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THE MAKING OF THE WHITE WORKING CLASS: CLASS EXPERIENCE AND CLASS IDENTITY IN JOHANNESBURG, 1890-1922.

Maria Lis Lange

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

January 1998

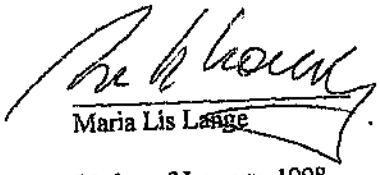
ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the economic, social and political processes that shaped the lives of Johannesburg's white working class between the beginning of deep level mining on the Witwatersrand and the Rand Revolt of 1922. It examines four related topics: white working class families, working class accommodation, the constitution of social networks and the problem of unemployment.

It is maintained in this thesis that white working class experience in Johannesburg had an important role in fostering a sense of community between English and Afrikaner workers and their families. It is argued here that the sense of community and identity that workers' developed in the three decades that elapsed between 1890 and 1922 is a necessary element to understand English and Afrikaner workers solidarity and organisation during the 1922 Rand Revolt.

This thesis is organised into seven parts. The introduction situates the topic of this thesis in the context of the South African historiography of the white working class. Chapter One is focused on the process of formation of working class families between 1890 and 1906. Chapter Two deals with the problems of white working class settlement in the city of Johannesburg between 1890 and 1906 especially focusing on the problem of white working class accommodation. Chapter Three examines the origins of the 'urban problem' and the government's responses to working class housing between 1907 and 1922. Chapter Four examines the constitutive elements of white working class experience in Johannesburg between 1890 and 1922, and analyses the formation of social networks amongst white workers. Chapter Five is focused on the issue of the ideological construction of the poor white problem and in the ruling class's changing perception of white unemployment. The conclusion analyses the findings of this thesis in terms of the literature on Afrikaner nationalism and the studies of the labour movement.

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



Maria Lis Lange

30 day of January, 1998.

For my parents, Erik and Amelia Lange.

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INTRODUCTION

CLASS EXPERIENCE, CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS AND WHITE WORKING CLASS IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY.

In 1898, a year before the outbreak of the South African War, William Kirby, a self-employed cab-owner who lived in Fordsburg with his wife, Elizabeth, and two children, asked Stefanus van Niekerk to be godparent to his third child, a boy, who was going to be baptized in the Anglican Church of the neighbourhood, the Church of Christ. Stefanus, who was also a cab-owner living in Fordsburg, a suburb known for the number of cabbies it housed, accepted the honour and a few years later, in 1903, he and his wife Phoebe also had their own child baptized in the Anglican Church. This story raises several questions about the composition and identity of the emerging white working class on the eve of a conflict that was to appeal to deep nationalistic feelings amongst the British and Afrikaners in the South African Republic.

Here was an English working class family, the Kirbys, sealing a relationship with an Afrikaner family, the van Niekerks, through the baptism of one of their children. At the same time, we see an Afrikaner family stepping outside of what most South African historiography has taught us about Afrikaner folk and religion, to have their child baptized in the Anglican Church. Why did the Kirbys choose Stefanus van Niekerk as godparent to their child instead of choosing an Englishman? Was this exceptional? Why did Stefanus accept? Why, finally, did the van Niekerks have their own child baptized in the Anglican Church instead of in the Dutch Reform Church? The answers to these questions are deeply rooted in the social, economic and political processes that took place on the Witwatersrand, especially in Johannesburg, after the discovery of gold in 1886.

This thesis explores aspects of the social history of the white working class in Johannesburg between 1890 and 1922. It will be argued here that during this period the shared class experience[1] of English and Afrikaner workers in Johannesburg brought people together across the 'ethnic' divide and helped to foster a sense of community in the white working class neighbourhoods of the city. Analysing this sense of community is an important step towards a better understanding of the white working class solidarity seen in the 1922 Rand Revolt, a solidarity that transcended the divisions between workers of Afrikaner and English descent, that spilled beyond the borders of the work-place into the working class neighbourhoods in the west of the city and that elicited support from some non-mining workers.

An analysis of the development of white workers' identity and sense of community in a historical context needs to take into account that a sense of community is not a precondition for the existence of a class but a process. This thesis explores some of the elements involved in this process and their interaction. In order to trace the development of a changing sense of community and identity amongst Johannesburg's white labouring men and their families it is necessary first to find out how the working class was constituted; secondly, what the role of material reality and culture in moulding their sense of community was; and thirdly, in what way government and party politics helped in galvanising workers' identity and sense of community.

The first question this thesis will try to answer is about the characteristics of the process of formation of the white working class. In order to do this the emergence of a working class family is the central issue that will be focused on. The constitution of families and kinship not only guarantees the demographic continuity of a given

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[1] The concept of class experience is taken from E. P. Thompson's **The Making of the English Working Class** , (Harmondsworth 1968): "Class happens when some men , as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and against other men whose interest are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations in which men are born - or enter involuntarily." p. 9. This concept will be further developed in Chapter Four.

population. It also contributes to the reproduction of emotional ties, social values and culture which are essential components of the process of class formation.[2] Despite the historical and sociological importance of the family, most South African historians over the last thirty years have been interested in other areas of white workers' history.[3] In terms of the working class family they either did not see in the presence or absence of families any particular consequence for the workers' life, and in this sense took family life as unproblematic, or they focused on the effect that the lack of family life amongst British workers on the Witwatersrand had at the political and social level.

H. J. Simons' and R. E. Simons' classic, **Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950**, sought to provide a comprehensive history of white workers organisations in the context of the development of racism in South Africa.[4] For them the lives of the workers were shaped largely by their conditions of employment. By implication, the absence or presence of families did not influence either workers' lives or the organisation of the labour movement:

> Immigrant workers of the early twentieth century were not pioneers, frontiersmen or revolutionaries. The colonial society was not so different from their own as to cause a sense of alienation. They fitted into the order of things as they found it and did what they could to better their conditions. They combined in ways familiar to them in their home countries, pressed their claims

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[2] Robertson, A. F., **Beyond the Family: The Social Organization of Human Reproduction**, (Cambridge 1991), p. 118.

[3] Some of the northern-hemisphere social scientists' works on the history of the family which have helped problematising the working class family in the South African context are: Laslett, P., **The World We Have Lost - further explored -**, (London 1983); Laslett, P. and Wall, R., (eds.), **Household and Family in Past Time**, (Cambridge 1972); Anderson, M., **Family Structure in Nineteenth Century Lancashire**, (Cambridge 1971); Levine, D., **Reproducing Families: The Political Economy of English Population History**, (Cambridge 1987); Aries, P., **L' Enfant et la Vie Familiale sous l' Ancien Regime**, (Paris 1973); Flandrin, J., **La Moral Sexual en Occidente: Evolucion, Actitudes y Comportamientos**, (Barcelona 1984); Poster, M., **Critical Theory of the Family**, (London 1978).

[4] Simons, H. J. and Simons, R. E., **Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950**, (Harmondsworth 1969). Hereafter **Class and Colour in South Africa**.

on government and employers and took political action to shape legislation affecting their terms of employment.[5]

The theoretical underpinnings of much of South African historiography of the 1970s was influenced by Marxist-structuralism through the works of N. Poulantzas and L. Althusser amongst others. Most of the research produced within this approach focused on the changing position of white workers in the labour process, especially in the mining industry; and on the organised politics of the working class and its relation to the government and the state. The study of the working class family was not an explicit area of enquiry of South African Marxist-structuralists. Two of the most renowned studies of the working class during the 1970s were F. A. Johnstone's work on the relations of production in the gold mining industry and R. H. Davies' analysis of the South African state's role in the creation of a stratum of privileged white workers in a racially organised society. Johnstone's and Davies' works gave preeminence to the analysis of the structures within which class experience and consciousness were set over the study of the process of formation of workers' experience and class consciousness.[6]

However, not all South African historians writing in the 1970s shared the preoccupation of their structuralist colleagues. Authors like D. Denoon explored very different aspects of the history of the working class. In his study of the period of reconstruction Denoon argued that a substantial increase in the number of British families settled in the Transvaal was a major political strategy of the Milner administration. The "demographic revolution" proposed by Milner attempted to invert the ratio between Afrikaner and British in the population of the Transvaal in order to secure the Imperial connection of the new colony:

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[5] Simons, H. J. and Simons, R. E., **Class and Colour in South Africa**, p. 73.

[6] Johnstone, F. A., **Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa**, (London 1976). Hereafter **Class, Race and Gold**; Davies, R. H., **Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa 1900-1960: A Historical Materialist Analysis of Class Formation and Class Relations**, (Brighton 1979). Hereafter **Capital, State and White Labour.**

> Because the Imperial intervention in South Africa envisaged very limited objectives, there was no escaping an eventual election within the white community. An important aspect of the failure [of Milner's policies] is the inability of the administration to achieve a massive electoral predominance of non-Afrikaners. The immigration of British voters was left largely to those natural forces upon which Milner pinned his faith and his only direct efforts concerned the quality rather than the quantity of the British immigrants. He was also anxious to curtail immigration of Russian Jews and other foreigners who might dilute the purity of his chosen race.[7]

Although Denoon's analysis stressed the political importance of family settlement, it did not look into the actual mechanics of this process and the effects that family formation had within the working class.

In the following decade, local historians, inspired by Marxist British historiography opposed to the "vision from above" of the 1970s structuralists, attempted a more nuanced interpretation of working class history that was more sensitive to agency. Amongst these works, C. van Onselen's **Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand** illuminated many aspects of the social history of the white working class. He attributed three of the principal social features of working class culture on the Witwatersrand - drinking, gambling and prostitution - to the overwhelming male presence in the society:

> These clusters of workers, concentrated in the boarding-houses and mine compounds of the Witwatersrand, produced, reproduced and accentuated several elements of late-nineteenth century working-class culture and, in the case of the white miners, elements of British male working-class culture in particular. Drinking, gambling and whoring, which would have probably played an important part in the emerging of working-class culture of the Rand in any case, became largely divorced from the broader mediating influences of family life, and thus assumed a central role in the lives of thousand of skilled and unskilled miners.[8]

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[7] Denoon, D., **A Grand Illusion: The Failure of Imperial Policy in the Transvaal Colony During the Period of Reconstruction, 1900-05**, (London 1973), pp. 159-60.

[8] Van Onselen, C., **Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914**, volume 1, **New Babylon**; volume 2, **New Nineveh**, (Johannesburg 1982), "The World the

Van Onselen, however, tended to take at face value both the Randlords' and the British administration's concerns about the lack of working class families in Johannesburg. This had at least two consequences for his work: first, a tendency to identify miners and British workers, and second, the implicit assumption that British single males would have not married Afrikaner women.

Historians like Davies, Denoon, Johnstone and van Onselen more or less agreed about the existence of two different ethnic elements in the constitution of the white working class in Johannesburg. Skilled and semi-skilled British workers, who were either single or w' d left their families behind, and unskilled Afrikaner workers who came with their families from a rural background. While most British workers found employment in the mines, the majority of Afrikaner workers were incorporated into the mines only after the 1907 strike. Despite the complexities of the process of deskilling of the mine white working force, studied especially by Johnstone, only recently has some light been shed on the early incorporation of Afrikaner workers into the gold mining industry.[9]

Although this analysis reflects the general direction of the process of the formation of the white working class in Johannesburg it presents at least four problems. First, it identified the whole of the white working class with the mine workers. At the same time, it tacitly assumed that most British workers who came to the Witwatersrand were mining employees. Secondly, examining the problems that the absence of white

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Mine Owners Made: Social Themes in the Economic Transformation of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914', volume 1, **New Babylon**, p. 5; and p. 8, p. 18, p. 22, p. 27, p. 30, p. 31 and p. 32. See also 'Prostitutes and Proletarians, 1886-1914', volume 1, **New Babylon**, pp. 103-62; 'The Witches of Suburbia: Domestic Service on the Witwatersrand, 1890-1914', pp. 1-73; and 'The Main Reef Road into the Working Class: Proletarianisation, Unemployment and Class Consciousness amongst Johannesburg's Afrikaner Poor, 1886-1914', pp. 111-70, volume 2, **New Nineveh**.

