 30 (23) August 1903, p 273

33. Quoted in A Grundlingh's 'Collaborators in Boer Society', op cit., p 276

34. Official Minutes of the Brandfort Congress, p 96

35. ORC CO 1032, Misc Correspondence, Report of the Brandfort Congress

36. Ibid.

37. ORC CO 567, Lieutenant-Governor to Milner, 30 November 1904

38. ORC CO 1032, Misc Correspondence, Report of the Brandfort Congress

39. Official Minutes of the Brandfort Congress, p 100

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., p 99

42. ORC CO 1032, Misc Correspondence, Report of the Brandfort Congress

43. Arthur G Barlow, Almost in Confidence (1952), p 113

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

46. See D Denoon, op cit., p 87, and T R H Davenport, The Afrikaner Bond (1966), p 295

47. ORC CO 1032, Misc Correspondence, Report of the Brandfort Congress

48. Ibid.

49. ORC CO 567, file 120/04 replies to CON 9652/04, 20 December 1904; ORC CO 574, file 9652/04; and C J P le Roux, Sir Hamilton John Goold-Adams se rol in die Oranjerivier-Kolonie 1901-1910, unpub MA (RAU), 1977, pp 51-54

50. ORC CO 567, file 115/04

51. ORC CO 567, Lieutenant Governor to Milner, 30 November 1904

52. Official Minutes of the Brandfort Congress, p 122. It is informative to contrast the delegates who assembled at Brandfort, in terms of elites and classes of society from which the delegates were chosen, with those who assembled for the Transvaal vergadering of May 1904. In contrast to the Transvaal where no 'protected burghers' attended the congress, some 10% of the ORC delegates were of this class. This figure though, reflects the extent to which the Brandfort Congress had been taken out of the hands of its originators and was now controlled by the republicans. Some 26% of the ORC delegates were ex-generals or commandants, field cornets or other republican officials. This number was a great deal less than the 37% of republican officials who attended the Transvaal meeting. The extent to which the old 'organic solidarity' of Free State society had broken down during the war is thus revealed. Also reflecting the evolving nature of the elite in the ORC, was the fact that 10% of the delegates were from the legal profession in contrast to 5% of this class in the Transvaal. In part this was due to their obvious knowledge of the compensation issue, but also reflected the prominence attained by the legal profession in forwarding the republican platform. That the representatives were almost completely composed of wealthier burghers and landowners is shown by the fact that only one bywoner was elected as a delegate to the Brandfort Congress. There were thus almost no representatives of the pre-war landless class who might have challenged the validity of the pre-war Free State being

a 'model republic'. Arthur Barlow was perhaps closer to the truth when he wrote that for many, the 'model republic' never got much further than the model. See Arthur G Barlow, op cit., p 113. Transvaal figures given in N G Garson, 'Het Volk': The Botha - Smuts Party in the Transvaal 1904-1911, The Historical Journal, XI, (1966), p 129 f.n. 132 and the ORC figures are contained in the official minutes of the Congress, pp 25-28, and ORC CO 1032, report on the delegates.

53. Bloemfontein Post, 1 December 1904

54. Official Minutes of the Brandfort Congress, p 143

55. Ibid., p 153

56. Ibid., p 117

57. Ibid., p 108

58. Ibid., p 151

59. Ibid., p 147

60. See C J le Roux, op cit., p 59:
'n besondere kenmerk van die kongres was die beroep wat hulle op alle Afrikaans- en Engelssprekendes gedoen het, veral diegene wat reeds tydens die oorlog hulle wapens neergelê het, om die verskille van die verlede te vergeet en saam te staan om te agiteer vir meer regte.

61. For instance the July 1907 Congress of the Orangia Unie party

62. A H Marais, op cit., p 32

63. The Friend, 19 April 1907

HW3 31

64. Ibid.

65. See D J Jacobs, Die ontwikkeling van Landbou in die Vrystaat 1890-1910, D Litt et Phil (UOVS) 1979., pp 38-42

66. Appendix B

67. List of the Archives of the Central Judicial Commission (1903-1906) compiled by Misses WJ Retief and B Kriek (1979)