[9] For a new approach to the incorporation of Afrikaners into the mines see Katz, E., 'Miners by Default: Afrikaners and the Gold Mining Industry Before Union', **The South African Journal of Economic History**, 6, 1, 1991 pp. 61-80.

working class families in Johannesburg posed to the reconstruction administration politicians, it overlooked the fact that the plea of Milner's administration was for exclusively British families. Thirdly, the characterisation of British workers as largely single and Afrikaners as married made the white working class family almost synonymous with the Afrikaner family.[10] Finally, it neglected the influence of social and cultural processes, such as the development of community ties, in the constitution of white working class families.

Social and cultural processes were also largely absent from the histories of the labour movement and working class politics written by South African historians in the last three decades. Yet this research has had great importance in illuminating significant aspects of white working class history. E. Katz's study of trade unions in the Transvaal, **A Trade Union Aristocracy**, significantly broadened our understanding of the history of the labour movement by tracing trade union activities prior to the South African War and by including in her study all trade unions and labour organisations in the Transvaal and not only those related to the mining industry.[11] Katz argued that between 1886 and 1913, British immigrant workers were as committed to racial discrimination in their trade unions as Afrikaner workers were to be later on. Katz's work revealed the political weaknesses and contradictions within the labour movement until 1910 and explained them in the context of the general apathy of the rank and file. Katz has pursued further studies on the white working class on the Rand before Union. Her most recent book, on miners' silicosis has enriched our knowledge of the hardships faced by underground workers, showing the devastating incidence of the disease amongst the white work-force and the centrality that demands for preventive measures underground had in negotiations between mine workers, the

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[10] Johnstone, F. A., **Class, Race and Gold**, pp. 51-4 and pp. 57-64; Davies, R. H., **Capital, State and White Labour**, p. 58, pp. 65-6 and pp. 73-80.

[11] Katz, E., **A Trade Union Aristocracy: A History of White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913**, (Johannesburg 1976).

Chamber of Mines and the government between 1886 and 1910.[12] In the course of her research on silicosis Katz has examined the neglected history of Afrikaner employment in the gold mines convincingly demonstrating that the process of incorporation of Afrikaner workers into the mining industry preceded the 1907 miners' strike.[13] As will be seen especially in chapters one and four of this thesis, Katz's study of the early employment of Afrikaners in the gold mining industry indicates that British workers had interacted with their Afrikaner counterparts at the work-place, and opens the space for a study of the different forms that that interaction must have taken.

D. Yudelman's study on the incorporation of organised labour into the mining industry explored the relations between the labour movement, the Chamber of Mines and the state between 1902 and 1939.[14] He argued that the period 1902-39 was characterised by the transition from a weak and inexperienced state to a stronger and interventionist state. The main features of this transition were the state's capacity to first subjugate and then co-opt white organised labour on the one hand and its ability to guarantee the necessary revenue to run the state without having its legitimacy questioned by the white working class electorate on the other:

> To survive, the state necessarily had to commit itself increasingly to ensuring the viability of certain key industries, especially the gold mines; at the same time, it had to do this in a way that would not fundamentally estrange the white electorate. It needed, if possible, to retain the support or complaisance of the white miners. But far more importantly, it needed to prevent the white miners from elevating their particular interests into general issues that might mobilize the white electorate as a whole.[15]

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[12] Katz, E., **The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Mines, 1886-1910**, (Johannesburg 1994).

[13] Katz, E., 'Miners by Default: Afrikaners and the Gold Mining Industry before Union', **The South African Journal of Economic History**, 6, 1, 1991, pp. 61-80.

[14] Yudelman, D., **The Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital and the Incorporation of Organized Labour on the South African Gold Fields, 1902-1939**, (Connecticut 1983).

[15] **Ibid.** p. 38-9.

The histories of the labour movement, as interesting, well researched and relevant as they have been, tended to conflate the white working class with the labour movement. White workers' thoughts and feelings were read off the speeches and opinions of their most vocal and articulate leaders. In the words of the British historian of the working class, E. Hobsbawm, institutional labour history:

> tends to replace the actual history of the movement by the history of the people who said they spoke for the movement. It tends to replace the class by the organised sector of the class, and the organised sector of the class by the leaders of the organised sector of the class.[16]

The studies of political parties had the same limitations as the histories of the labour movement.[17] White workers are displaced by their leaders and are identified with British workers and more often than not, though understandably enough, with miners:

> The first sign of renewed organizational activity among the white English-speaking workers after the Anglo-Boer War was the formation shortly after the end of the war in 1902 of another Trades and Labour Council. It was strengthened by the adhesion of the growing number of craft unions. Yet fear among the leaders of the member unions of a strong authority over them prevented the Trades and Labour Council from assuming an independent role.[18]

Political biographies old and new, such as those published by R. K. Cope, E. Roux and W. Roux, and B. Hirson and G. A. Williams have also made important contributions to our understanding of white working class politics and the rise of the Communist Party.[19] Yet because they focused on the lives of prominent individuals,

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[16] Eric Hobsbawm. 'Interview' in Abelove, H., *et al.*, **Visions of History**. (New York 1976), p. 31.

[17] See, Tickin, D., 'The Origins of the South African Labour Party', Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1973; Johns, S., **Raising the Red Flag: The International Socialist League & The Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932**, (Bellville 1995). Hereafter **Raising the Red Flag** . And also Simons H. J. and Simons, R. E., **Class and Colour in South Africa**.

[18] Johns, S., **Rasing the Red Flag**, p. 26.

[19] Hirson, B. and Williams, G. A., **The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924**. (London 1995): Roux, E., **S. P. Bunting: A Political Biography**, (Bellville 1993), Roux, E. and Roux, W., **Rebel Pity: The Life of Eddie Roux**, (London 1970) and Cope, R. K., **Comrade Bill:**

they actually said very little about the experiences and feelings of the workers themselves.

Working class experiences, feelings and identity became an area of enquiry amongst South African historians during the mid-1980s. This was, in part, a reaction against the powerful influence of Marxist-structuralism in South African scholarly research. Local historians turned their attention to the complex and more subtle problems of identity formation and the ways in which identity and community relate to different forms of class consciousness. The essays collected by B. Bozzoli in **Class, Community and Conflict** are a good example of this approach.[20] In her introductory essay Bozzoli placed South African historians' concern with community in historical perspective at the same time as she opened the debate about the use of 'community' as an analytical category:

> On the surface, the concept 'community' represents a move away from economistic Marxism. Massive, economically-defined classes, such as 'the working class' or 'the petty bourgeoisie' have been assumed by some to be the appropriate analytical categories for use in South Africa. Such categories are soon found wanting: ordinary people live in small groupings, both in urban and rural settings. Their identification of themselves may not be as members of the enormous national classes, but as members of some local specific group. The gap between economic 'class' and reality as experienced is too big. 'Community' is both sufficiently general and sufficiently vague, to cover all situations in which this may be the case. It moves away both from 'race' categories and from 'tribal' ones, as well as requiring us to rethink the meaning of the term 'class'. However, what lies beneath the surface of a term such as this? Is it merely a mask for deeper class differences? Does it really have

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The Life and Times of W. Andrews, Workers' Leader, (Cape Town 1943).

[20] Amongst the essays collected by Bozzoli those that dealt specifically with the white working class are Mantzaris, E. A., 'Radical Community: The Yiddish-speaking Branch of the International Socialist League, 1818-1920'; Brink, E., 'Maar'n klomp "factory" meide: Afrikaner Family and Community on the Witwatersrand during the 1920s'; Clynick, T., 'Community Politics on the Lichtenburg Alluvial Diamond Fields, 1926-1929' and Witz, L., 'A Case of Schizophrenia: The Rise and Fall of the Independent Labour Party', in Bozzoli, B., (ed.), **Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives**, (Johannesburg 1987).

analytical value?[21]

In her review of the uses of the concept 'community' Bozzoli distinguished two broad approaches. On the one hand, there was the view that suggested that communities were in fact inventions of the petty bourgeoisie who, in their attempt to mobilise support for nationalism, created a term inclusive enough to obscure class cleavages. This approach has been especially powerful in the studies of the history of different aspects of Afrikaner nationalism as evidenced in the works of H. Giliomee, D. O'Meara and I. Hofmeyr amongst others.[22] On the other hand, there was another school of analysis, represented mainly by northern hemisphere historians like J. T. Cumber and G. Stedman-Jones that explored the different ways in which community interacts with class.[23] While the first approach has helped to demystify the idea of static communities, the latter, with its focus on the materiality of community, acknowledged that at certain points in history communities become "manifest social entities, with important effects on class and ideological responses".[24]

Some of Bozzoli's suggestions as to the need to combine both approaches to the analysis of community were developed further during the 1990s. Current historiography on South Africa's white working class has incorporated a focus on

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[21] Bozzoli, B., 'Class, Community and Ideology in the Evolution of South African Society', in Bozzoli, B. (ed.), **Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives**, (Johannesburg 1987), pp. 5-6.

[22] Giliomee, H., and Adam H., **The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power** (Cape Town 1979); Hofmeyr, L. 'Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnicity, 1902-1924', in Marks, S. and Trapido, S., (eds.), **The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa**, (London 1987), pp. 95-123; O'Meara D., **Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1932-1948**, (Cambridge 1983).

[23] Stedman-Jones, G., **Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982**, (Cambridge 1983), pp. 179-238. Hereafter Languages of Class; Cumber, J. T., **Working Class Community in Industrial America: Work, Leisure and Struggle in Two Industrial Cities, 1880-1930** (Connecticut 1979).

[24] Bozzoli, B., 'Class, Community and Ideology in the Evolution of South African Society', in Bozzoli, B., (ed.), **Class, Community and Conflict: South African Perspectives**, (Johannesburg 1987), pp. 6-8.

gender and, in line with the intellectual preoccupations of the 1990s, an analysis of the historical construction of social categories.[25] Class, race, gender and ethnic identity constitute interactive elements in the understanding of working class and petty bourgeois women in the works of I. Berger, E. Brink, and M. du Toit.[26]

This study, with its focus on the development of white worker's identity and sense of community in Johannesburg between 1890 and the Rand Revolt of 1922, builds on the many contributions South African historians have made to the understanding of the history of the white working class. From a theoretical perspective, it has been influenced by the arguments within English Marxist historiography as well as by their reverberations in local historiography.

As this thesis examines the changing composition and class experiences of the white working class in Johannesburg E. P. Thompson's work is an unavoidable starting point. The publication of E. P. Thompson's **The Making of the English Working Class** in 1963 has to be read against the then current debate amongst European Marxist historians and social scientists about the role of human agency and social structure in history. Thompson opted, together with authors like R. Williams, E. Hobsbawm, and C. Hill amongst others,[27] for a reaffirmation of people's agency in

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[25] See Morrell, R., (ed.), **White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940**, (Pretoria 1995), especially Freund, B., 'The Poor Whites as a Social Force and a Social Problem in South Africa', pp. xiii-xxii.

[26] Brink, E., 'Man-made Women: Gender, Class and the Ideology of the *Volksmoeder*' in Walker, C., (ed.), **Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945**, (London 1990), pp.273-92; Berger, I., **Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African Industry, 1900-1980**, (London 1992); du Toit, M., 'Women, Welfare and the Nurturing of Afrikaner Nationalism: A Social History of the Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging, c. 1870-1939', Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1996.

[27] Williams, R., **Culture and Society**, (London 1958) and especially, **Marxism and Literature**, (Oxford 1977); Hobsbawm, E., **Labouring Men**, (London 1964), Hill, C., **Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution**, (London 1965).

history.[28]

The concept of class and the methodology that E. P. Thompson proposed in the preface to this book were inspiring and challenging at several levels.[29] Class for Thompson was a juncture of structure and process in which people's experiences of their place in the relations of production had a fundamental role in the development of social identities and consciousness. Three main inferences can be drawn from Thompson's approach. First, it reaffirmed the importance of people's lives as the substance of historians' work. Secondly, class consciousness was seen as the cultural expression of class experiences; and thirdly, it broke away from the idea of the irrevocable revolutionary destiny of the working class characteristic of teleological Marxism.

Thompson's concepts of class, class experience and class consciousness nevertheless pose some problem First, his concept of class experience tends to be primarily focused on workers' experience of the work place, without paying enough attention to other areas of experience such as family and neighbourhood. Secondly, and related to the former, there is little analysis of the ways in which class experience influences the development of a sense of community amongst workers before it culminates in class consciousness and political action. Thirdly, Thompson's history of the making of the English working class does not take full account of the role of women workers or of women in working class families. Despite these criticisms Thompson's methodology, particularly his analysis of the influence of Methodism in the

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[28] For a historiographical analysis of these developments in Britain see Johnson, R., 'Culture and the Historians' and 'Three Problematics: Elements of a Theory of Working Class Culture' in Clarke, J., *et al.*, (eds.), **Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory**, (London 1979) pp. 41-74 and pp. 201-37. For a study of the impact of these discussions in American historiography see, Novick, P., **That Noble Dream: The Objectivity Question and the American Historical Profession**, (New York 1988).

[29] Thompson, E. P., **The Making of the English Working Class**, (Harmondsworth 1967). Thompson developed his argument further in 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?', **Social History**, 2/3, 1978, pp. 140-60.

development of English workers class consciousness, has been of great help in analysing the formation of the white working class in Johannesburg.

G. Stedman-Jones' **Outcast London** (1971) represented an important contribution to the analysis of a fully proletarianised working class and the ways in which it was understood and dealt with by the ruling class.[30] **Outcast London** was a study of casual labour in London between the 1860s and the 1890s. In it Stedman-Jones combined the analysis of the labour market and the associated urban and social problems with an analysis of the political and ideological responses that the 'social question' elicited amongst the English ruling class. In the early 1980s Stedman-Jones was confronted by the problem of class consciousness as he was writing his study on Chartism. Influenced by the post-structuralist approach that understood language not as independent but as constitutive of the social,[31] Stedman-Jones re-examined Thompson's contribution. The terms 'class experience' and 'class consciousness', Stedman-Jones argued, suggest that the relationship between economy (material reality) and politics (language) is one of direct expression. In this sense, experience and consciousness, according to him, conceal the problematic character of language itself.[32] Class interest, according to Stedman-Jones, was not constituted prior to its articulation through language. Quite the contrary, he argued, it was precisely the

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[30] Stedman-Jones, G., **Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society**, (Oxford 1971).

[31] A full account of the development of the structuralist approach to language is beyond the scope of this introduction. Stedman-Jones himself acknowledged the influence of Saussure's non-referential conception of language in his work. Foucault's theory of discursive formations is also present in Stedman-Jones' work though unacknowledged. **Languages of Class**, p. 22. For a critique of Stedman-Jones' position about language and his particular analysis of Chartism, see Thompson, D., **The Chartist: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution**, (New York 1984), pp. 238-9; Anderson, P., 'The Common and the Particular'. **Journal of International Labor and Working Class History**, 36, 1989, pp. 31-8, p. 33; Palmer, B., **Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History**, (Philadelphia 1990), pp. 128-33.

[32] Stedman-Jones, G., **Languages of Class**, p. 20.

discursive structure of political language which conceived and defined class interest.[33]

Although this thesis is a study of social history rather than an exploration of white workers' political articulation of their class interests, as proposed by Stedman-Jones, language and discourse are necessary elements of the present analysis. On the one hand, white workers in Johannesburg belonged to one of, at least, two of the dominant language groups: Dutch/Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking, and the identification of workers' nationalities through their names and the language they spoke has been a necessary part in the analysis of the composition of the white working class. On the other, this thesis explores the changes in the ruling class's ideological and political understanding of white workers through an analysis of the historical construction of the 'poor white problem' which has been influenced by the works of A. Ashforth and S. Dubow.[34]

This thesis is organised into five chapters that deal with different aspects of white workers lives in Johannesburg between 1890 and 1922. Chapter one is focused on the demography of the white working class between 1890 and 1906. It is argued here that, between the development of deep level mining in the 1890s and the end of the period of reconstruction, there were in Johannesburg a comparatively large number of working class families and that one of the main characteristics of these families was that in some cases they were the result of intermarriage between people of British descent and Afrikaner people. The findings of this chapter, which are based for the

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[33] "The language of class was not a simple articulation of cumulative experience of a particular form of class relations. It was constructed and inscribed within a complex rhetoric of metaphorical association, casual inference and imaginative construction. Class consciousness formed part of a language whose systematic linkages were supplied by the assumptions of radicalism: a vision and analysis of social and political evils which certainly long predated the advent of class consciousness, however defined." Stedman-Jones, G., **Languages of Class**, p. 102.

[34] Ashforth, A., **The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth Century South Africa**, (New York 1990); Dubow, S., 'Race, Civilisation and Culture: The Elaboration of Segregationist Discourse in the Inter-war Years' in Marks, S. and Trapido, S., (eds.), **The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa**, (London 1987) and **Illicit Marriage: Scientific Racism in South Africa**, (Cambridge 1995).

most part on the analysis of a sample of the baptismal records of the working class parishes of the Anglican Church, suggest that on the eve of the granting of Responsible Government to the Transvaal in 1907, the emerging white working class was less British than the reconstruction administrators would have liked and less 'ethnic' than Davies', Denoon's, Johnstone's and van Onselen's works had led us believe.

Having demonstrated the demographic and cultural importance of white working class families in Johannesburg, chapters two and three are focused on the characteristics of workers' accommodation and the physical development of white working class neighbourhoods in Johannesburg during two distinctive periods. In chapter two it is argued that, between 1892/3 and 1906, the control that mining houses exercised over large portions of land in the city and environs did much to shape the political economy of working class housing in Johannesburg. At the same time, it is shown in this chapter that close links between the reconstruction administration and mining capital acted, in some cases, as an obstacle to a more active role of the state in the provision of working class housing in Johannesburg.

Chapter three explores the development of what will be called here the 'urban problem' i.e. the local and central government preoccupation with the physical, social and economic conditions in which white workers, especially unskilled white workers, lived in Johannesburg between 1907 and 1922. It maintains that successive economic crises (1906-8; 1913-4; 1919-21) and the steady influx of rural population into Johannesburg, coupled with the political transformation of the Transvaal into a self-governing colony in 1907 and into a province of the Union of South Africa in 1910, changed the government's attitude towards the problem of working class housing and the working class in general. This was partly due as well to the fact that the relative importance of workers' votes also changed, as did working class politics, as the political unit moved from colony to province and to nation state.

Chapter four explores the everyday life of white workers in Johannesburg between 1890 and 1922. It builds on the argument of the previous chapters in two senses. On the one hand, it examines how the relationships between working class families were often formalised through the institution of the godparent. In a society where there was no historical community to underwrite important moments in the life cycle, working class families developed over the years a sense of community based on their shared experiences in the neighbourhood and the work-place. On the other, it analyses how the physical and social characteristics of the working class neighbourhoods of the city helped to develop more superficial, yet important, relations between Johannesburg's white working class population. It is argued here that working class life involved men, women and children, single and married people, employed and unemployed in a social continuum that included the work-place, the street where they lived, the bars, the churches, and the schools they attended. It is shown here how easy it was for white workers, especially during periods of unemployment, to slip down into the lumpenproletariat and how this process was aided by the fact that many working class families lived in close proximity to prostitutes, liquor dealers, and petty criminals.

Chapter five shifts the focus of the study from the workers themselves to the ruling class's perceptions of the working class. It explores the ideological and political responses that workers' survival strategies in times of crisis elicited in the local and central government through an analysis of unemployment in inner Johannesburg and its immediate suburbs between 1890 and 1922, and the ideological construction of the 'poor white problem' that accompanied it. This chapter suggests that during most of this period the predominant view of poverty as a moral and ideological problem obscured the ruling class's ability to see the potential political threat 'poor whites' posed to the state.

Each chapter of this thesis functions as do the different planes of a painting. They can be read separately but they only have full meaning in their relation to each other. Yet, unlike the neatness of the Dutch masters where every line of the painting can be

followed close up without losing sight of the picture, this thesis is more akin to the works of the Impressionists where too close a view blurs the lines and colours into an amorphous mass. This effect is, to a great extent, a consequence of the characteristics of the sources available in writing a social history of the white working class.

The evidence that supports this loosely bound narrative of the making of the white working class comes from several types of sources. In order to examine the demography of the working class in Johannesburg and to analyse the ways in which workers' families were constituted it was necessary to construct a data base with the baptismal records of the working class parishes of the Anglican Church: Belgravia, Fordsburg, Jeppestown and Johannesburg central. The data gathered through these sources covered 2,290 families who had their children baptized in the Anglican Church between 1890 and 1906. The information recorded in the baptismal registers permitted the reconstruction of a large number of white working class families who baptized their children as Anglican, i.e. the approximate date of the marriage, the identity of the spouses, and how many children the couple had. It also allowed the following of these families' movements through the city as they changed suburban addresses and, in some cases, the tracing of the changing fortunes of the principal breadwinners.[35] Moreover, the fact that the baptismal registers provided the names of the godparents helped in the elusive task of exploring different types of relations between working class families. The names of the godparents were traced through the records in order to, if possible, identify them. A fairly high proportion of godparents were married couples who had also had their children baptized in the Anglican Church. A substantial part of the analysis of white workers' development of a sense of community, contained in chapter four, is based on this information.

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[35] This was possible because the baptism registers in the Anglican Church not only recorded the name of the parents, of the baby, and the godparents, but recorded the address of the family and trade of the father. Thus, for every baby baptized in a family we have all this information. When a family was reconstructed, that is, when it was possible to establish how many children it had, it was also possible to establish if the family had moved from the original address and if the father had changed employment. For details as to the methodology employed see Chapter One.

The analysis of working class housing and the central and local governments' changing perception of the 'urban problem', which is the theme of chapters two and three, is based on various documentary collections. For the period prior to the South African War, the Strange Collection, housed in the Johannesburg Public Library, provides information, albeit fragmentary, on the problems faced by the Johannesburg Sanitary Board and the first municipal council. The development of municipal government after 1902 is far better documented, which reflects the zeal of the reconstruction administration in keeping records. The collection of the Mayor of Johannesburg, housed in the State Archives in Pretoria, especially the minutes of the Johannesburg Town Council and the reports of the Medical Officer of Health, offered invaluable material to reconstruct the characteristics of Johannesburg's working class neighbourhoods and the interests at stake at the time of discussing housing schemes.

The evidence and reports of two commissions of enquiry appointed by the British administration of the Transvaal were particularly useful in understanding two aspects of Johannesburg 'urban problem'. The **Insanitary Area Improvement Scheme, 1902-1903** provided important insight into the characteristics of the oldest slum area in Johannesburg, in the west of the city, and the nominated town council's approach to street clearance and rehousing of white workers. The **Johannesburg Housing Commission** of 1903 showed the extent of the problem of working class housing immediately after the South African War through the testimony of workers, estate agents, building societies and people involved in charitable work in the white working class neighbourhoods of the city. At the same time, the commission's report established the lines along which the administration was prepared to deal with a shortage of working class accommodation in the city.

The incoming correspondence of the Colonial Office showed the close links between local and central government during the period of reconstruction. Finally, the land issue, especially the influence of the Gold Law of 1898 in allowing a progressive concentration of large extensions of land, mostly by the mining companies, was

analysed through the **Report of the Gold Law Commission, 1901-1902** and the **Third Report of the Financial Relations Commission** of 1906. Details on the establishment and development of the different townships that constitute Johannesburg were found in the **Report of the Transvaal Leasehold Commission** of 1912.

The debate about site value and the problems of leasehold and freehold tenure in Johannesburg after the granting of Responsible Government to the Transvaal are well documented in a series of commissions of enquiry: **Transvaal Leasehold Commission** of 1912, **Small Holdings Commission** of 1913 and the **Local Government Commission** of 1915. Information about town planning and public health for the period after Union came from the Johannesburg Health Department and the Mayor of Johannesburg collections. Official and private concern with the social conditions prevalent in slum areas were traced through the reports and evidence of the **Commission of Enquiry into Assaults on Women** appointed in 1912 and the **Select Committee on European Employment and Labour Conditions** of 1913. The analysis of the central government response to the post-World War I housing crisis is based on the report of the **Housing Committee** appointed in 1920.

The study of the development of a sense of community amongst Johannesburg's white workers, which constitutes the principal focus of chapter four, raised several questions about historical evidence. The sources for a study of this nature are, at best, fragmentary. There are very few first hand workers' accounts of their life in Johannesburg. It was therefore necessary to isolate workers' voices or working class representatives' voices from their testimony before the commissions of enquiry into housing, indigency, cost of living and unemployment appointed between 1890-1922. The exchanges between commissioners and witnesses as well as the reports produced after each of these enquiries are necessarily coloured with the prejudices, preconceptions and misconceptions of the commissioners whose lives were quite removed from those of the working class. In spite of this, the evidence presented

before commissions of enquiry constituted a valuable source of information on working class life and on some workers' opinions on issues such as housing and unemployment.

Besides commissions of enquiry and the already mentioned baptismal registers, one other source has been used in order to reconstruct white workers' life in the city. Criminal court cases involving Johannesburg's white workers are generally sketchy and incomplete and they very seldom recorded in their own words the testimony of the men and women involved in a criminal offence. They are, however, important sources for looking at the workers'everyday life. Nevertheless, the information contained in these sources was not enough to capture fully the flavour of the period. Travellers' descriptions, old pictures and newspapers have been used to supplement the general argument of chapter four.

Chapter five's twin objectives, the exploration of the history of white unemployment in inner Johannesburg and its surrounding suburbs, and the analysis of the ideological construction of the 'poor white problem' between 1890 and 1922, meant dealing with two different types of sources and attempting two different readings of the documents. Descriptive documents, such as those produced by the Refugee Aid Committee between 1901 and 1903 and the Rand Aid Association after 1903, gave an indication of the number of poor and the characteristics of indigency in the city. The Office of the Inspector of White Labour, created in 1907, gathered information about unemployment, wages, and relief works, which have been extremely useful in studying the problem of unemployment and in establishing the hardships that white workers experienced in Johannesburg. Similar information was found in the commissions of enquiry and committees appointed between 1906 and 1922 which, directly or indirectly, dealt with unemployment and poverty. But in order to trace the ruling class's ideological construction of the 'poor white problem' these same sources had to be read in the context of the broader intellectual tendencies of the period, especially in Britain, and reinterpreted in terms of the racial hierarchy that constituted South

African society.

The title of this thesis attempts to reflect the continuous process of the formation of the white working class in Johannesburg during the thirty-two years that separate the development of the deeper level mines on the Witwatersrand from the 1922 Rand Revolt. But it also reflects the powerful influence of the work of E. P. Thompson on the questions as well as in the analysis presented in this study. In a 1995 article reflecting on the usages of E. P. Thompson in African history, F. Cooper pointed out that Thompson has been more often honoured in the titles than in the content of the works produced by Africanists.[36] Hopefully, the homage that the title of this thesis offers is accompanied by a use of Thompson's methodology and theoretical approach to the formation of the working class.

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[36] Cooper, F., 'Work, Class and Empire: An African Historian's Retrospective on E. P. Thompson', **Social History**, 20. 2, 1995, pp. 235-41.

CHAPTER ONE

THE EMERGENCE OF THE 'SOUTH AFRICAN' WHITE WORKING CLASS IN JOHANNESBURG, 1890-1906.[1]

1. INTRODUCTION.

The history of the Witwatersrand, the area that stretches for forty miles from Springs in the east to Krugersdorp in the west, is in many senses the history of the gold mining industry. What is true for the region is even more true for Johannesburg. The city grew out of the 1886 gold discoveries. Its population was attracted by the goldfields and the fortunes of rich and poor alike were bound to the booms and slumps of the mining industry. But it was the poor who experienced the compelling influence of the Witwatersrand goldfields in day-to-day life. The fact that the reef which constituted the Rand ran from east to west and that it dipped southwards determined one of the most striking features of the geography of class of the city. Working class neighbourhoods developed east and west of the town centre in close proximity to the mines. The boarding houses and bars designed to shelter and comfort mostly single British, Australian and American miners were concentrated in Jeppestown (1889) and Belgravia in the east and Fordsburg (1888) and Vrededorp (1892) in the west.

The history of the mining industry itself was also shaped by the peculiarities of the gold deposits which, although extremely regular, contained low grade ore. This, combined with the fact that the reef ran deep under the surface, made it clear by 1889 that the mining industry on the Rand was going to be capital and labour intensive if any gold was going to be profitably recovered from the reef. In that year the first undercapitalised diggers organised in the Diggers' Committee gave way to the Chamber of Mines. Between 1890 and 1891, the Chamber of Mines faced the first

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[1] The use of the expression 'South African' for the period before the constitution of Union is certainly an anachronism, yet it is used here to indicate the existence of an identity that included British as well as Afrikaner workers.

crisis in the industry. The gold found in the deep reef did not respond to the existing technology of mercury amalgamation. The MacArthur-Forrest process of amalgamation and gold extraction provided the technical breakthrough the mine magnates needed to start operating deep level mines successfully.[2] But availability of technology was only part of the answer to the 1890-1 crisis. Huge injections of capital were required as was an organisational structure capable of overcoming the enormous uncertainties of deep level mining. Therein lay the origins of the group system that was to dominate the Rand through the twentieth century. The groups were established by a process of amalgamation of individual mines and were based on the creation of a pool of financial and managerial expertise. Five mining groups dominated the mining industry on the Rand. The London-based financial house of Wernher, Beit and Company and its Johannesburg representatives, Eckstein and Company, created Rand Mines Limited in 1893 and Central Mining Investment Corporation in 1905. Together these firms controlled 37 per cent of the gold produced on the Rand between 1902 and 1913. The second group of importance was Consolidated Goldfields, founded by Cecil Rhodes and Charles Rudd, which controlled 11 per cent of the Rand's gold during the same period. Finally, three other groups, the Barnato family's Johannesburg Consolidated Investment; Joseph Robinson; and, George Farrar and Associates controlled about 20 per cent of the gold produced on the Rand between 1902 and 1913. The process of amalgamation that started in the early 1890s renewed confidence in the market and created the financial climate for the 'Kaffir boom' of 1895.[3]

The first mining boom proved ephemeral. But the development of the deep level mines brought about a change in the mine owners' understanding of the future of the industry on the Witwatersrand. In 1886 nobody thought that the goldfields could be mined for longer than a few years; consequently, stabilisation of skilled workers and state support for the gold mines were not regarded as crucial needs. By 1890 the

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[2] Kubicek, R. V., **Economic Imperialism in Theory and Practice: The Case of South African Gold Mining Finance, 1886-1914**, (Durham 1979), p. 44. Hereafter **Economic Imperialism**.

[3] Kubicek, R. V., **Economic Imperialism**, p. 54.

situation was very different. In order to make deep gold mining profitable companies needed extensive assistance from the state. First of all it was necessary to reduce the costs of transport, foodstuff and dynamite. Secondly, it was of paramount importance that cheap African workers be supplied regularly to the different mines. Finally, reducing the high cost of living in Johannesburg was a pre-condition to entice overseas miners and artisans to settle on the Rand where their expertise was required to develop deep level mines.

The President of the South African Republic, Paul Kruger (1883-1900), was rightly suspicious of Britain's intentions on the Transvaal and deeply protective of the Republic's independence from the colonial power. The mine owners' perception of Kruger's government as obstructive to the needs and interests of the mining industry lay at the origin of the Jameson Raid. Otto Beit,[4] Lionel Phillips[5] and George Farrar[6] together with Cecil Rhodes[7] plotted and supported, with the tacit approval of the Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain, a military expedition led by

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[4] Sir Otto Beit (1853-1930) financier and benefactor brother of Alfred Beit the mining magnate. Came to South Africa in 1890 and joined H. Eckstein & Company. He settled in London in 1898 and became partner in a stockbroking firm.

[5] Sir Lionel Phillips (1855-1936). Born in London. He was closely involved with South African mining from 1875 when he came to Griqualand West as a diamond sorter. He moved to the Witwatersrand in 1889 as a representative of the Wernher and Beit firm. Soon he became a senior partner and President of the Chamber of Mines between 1892 and 1895. His involvement in the Jameson Raid forced him to leave the country. He returned to Johannesburg in 1906 and was deeply involved in local politics while defending the interests of the mining industry.

[6] Sir George Farrar (1859-1915). Mining magnate and politician. Chairman of the Anglo French Exploration Company and of East Rand Proprietary Mines Limited. He was a leading member of the opposition to Kruger in the Reform Committee at the time of the Jameson Raid. In 1904 became a leader of the Transvaal Progressive Association that supported Responsible Government for the Transvaal. He was elected to the Transvaal Legislative Assembly in 1907. Was a Transvaal delegate to the National Convention 1908-9, and after the unification of South Africa, a member of the House of Assembly.

[7] Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902). Mining magnate and politician. Arrived in Kimberly in 1870 where became successful in his diamond mining ventures. In 1880 founded De Beers' Diamond Mining Company. Founded Consolidated Gold Fields of South Africa in 1887 and launched the British South African Company in Matabeleland (Rhodesia) in 1889. He started his political career in 1881 as a member of the Cape House of Assembly. He became Prime Minister of the Cape in 1890, position from which he resigned after the Jameson Raid.

Dr. L. S. Jameson which, on December 31, 1895, attempted to overthrow Kruger's government. The raid's failure created a sense of instability that caused the mining industry to slide into another crisis that lasted until 1398. Whatever the efforts the Kruger government made to satisfy some of the mine magnates' demands, such as a more efficient method for the recruitment of black workers, they fell short of satisfying the industry's needs.[8] In 1898 the Witwatersrand goldfields produced 27 per cent of the world's gold. The fact that most of the capital invested in the industry was British and that London was at the time the centre of the international money market made the gold of the Witwatersrand important enough for the British Empire to wage a war against the Boer republics between 1899 and 1902.[9]

The transformation of the Transvaal into a British colony in the aftermath of the South African War (1899-1902) had important consequences at the social and political levels. After the war Sir Alfred Milner, who had been appointed British High Commissioner for South Africa in 1897, took office as Governor of the Transvaal. From 1902 to 1905, Milner's administration laid the foundations of a colonial state capable of meeting adequately the needs of a process of capital accumulation based on gold production. Amongst these needs the reproduction of the white work-force was paramount. And this not only because skilled workers were needed to develop the mining industry, but also because the settlement of workers from the United Kingdom was to guarantee the British character of the Transvaal at the political level. The Milner administration expected to achieve this through a policy of immigration aimed at encouraging British workers to settle on the Rand with their families.[10]

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[8] On the political and ideological imperatives of the gold mining industry during the 1890s see Bozzoli, B., **The Political Nature of a Ruling Class: Capital and Ideology in South Africa, 1890-1933**, (London 1981), pp. 25-62. Hereafter **The Political Nature**.

[9] On the causes of the South African War see Marks, S. and Trapido, S., 'Lord Milner and the South African State', **History Workshop Journal**, 8, 1979, pp. 50-80. Hereafter 'Lord Milner'; Phimister, I., 'Unscrambling the Scramble: Africa's Partition Reconsidered'. Seminar Paper. African Studies Institute. 1992.

[10] But the "Britishness" of the Transvaal Colony in general and of the mining industry in particular was not exclusively based on the presence of large numbers of British workers employed in the

This chapter looks at the history of the white working class families in Johannesburg between 1890 and 1906. The revolutionary character of this period in terms of the transformation of the regional economy, the nature and scope of the state and the form and content of the ideology has been outlined by B. Bozzoli.[11] From the point of view of the social history of the white working class these were formative years. It was during the reconstruction period, 1902-1906, that the colonial administration was especially concerned with stabilising British workers on the Witwatersrand. An essential part of this strategy was to achieve the reproduction of the white working class through the agency of the nuclear family.[12] By 1907, when the Transvaal entered a new political status through the granting of Responsible Government, the main trends of Johannesburg's white working class demography were established and the first elective government's concern shifted from workers' stabilisation to other aspects of the social reproduction of the white working class, such as the development of industrial education.

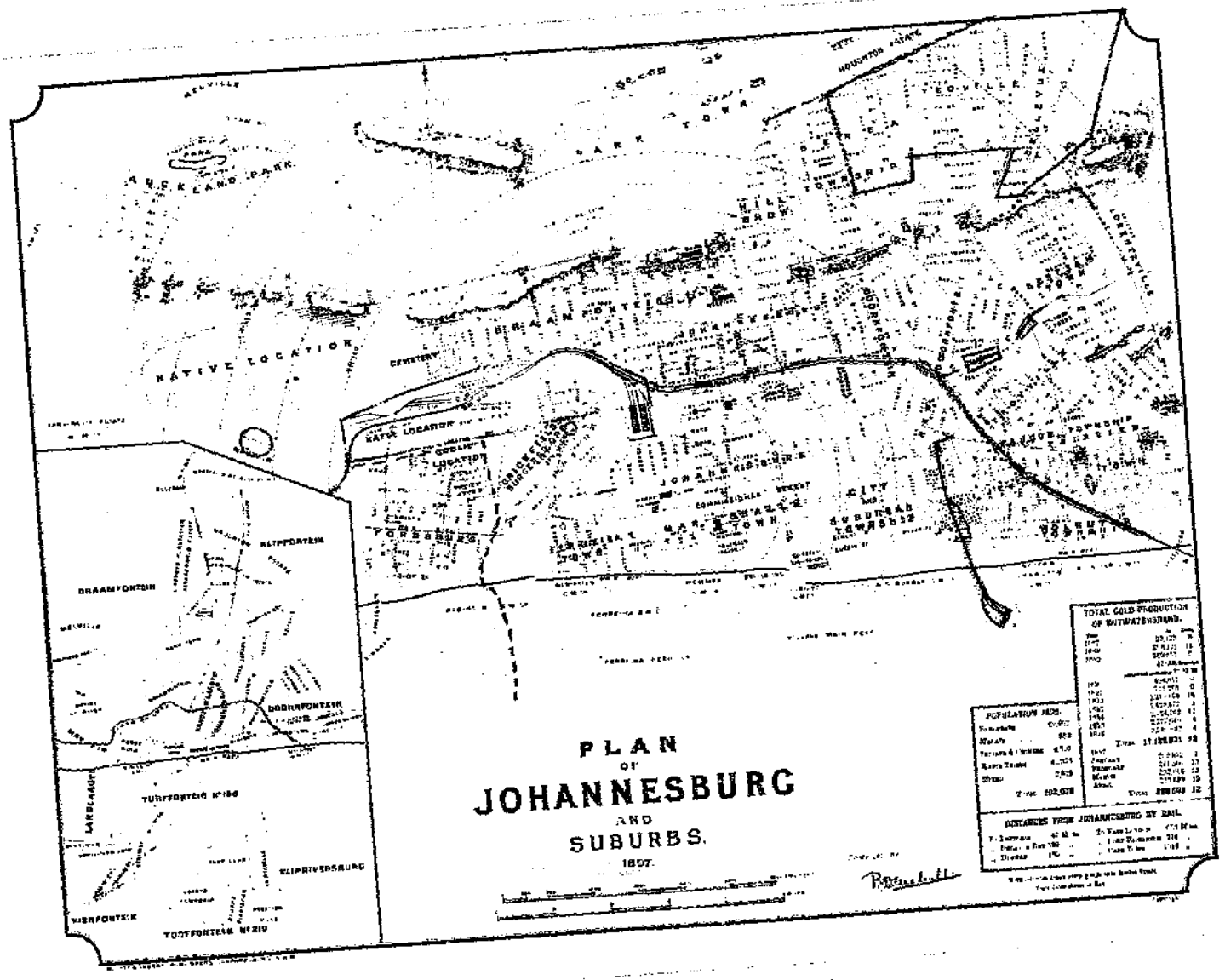
Two main points will be argued here. First, that there were in Johannesburg a comparatively large number of working class families before the outbreak of the South African War. Secondly, that the stabilisation of the white working class took place despite, rather than because of, Milner's immigration policy, for the British workers married Afrikaner women with a disregard for "racialism" that worried contemporary

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mining industry. As B. Bozzoli has argued, "In spite of the presence of workers and employers of many different national origins and races, of the presence of German and French as well as British capital and the fact that the majority of the workers of the industry were black southern Africans, the character of the gold mining industry was British." Bozzoli, B., **The Political Nature**, p. 36.

11 "Capital's dominance over the whole South African region was first manifested in the dominance of the gold mining industry at the turn of the nineteenth century. No period in South Africa's history is more fascinating than that of the 1890s and 1900s, during which this dominance rapidly and violently came into being, and the mighty imperial forces which owned or buttressed gold-mining wrought transformations in every corner of the region, in every sphere of the economy, in the nature and scope of the state, and in the form and content of the ideology. These were revolutionary decades in South Africa." Bozzoli, B., **The Political Nature**, p. 25.

12 Sir Alfred Milner to Major Hanbury Williams 27/12/1900. Headlam, C. (ed.), **The Milner Papers**. (Cape Town 1966), volume 2. Hereafter **The Milner Papers**.



Plan of Johannesburg and Suburbs, 1897

politicians.

Most of the argument of this chapter took as its primary source the baptismal registers of the Anglican Church as these covered the working class parishes of the city. Accordingly, the baptismal records of the parishes of central Johannesburg, which comprised the area delineated by the railway line in the north, Commissioner Street in the south, the Gas Works in the west and End Street in the east, and those of Belgravia, Fordsburg and Jeppestown have been carefully examined.[13] The sample thus constructed contains 2,290 families who had their children baptized in the Anglican Church.[14] This represents over 35 per cent of the families resident in Johannesburg in 1896. The data has been processed to reconstruct, albeit in an incomplete manner, the history of these working class families. In other words, making use of the information contained in the baptismal records, it has been possible to establish the approximate date of the constitution of the family; who were the parents; how many children they had and when; and the fluctuations in the employment of the father as well as any changes in the family abode.[15]

2. WHITE WORKING CLASS FAMILIES IN JOHANNESBURG, 1890-1901.

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[13] University of the Witwatersrand (U.W.), Church of the Province of South Africa (CPSA), AB. 2013 Diocese of Johannesburg: JB.3.2 Belgravia; JJ.2.4.1 Jeppe; JJ.3.1.4.1-4 Johannesburg. The baptismal registers from Fordsburg do not form part of the collection yet, and therefore are not classified. They were directly taken from the Church of Christ in Fordsburg.

[14] The Anglican Church was by the time one of the most important denominations in Johannesburg. 32.63 per cent of the population identified themselves as Anglicans in the 1896 Census of Johannesburg.

[15] The data base has been organised using the program Dbase III. Each record was given a number after which follow the surname of the father, and the names of both parents. Each record reflects the information available in the baptismal records of the Anglican Church. It comprises: date of birth and name of the child, address of the family, trade of the father and name of the godparents The data based has been named Data Base J1.The information will be quoted as follows: Data Base J1., number of the record, and name of the family followed by the names of both parents.

Johannesburg's public diggings were proclaimed in 1886. Ten years later, the first census of the city, focused on the area within a three mile radius of Market Square, indicated that the total white population was 39,454 persons. As can be seen from Table 1, the male population heavily outnumbered the female. In terms of conjugal status, single predominated over married amongst the male population while the reverse situation was found amongst the females (Table 2).

TABLE 1
WHITE POPULATION OF GREATER JOHANNESBURG[16]

	MALES		FEMALES		CHILDREN		TOTAL
	NUMB	%	NUMB	%	NUMB	%	
1896	20,169	51.12	9,208	23.34	10,077	25.54	39,454
1904	40,846	51.58	21,515	27.17	20,458	21.24	82,839

TABLE 2
CONJUGAL CONDITION OF THE WHITE POPULATION IN JOHANNESBURG

	MARRIED				SINGLE			
	MALES		FEMALES		MALES		FEMALES	
	NUMB	%	NUMB	%	NUMB	%	NUMB	%
1896	8,421	41.71	5,624	61.08	11,748	58.24	3,584	38.9
1904	17,929	43.89	14,371	66.80	22,917	56.10	7,144	33.2

Taking male and female together, slightly less than half of the population was classified in the census as married. This included married people who were not living with their husbands or wives, and also widows and widowers. To estimate the actual proportion of families living in Johannesburg, it was consequently assumed that for every married woman living in the city, there was a married man (Table 3). The

[16] It is necessary to remember here that while the 1896 Census focused on an area within a three mile radius of Market Square, the 1904 Census was taken after the boundaries of the city had been extended to a six mile radius of Market Square and in that sense the definition of Johannesburg differs from one census to the next.

remainder represented the married men who did not have their families with them, presumably overseas. Although this calculations are rather crude, they provide an indication of the relative importance of families in the city.[17] On the basis of the **1896 Census** it is possible to estimate that about 66 per cent of the married male population of Johannesburg had s ‘tled their families in the city.

TABLE 3
NUMBER OF WHITE FAMILIES IN JOHANNESBURG

CENSUS	MALES	FEMALES	FAMILIES	%
1896	8,421	5,624	5,624	66.79
1904	17,929	14,371	14,371	80.16

The rapid economic development of the Witwatersrand in the age of cheap steamship travel had made of Johannesburg a Babel of languages and nationalities.[18] But in spite of the significant presence of foreigners in the city, most of its population had been born in the subcontinent. As can be seen from Table 4, by 1896 the proportion of men born in the United Kingdom (46.25 per cent) was inferior to the proportion of men born in any of the two British colonies (36.03 per cent) and in the Boer republics (27.11 per cent). The great majority of the female population (73.71 per cent) was born in the subcontinent. Only 26.30 per cent of the females living in Johannesburg

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[17] The high number of married women in Johannesburg in 1896 probably reflects false returns from prostitutes who were living with pimps. While the returns of the **1896 Census** under ‘occupations’ showed the existence of 114 self-confessed prostitutes, van Onselen has indicated that the actual number of whores in the city was around 1,000. Whether these women chose to pass as married, or to disguise their actual trade under other occupations such as barmaid, is not easy to establish. See van Onselen, C., **Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914**, (Johannesburg 1982), ‘Prostitutes and Proletarians, 1886-1914’, volume 1, **New Babylon**, p. 104. Hereafter ‘Prostitutes and Proletarians’.

[18] The returns of the **1896 Census** showed under birthplaces a significant number of foreigners in Johannesburg. Amongst them there were: Russians (male: 2,587; females: 394); Germans (males: 1,368; females: 557); Hollanders (males: 526; females 215); Swiss (males: 80; females 31); Swedes and Norwegians (males: 202; females: 59); French (males: 194; females: 150); Italians (males: 173; females: 23); Americans (males: 378; females 93) and Australians (males: 463; females: 201).

were British by birth.

TABLE 4
NUMBER OF WHITE MALES AND FEMALES BY PLACE OF BIRTH*

		CENSUS					
		1896			1904		
		NUMBER	% OF TOTAL	% OF TOTAL	NUMBER	% OF TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
TRANSVAAL	MALES	2,543	13.71		6,561	17.19	
	FEMALES	2,269		18.59	6,520		25.04
ORANGE FREE STATE	MALES	632	3.41		1,119	2.93	
	FEMALES	665		5.45	1,205		4.63
CAPE COLONY	MALES	6,188	33.37		7,517	19.70	
	FEMALES	5,653		46.31	7,966		30.59
NATAL	MALES	494	2.66		895	2.35	
	FEMALES	410		3.36	950		3.65
UNITED KINGDOM	MALES	8,687	46.85		22,070	57.83	
	FEMALES	3,211		26.30	9,400		36.10
TOTAL WHITE POPULATION OF JOHANNESBURG	MALES	18,544	100.00		38,162	100.00	
	FEMALES	12,208		100.00	26,041		100.00

* The table only reflects the places of birth that are relevant for this study.

The influx of foreigners, particularly British, attracted by the gold mines had been gaining momentum through 1893-4, and 1895 saw the largest number of skilled mine workers coming into the Witwatersrand. For the mine magnates the employment of skilled miners was of crucial importance at a time when gold production was facing the transition to deep-level mining. A necessary condition to attract this section of the labour force was to address issues such as the high cost of living on the Rand. At the

same time the mine owners' opposition to Kruger, which was organised in the Reform Committee, helped to focus the discontent that the British population of the Transvaal felt around the franchise issue.[19] Thus the presence of the *Uitlanders* ('outlanders' or non-Afrikaner whites) became a serious economic and political problem for the Kruger Republic. In the context of the tense relations between the South African Republic and the Empire the suspicion with which the Kruger regime viewed the presence of foreigners in the Republic should not come as a surprise.[20]

It was against this background that the Jameson Raid took place in 1895.[21] In the aftermath of the raid the mine magnates' demands for reform in the state were made explicit in the **Industrial Commission of Enquiry** of 1897. The evidence put before the commission showed clearly that the greater investment that deep-level mining implied had to be compensated for by a reduction in the costs of dynamite and transport rates, and with the creation of a centralised structure for the efficient recruitment of cheap African labour. Besides this, the industry also needed the immigration and settlement of British workers to be encouraged.

Bringing down the cost of reproducing the white labour force was the necessary condition to make the development of the low grade mines possible. This was directly linked with reducing the high cost of living on the Witwatersrand. A good deal of effort was spent by the American consulting engineers, such as William Hall, State Engineer for the State of California, the mine managers and the workers who gave evidence before the commission, impressing upon its members that the high cost of

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[19] On the political opposition to the Kruger government and the grievances of the *Uitlanders* see Gordon, C., **The Growth of Boer Opposition to Kruger, 1890-1895**, (London 1970); and Cammack, D., **The Rand at War: The Witwatersrand and the Anglo-Boer War**, (London 1991). Hereafter **The Rand at War**.

[20] In 1877 Britain annexed the Transvaal for the first time and although the Boer uprising of 1881 forced British withdrawal, the Empire was still insistent about being recognised as paramount power in the region.

[21] On the nature of the Kruger Republic and the causes of the South African War see Marks, S., and Trapido, S., 'Lord Milner', pp. 50-80.

living and the settling of good workers on the Rand stood in contradiction with each other.[22]

It was accepted during the enquiry as a plausible statistic that 54 per cent of the mine workers were single, and that, from the 46 per cent who were married, only 13 per cent had their famili ·ith them. These percentages, taken from a sample of 53 mining companies, seem rather low when compared with the 66.79 per cent of married men who lived with their families in Johannesburg according to the **1896 Census**.[23] The discrepancy in the figures can be attributed to the fact that the mining companies fell outside the area within which the **1896 Census** was taken. This moreover suggests that the families settled in Johannesburg were largely non-mining families.[24] The figures given to the **Industrial Commission of Enquiry**, nevertheless pointed out how serious a problem the settlement of skilled workers was for the mining industry at the time. For the mine magnates the relatively high number of married men with their families overseas emphasised that the Rand was regarded as only a temporary source of high wages and that the aim of these workers was to make as much money as possible and go back home.

The unstable character of the mining industry's white work-force was further accentuated by the ravages of silicosis, the lung disease caused by the inhalation of silica particles in underground work, which not only killed thousand of miners but also

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[22] Marks, S., and Trapido, S.,'Lord Milner', pp. 61-2.

[23] **Industrial Commission of Enquiry 1897**, Evidence of C. S. Goldman, pp. 118-19. Goldman was a member of the Executive Council of the Chamber of Mines and also a member of the Native Labour Association, the organisation put into place by the Chamber of Mines in the 1890s to recruit black workers within the Portuguese colonies.

[24] It is important to mention here that the fact that the figures given before the **Industrial Commission of Enquiry** have been used by historians as an indication of the unsettled character of Johannesburg's working class population has contributed to the identification of the miners with the whole of the working class. See van Onselen, C., 'The World the Mine Owners Made: Social Themes in the Economic Transformation of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914', volume 1, **New Babylon**, p. 31. Hereafter 'The World the Mine Owners Made'.

discouraged skilled miners from coming to the Witwatersrand.[25] Although the high cost of living on the Rand continued to be a problem well into the 1910s, the slow amelioration of working conditions in the mines and confidence in the future of the gold mining industry induced white mine workers to settle on the Rand. By 1902 the number of married miners with resident families had increased to [illegible] per cent and in 1912 it reached 42 per cent.[26]

In the years prior to the South African War (1899-1902) married men who lived in the city with their families had to face the rent of a cottage or rooms in a boarding house. The cost of accommodation represented between 26 per cent and 39 per cent of a miner's wage (£23 per month). Accommodation expenses were only the beginning. Men had to feed and clothe their families, educate their children and be able to provide in cases of illness. And, as the workers giving evidence before the **Industrial Commission** stated, all this was supposed to be done in Johannesburg without the help of the workers' benefit societies or the various charitable organisations common in England which distributed clothes amongst the poorer classes.[27]

The size of the worker's family was obviously one more element in the capacity of an "all round" miner[28] or of any other skilled mine worker to cope with the high cost of living in Johannesburg. The £23 that a miner could earn monthly was not nearly enough to support a family of five - wife and four children. The cost of the steamship fare to come to South Africa also acted as a deterrent for the workers who wanted to bring their families out. A third class ticket from England to the Cape cost in 1897

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[25] Katz, E., **The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Mines, 1886-1910**, (Johannesburg 1994), pp. 1-10. Hereafter **The White Death.**

[26] **Report of the Small Holdings Commission, 1913**, (U. G. 51-13), para. 16.

[27] **Industrial Commission of Enquiry 1897**, Evidence of R. Barrow, p. 175.

[28] The expression "all round miner" refers to the versatility and practical skills that miners trained in Britain had. Contrary to their initial position on the Witwatersrand gold mines "all round miners" in Britain did not command particular respect for their skills. For the gradual change in the position of these workers on the Witwatersrand see Katz, E., **The White Death**, pp. 67-73.

16 guineas .ne price of the railway fare from Cape Town to Johannesburg was added the whole expenditure for the voyage amounted to £ 21 4s 9d.[29] That was probably the reason why, when R. Barrow, a carpenter employed in the mines who gave evidence before the commission of enquiry, decided to come to South Africa in 1887, he did so by himself. He worked for six months for De Beers' in Kimberley, after which he moved to the Transvaal, and only in 1893, when he was better established, did he bring his family from Lancashire.[30]

Apart from these British married wo.kers with families based overseas, there were those single men who decided to establish themselves in the Transvaal and married Afrikaner women. The presence of working class families on the Rand became obvious after the outbreak of the South African War. In September 1899, Kruger appointed the *Rust en Orde Commission* to govern the Rand during the war. Amongst the functions of the commission was the granting of permits to the local population to stay in Johannesburg. Cammack's analysis of these permits revealed that by 1899 there were British workers married to Republican women. All the families listed by the *Rust en Orde Commission* wanted to stay on the Rand despite the outbreak of the war. Half of the men had jobs, and if they did not, as in the case of the miners, they wanted to stay to find work.[31]

Although mine workers constituted the majority of Johannesburg's working class population, they were far from being the only workers on the Rand.[32] The economic development of Johannesburg, especially in terms of building construction and transport, offered employment to large numbers of people who had fled locusts and rinderpest in the countryside and were in search of higher wages or a better life. But

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[29] **Industrial Commission of Enquiry 1897**, Evi lence of R. Barrow, p. 174.

[30] **Industrial Commission of Enquiry 1897**, Evidence of R. Barrow, p. 172.

[31] Cammack, D., **The Rand at War**, pp. 69-70, p. 77 and p. 202.

[32] The returns of the **1896 Census** showed that mining was the single largest skilled occup. tion amongst the city's population (3,194).

not every newcomer was equally well equipped to stand the fluctuations of the Rand economy. By the early 1890s economic crises had produced destitute families and individuals, some of whose stories shocked the Rand public. One such story appeared in the October 11, 1890, edition of **The Star**. George Muller was an Afrikaner mason who started his working life in the Cape. Following the discovery of diamonds he moved with his family to Kimberley where he worked at his trade. In 1886, along with thousands of other hopeful white workers, Muller headed for the South African Republic to try his luck on the Rand. Once in Johannesburg he could not get work as a mason and did odd jobs for a year until, probably as a consequence of the economic crisis of 1890, he was completely out of work. Father of six children and sick, George Muller committed suicide in Fordsburg on October 10, 1890.[33]

Accounts of desperate and destitute white workers committing suicide were not a common feature in the pages of Johannesburg's newspapers during the 1890s and in this sense the story of George Muller was probably unusual. Nevertheless, in the years before the Jameson Raid there were not many charitable institutions offering assistance to the unemployed. The more fortunate found some relief in casual employment as barmen, waiters or billiard markers while the others were reduced to vagrancy or petty crime.[34] During the 1890s the reporters of Johannesburg's underworld ventured into those areas of the city where poverty and destitution combined easily with crime and moral degradation to bring to the readers of **The Star** and **Standard and Diggers' News** some stories of the demi-monde. But of course, poverty was a serious matter for the Victorians and both leading newspapers were also concerned with the ideological aspects of poverty and the way society should deal

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[33] **The Star**, 11 October, 1890; **The Star**, 13 October, 1890

[34] Van Onselen, C., **Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914**, (Johannesburg 1982), volume 2, **New Nineveh**, 'The Main Reef Road into the Working Class: Proletarianisation, Unemployment and Class Consciousness amongst Johannesburg's Afrikaner Poor, 1886-1914', p. 123-6. Hereafter 'The Main Reef Road'.

with it.[35]

The social concern about destitution became more acute when in the context of the "Kaffir Boom" of 1895 the railway link between Johannesburg and Cape Town (1893) and Delagoa Bay (1895) increased the numbers of immigrant workers coming from overseas. During the mid-1890s there was growing involvement of private institutions, like the Present Help League, and churches in alleviating indigency and, especially in the case of the church, moralizing on the plight of the poorer classes.[36]

The Church of England was actively involved in the diocese of Johannesburg from 1892 onwards. Under the pastoral direction of Rev. John Darragh, the church expanded its activities from Saint Mary's Cathedral in central Johannesburg to the ever-growing mining suburbs like City and Suburban, south-east of the city centre, and Ferreirastown, south-west of central Johannesburg, and to poverty stricken areas like Brickfields, south of the railway line.

Portrayed by Ambrose Pratt, a visiting Australian journalist, as New Babylon and New Nineveh, the Golden City honoured the metaphor from its earlier days not only with regard to its affluence, but also - at least in the church's view - with regard to its sins. That Rev. Darragh and other members of the Anglican Church found Johannesburg a sinful town is hardly surprising. Its origins as a mining camp as well as the predominance of bachelors amongst its working class population created a culture that revolved mostly around liquor and prostitution.[37]

In the early 1890s Cape Town and Port Elizabeth had been declared scheduled areas

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[35] See **Standard and Diggers' News (SDN)**, 28 September, 1895 'They don't want work'; 26 May, 1896, 'Hard times on the Rand'; 22 February, 1899, 'Indiscriminate Alms Giving'. **The Star**, 30 August, 1897, 'The Problem of the "Arme" Burgher'.

[36] The Present Help League was established in 1895 with the help of Lionel Phillips and was supported by the mine magnates.

[37] Van Onselen, C., 'Prostitutes and Proletarians', pp. 106-8.

in terms of the Contagious Disease Act passed in 1885,[38] which provided for the registration and medical examination of prostitutes as a way of preventing the spread of venereal diseases, compelling the local prostitutes to search for more hospitable places to ply their trade. The declaration of Kimberley as a scheduled area in terms of the same Act in 1891 and the extension of the railway from that city to Johannesburg in 1892 allowed for a new movement of these mostly southern African-born women to the Golden City. But it was not the proliferation of prostitutes, which by 1896 were said to number about 1,000, that worried the government and middle class; it was how conspicuous the trade in vice had become. It bears recalling that by the mid-1890s the infamous Frenchfontein was right in the heart of Johannesburg, - between Bree Street in the north and Anderson Street in the south, and Kruis Street in the east and Sauer Street in the west - in walking distance of the houses of many workers and completely visible to those interested in the gesticulating practitioners of the trade.

It was against this background that two Anglican missionaries held a series of special services in St. Mary's during September 1894. For ten days Fathers Osborne and Simeon, pastors in charge of City and Suburban, battered their audiences with the effects that sin had on their souls. Specific pastoral importance was given to holding services separately for men and women. The general topic was the relationship between the sexes and the indissoluble unity of marriage. The sermons during the men's services were expressly directed toward those who had come to the Rand without their wives who were left "struggling in poverty and subjected to temptation", while men led a life of sin in Johannesburg with the encouragement of their peers, i.e. the men who lived in the city boarding houses or in the mines' single quarters.

For the women, the sermons were organised around the topic of parental responsibility. Great emphasis was placed on those aspects of urban culture which

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[38] On the application of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the Cape see van Heyningen, E., 'The Social Evil in the Cape Colony, 1868-1902: Prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts', **Journal of Southern African Studies**, 10, 2, 1984, pp. 170-97.

conspired against the family, such as the availability of prostitutes in Johannesburg. Invoking the very appealing idea for the British community that "an Englishman's home is his castle", the priests called for the defence of family values against "external enemies", which were probably best represented by the single-men culture developed around bars and brothels.[39]

Family life thus was viewed by Rev. Darragh and Fathers Osborne and Simeon as both an instrument for moralization, and an area where moralization was needed. Faithfulness and parental responsibility were the values to be encouraged and defended in a city that, itself born of speculation, was not especially inclined to be faithful to its lovers or responsible for its own children.

But besides the moral issues that preoccupied the Anglican priests, the white working class families living in Johannesburg had some more immediate concerns. Not the least important amongst them was maintaining their families. The size of the family was one important factor in the capacity of the workers to cope with the impact of the economic fluctuations on the Witwatersrand. The booms and slumps of the economy, however, did not affect all trades in the same way. While men employed in the building or in the mining industries were more exposed to economic shifts, those breadwinners employed in the service and commercial sectors were comparatively more protected.

The baptismal records gathered in the data base confirmed the existence of working class families in Johannesburg prior to the South African War. The records have been organised by trade of the father at the time of the first birth and some case studies have been singled out to illustrate the correlation between economic fluctuations and the survival strategies white working class families developed in Johannesburg between 1890 and 1906. Table 5 (see p. 43) shows the different trades of the breadwinners and the proportion of families headed by English and Afrikaner males

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[39] (U.W.) (CPSA). AB748/Ba. Minutes of St. Mary Parochial Council.

in twenty-three different trades during this period.[40] Five areas of employment have been selected for this analysis: the mining industry, the building industry, the transport industry, the service sector, and unskilled labour. The samples thus singled out showed two main features of working class family life in Johannesburg during these years. First, breadwinners were compelled to change jobs in times of crises and often, when this coincided with a new birth, a shift in jobs was accompanied by a movement of the whole family from an acceptable working class neighbourhood to a slum area where rents were substantially cheaper. Secondly, the Anglican Church was not the exclusive domain of the English-speaking working class population of Johannesburg. British and Afrikaner people sometimes intermarried and for reasons that would be soon suggested they chose to have their children baptized in the Anglican Church.

Mining and mining related employment such as cyanider, amalgamator and platelayer constituted the single most frequent category of employment in the sample. Between 1890 and 1901, 144 miners, which formed part of the data base, baptized their children in the Anglican Church.[41] In most cases the male breadwinner in these families was English. Mixed marriages, that is to say, British men married to Afrikaner women represented approximately 10 per cent of the mining families of the sample.

Lennox Bayley married Isabelle (surname unknown) in 1897. In June 1899 while living in central Johannesburg with Lennox employed as a miner, they had their first child, a boy. During the next three years Lennox worked as an assayer in City and Suburban mine, where they also lived. During this time the couple had two more children: a girl in 1900 and a boy in 1903. By 1905 we find that the Bayleys have moved from City and Suburban to Fordsburg, a working class neighbourhood in the west of the city. Lennox was then a cyanider which meant that he was earning a

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[40] The identification of British and Afrikaner families has been based on language, distinguishing British surnames i.e. Smith, from Afrikaner surnames, i.e. Smit. When in doubt about the origin of a particular name it has been checked against Mulherbe, D. F. du Toit, **Stamregister Van Die Zuid-Afrikaanse Volk**, (Stellenbosch 1966).

[41] Of the 144 families whose main breadwinner was a miner it has been possible to reconstruct 26.60 per cent of them.

slightly smaller wage, £22 per month. On September 24, 1905, they registered a baby girl in St. Mary's and fifteen months later a boy.[42] Thus Lennox and Isabelle had five children between 1899 and 1905. The size of their family was in all probability the reason why they had to move from their accommodation on the mines married quarters, where the rent must have been around 10s per month, to more expensive accommodation in Fordsburg.

Samuel Heugh married Rosa Cox in September 1889. At the time Samuel was employed as a coachman. They moved back and forth between Fordsburg and Jeppestown, in the east of the city, over a period of eleven years after the birth of their first child, a girl, in August 1893. Samuel was by this date working as a miner. Between 1895 and mid-1896 Samuel and Rosa had two sons. He supported his family with his wage as platelayer, a position Samuel kept until 1899 when they baptized their second daughter. But the Boer occupation of Johannesburg during the war implied a halt to most mining operations and Samuel must surely have joined the unemployed mine workers for some time or was recruited by the British troops. In 1904, when their fifth child was born, Samuel had left the mines and was employed in an unskilled job on the railways, in all probability earning much less.[43] The story of the Heugh family showed clearly the deterrent effect of the war on child bearing either because it probably took the father to the front or because of the negative impact it had on the economy.

Charles and Jane Isaacs lived for three years in Marshallstown, south of Johannesburg central. At the time of the birth of their first child, in 1895, Charles was a miner. The births of their second and third children took place in the context of the economic recession of 1896-7. The effects of the crisis on the Isaacs' family can be seen in the fact that Charles left his job on the mines, probably retrenched, to become a cab driver. Thus at a moment in which the extension of the horse-drawn tram line by 25

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[42] Data Base, J1. Record 2119 Bayley, Lennox and Isabelle.

[43] Data Base J1. Record 698 Heugh, Samuel and Rosa.

per cent and the increase in the prices of forage and horses halved the number of cabbies in the city.[44]

The family of Thomas and Josephine Davis must have experienced quite a crisis for Thomas to change his job as a miner in 1893 - when his son was born - for the risks of self-employment as a brickmaker. Although Thomas changed trades in the midst of the ongoing building boom, this was clearly a serious setback as the family moved from central Johannesburg to the inhospitable area of Brickfields where slum conditions were prevalent.[45]

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[44] Data Base J1. Record 1151 Isaacs. Charles and Jane.

[45] Data Base J1. Record 487 Davis. Thomas and Josephine.

TABLE 5

PERCENTAGE OF ENGLISH AND AFRIKANER BY OCCUPATION, 1890-1906.

TRADE	TOTAL	ENGLISH	AFRIKANER	%*
MINER	218	88.07	11.92	26.60
PLATELAYER	11	72.72	27.27	54.54
ENG.DRIV.	104	82.69	17.30	33.65
AMALGAMAT.	30	93.33	6.66	43.33
MECHANIC	31	93.54	6.46	29.03
CYANIDER	7	85.71	14.28	14.28
BLACKSMITH	92	76.08	23.92	26.08
CARPENTER	196	84.69	15.30	20.91
MASON	129	79.06	20.93	33.33
BRICKLAY.	81	87.65	12.34	32.09
BRICKMAKER	81	48.14	51.85	27.25
PAINTER	46	76.08	23.91	28.26
CAB OWNER	31	64.51	35.48	22.58
CAB DRIVER	68	80.00	20.00	20.58
COACHMAN	64	62.50	37.50	26.50
DRIVER	108	58.33	41.66	18.75
COACH.BUIL	9	55.55	44.44	44.44
GROOM	38	71.05	28.94	28.94
RAILWAY	29	75.86	24.13	17.25
POLICEMAN	55	41.81	58.18	23.13
BARMAN	48	95.83	4.17	28.94
COOK	32	90.62	9.37	21.85
LABOURER	42	73.80	26.19	28.57

* Percentage of families reconstructed by trade.

As these cases show, the life of the mining families was dependent on the fluctuations of the industry. Most mining employees kept their jobs as "all round" miners or changed trades within the mining industry as we saw in the case of Lennox Bayley.

But there were also cases such as that of Samuel Heugh or Charles Isaacs who probably suffered the effects of two different crises in the mining industry - 1896-7 and 1899 - at the moment they could least afford it.

The growth of Johannesburg made of the building industry a source of employment for workers with very different skills. From the late 1880s former Afrikaner *bywoners* (tenant farmers) who had moved to Johannesburg after the discovery of gold had found in the small-scale production of bricks a moderately profitable enterprise to which they could apply their skills. In late 1887 President Kruger authorised Afrikaner brickmakers to settle on the south-west *spruit* of the Braamfontein farm, recently acquired by the government, to manufacture bricks using the clay deposits existing in the area. Between 1891 and 1896 brickmakers benefited from the town's first building boom. This period of prosperity in the building trade also favoured skilled workers such as plasterers, bricklayers and builders who saw their trades flourish during these years. Nevertheless, the 1896-7 economic crisis and the outbreak of the war in 1899 was a setback to most workers involved in this industry. But as much as all building trades were adversely affected by the crisis, self-employed brickmakers had to face a further hassle. They could not compete with the capitalist production of bricks which started in the early 1890s.[46]

Brickmaking has been regarded as chiefly an Afrikaner trade. Nevertheless, half of the families of brickmakers who had their children baptized in the Anglican Church between 1890 and 1901 were English and lived in Brickfields, one of the poorest and most insanitary areas of the city, south of the railway line.[47] Amongst the brickmakers the proportion of "mixed marriages", English men to Afrikaner women or Afrikaner men to English women - less common - was approximately 16 per cent.

Some of these families constitute an example of social mobility as over time they

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[46] Van Onselen, C., 'The Main Reef Road', pp. 113-25.

[47] The families of brickmakers that have been reconstructed represent 27.50 per cent of the families headed by a brickmaker who had their children baptized in the Anglican Church.

managed to leave Brickfields for better areas in the city. William and Maria Muller, both Afrikaner, had their first child in Brickfields in 1893. For seven years they lived in Brickfields where they had three more children, two girls and a boy. In 1901, at the time of the baptism of their fourth daughter, the Mullers were living at 20 De Beer Street, Braamfontein, a better and more expensive neighbourhood, north of the railway line.[48]

It was not uncommon that the brickmakers exchanged self-employment for positions as employee brickmakers on the mines. In most of these cases they moved with their families to subsidised accommodation on mine property. Henry Bates married an Afrikaner woman, Maria, with whom he had three daughters. While in 1894 Henry was a self-employed brickmaker; the next two births found him working in his trade for Spes Bona Mine.[49] In other cases general recession combined with the fluctuations of the trade to make social mobility impossible. In this context each new birth acted as a burden on the economy of the family. This was the case of George and Ellen Coleman. Their first child was born in 1896, at the end of the building boom that started in 1891, while they were living in Fordsburg. Eleven month later, in the context of the economic crisis of 1896-7, their second child was born and they had to move to the Malay Location, an area on the west of the city, south of Vrededorp, designed for the settlement of Cape Malays and Cape 'coloured' people where dilapidated houses and slum conditions were prevalent.[50]

The fortunes of the more skilled workers within the building trade, such as bricklayers, masons, builders, plasterers and painters were not very different.[51] The size of the

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[48] Data Base J1. Record 604 Muller, William and Maria.

[49] Data Base J1. Record 1018 Bates, Henry and Maria.

[50] Data Base J1. Record 1541 Coleman, George and Ellen.

[51] Amongst working class families headed by bricklayers and builders whose children had been baptized in the Anglican Church it has been possible to reconstruct 32.09 per cent of the families. Amongst the families headed by painters and plasterers it has been possible to reconstruct 28.26 of the families.

family more often than not acted as an obstacle to economic mobility. A typical case was that of the Roses, who started their family in the mid-1880s. Benjamin and Minnie Rose lived in central Johannesburg for eight years (no address supplied in the records). During this time they had four children, two girls and two boys, with Benjamin alternatively employed as bricklayer or mason. But when in 1894 their fifth child was born, they were living in the Malay Location, where they had their sixth and, according to data at our disposal, last child.[52]

Building construction was not the only economic activity that provided opportunities for self-employment to Johannesburg's newly urbanised population; the transport industry also offered an alternative to full proletarianization for many Afrikaners who had fled the countryside. Between the late 1880s and the early 1900s many Afrikaner newcomers put their rural skills and their limited amounts of capital into transport riding. Particularly in the years prior to the extension of the railway link from the coastal cities to the Rand (1892-5) transport riders ensured the flow of food and machinery to the mining industry. Although the 1896 Census of Johannesburg shows only 53 transport riders in the city, during its heyday transport riding provided employment for thousands of poor *burghers*.[53] At the same time the growth of Johannesburg made the development of a system of urban transport a pressing necessity.

Under the protection of Kruger's republican government, owner-drivers of cabs started a business which at least until 1896 created jobs for the less fortunate cab drivers. The returns of the census of the city taken in that year indicate that amongst Johannesburg's working population there were 83 cab owners and 692 cab drivers. Although these jobs were largely taken up by Afrikaners they were by no means alone in the transport business. It also provided employment for a fair number of Jews, coloured Muslims, so-called Malays, and English workers who were trying to find

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[52] Data Base J1. Record 511 Rose, Benjamin and Minnie.

[53] Van Onselen, C., 'The Main Reef Road', pp. 114-15.

their feet in Johannesburg. Until the early 1900s self-employment as transport rider or owner-driver of cabs acted as an alleyway to escape full proletarianisation. Thus, transport rider, cab owner, cab driver, and coachman, were more than urban occupations. They represented different strategies of survival for both the newly urbanised and the unemployed overseas worker. Amongst these families the percentage of "mixed marriages", according to the data base constructed with the baptismal records of the Anglican Church, was roughly 17 per cent.

Between 1892 and 1898 Edward and Jane Murphy had five children, three girls and two boys. During four of these six years Edward worked as a cab driver living alternatively in central Johannesburg, in close proximity to Market Square and not far away from Fordsburg where most stables were located, and Brickfields. By 1896 the rising prices of horses and forage after the rinderpest coupled with the extension of the horse-drawn tram line in the city by City & Suburban Transport Company,[54] had put many cabbies out of employment. In this context it is hardly surprising that when the Murphys baptized their fifth child in 1898 Edward had changed jobs. He was a miner.[55] It is quite probable that Edward Murphy was a miner by trade who due to the crises of the industry, 1890-1 and 1896-7, found it very difficult to get a job on the mines. In this case the transport industry protected the Murphy family from the consequences of unemployment.

William and Anna Culvert started their family on the eve of the South African War. William was employed as a coachman in 1898 when his first daughter was born and the whole family was living in Fordsburg. By the next year he was a labourer in

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[54] The company started in the late 1880s when A. H. Nellmapius, a wealthy and prominent Transvaal farmer, approached President Kruger to obtain a concession to develop a line of horse-drawn trams in the city. The economic potential of the venture attracted mining capital and Johannesburg City & Suburban Transport Company was floated in 1889. The tram service started operating in 1891. By 1896 City & Suburban Transport operated a fleet of about 35 trams and employed 200 drivers. See van Onselen, C., 'Johannesburg's Jehus, 1890-1914', volume 1, New Babylon, pp. 165-7. Hereafter 'Johannesburg's Jeh

[55] Data Base J1. Record 472 Murphy, Edward and Jane.

profitability crisis between 1907 and 1922, was especially resented by white mining employees who feared their position in the industry was threatened by extensive employment of African workers. In 1907 strikers were heavily repressed by the *Het Volk* government with the help of British troops. The way in which the strike was solved caused Lionel Phillips to comment to J. Wernher in London on June 3:

> The whole situation is really getting topsy-turvy; a Boer government calling out British troops to keep English miners in order while Dutchmen are replacing them in the mines. This must be good for the country anyhow as wages earned by such men remain here instead of being to a large extent sent to England; and the intercourse between Dutchmen and the mining population must also tend in the direction of eradicating racialism.[38]

Het Volk's support of the Chamber of Mines in the conflict dissipated the suspicion and animosity that had characterised the relationship between the new political party and the Chamber of Mines before the granting of Responsible Government.[39]

The incorporation of growing numbers of unskilled Afrikaner workers into the mines between May and July 1907 was, in part, due to the process of job fragmentation that was taking place in the industry. Although this was seen by the *Het Volk* government as a partial relief to Afrikaner unemployment, the strike itself made the unemployment situation even worse. Eight hundred men were retrenched. In this context, a deputation from the Transvaal Miners' Union to Jan Smuts on July 22 suggested the repatriation of the British unemployed as a solution to the crisis. At the same time, unemployed British mine workers formed with the union's support the United Workmen's Benefit Association of the Transvaal and petitioned Prime Minister Louis

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[38] Fraser, M. and Jeeves, A., (eds.). **All that Glittered: Selected Correspondence of Lionel Phillips, 1890-1924.** (Cape Town 1977), p. 179.

[39] On the development of the strike and the political implications of its resolution see, Katz, E., **A Trade Union Aristocracy**, pp. 132-4; Yudelman, D., **The Emergence of Modern South Africa: State, Capital and the Incorporation of Organized Labour on the South African Gold Fields, 1902-1939.** (Connecticut 1983), pp. 59-61. Hereafter **The Emergence of Modern South Africa**; Ould, C. R., 'General Smuts' Attitude to White Labour Disputes between 1907 and 1922', M. A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1963, pp. 2-11. Hereafter 'General Smuts'.

Botha for assistance. The terms of the petition point to the relative facility with which miners moved between the United States, Australia and South Africa searching for employment during the period 1880-1910:

> We do not want charity or relief works as they are only st'pping stones to further degradation, misery and crime, but we appeal to the Government for help and justice to every white man. If not, deport us to other countries where white men can get work for we do not want to be driven to commit crime by demanding work to support our wives and families.[40]

Similarly, a group of miners from Germiston sent a petition to Lord Selborne asking for assistance to go to Australia, while others wrote to the Colonial Office in London. The government of the Transvaal was opposed to the emigration of any man with a possibility of finding work in the country, as would have been the miners case, and the Colonial Office could not grant funds to solve the domestic problems of a self-governing colony.[41]

The *Het Volk* government watched the growing white unemployment with concern especially because large numbers of Afrikaner workers, its natural constituency, were affected by it. As a response to both growing unemployment and the retrenchments caused by the strike the government created the office of the Inspector of White Labour which opened its doors to the public on September 17, 1907. The Inspector of White Labour dealt with all matters related to unemployment: keeping a register of people unemployed, investigating complaints made in regard to the employment of white labour and advising the government on matters related to the employment of

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[40] (TAD) (CS) 704/105072/07. Letter from the United Workmen's Benefit Association of the Transvaal to Prime Minister Louis Botha, 24 April, 1907. On the composition of the mining work force in Australia during the same period see Kennedy, B., **Silver, Sin and Sixpenny Ale: A Social History of Broken Hill, 1883-1921**, (Melbourne 1978).

[41] (TAD) (CS) 786/12502/07. Letter from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor of the Transvaal, 14 October, 1907.

white workers in the colony.[42] Administratively the office depended on the Secretary of Mines and the post became a statutory office in 1908 with the creation of the Department of Labour. The first Inspector of White Labour was Alexander Raitt, who had been Secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers in 1903 and was a member of the Transvaal Legislative Council at the time of his appointment to the new office. Raitt died two months after his appointment, and was replaced by Robert Shanks, who had been a member of the Johannesburg elected Town Council in 1903 and 1904, supported by the Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council, an association created in 1902 with the object of representing the views of trade unions on the Rand. Yet, by 1908, Shanks was not seen as a trade union man by the workers.[43]

A month after the creation of the office, in October, there were 406 unemployed males registered with the Inspector of White Labour, and five months later there were 2,422. Most of the men applying for jobs belonged to the less skilled section of the workforce and were classified under the category of 'general workers' in the report. Although skilled workers found employment more easily through personal contacts with fellow labouring men or the trade unions, in October 1907 108 miners were included in the lists of the unemployed.[44] The reports of the Inspector of White Labour again pointed to an old problem in the Rand's labour market: unskilled white men were facing serious competition from black workers on the mines.

In March, 1908, the great amount of distress existing in the town due to the number of unemployed was the reason for a meeting called by the Mayor of Johannesburg, James Thompson, and the formation of the Rand Unemployed Investigation Committee. Presided over by the Mayor and with the participation of Lionel Phillips,

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[42] (TAD) Secretary for the Mines (MM) 172/1893/07. Letter from the Secretary of Mines to the Inspector of White Labour, 2 October, 1907.

[43] Katz, E. **A Trade Union Aristocracy**, p. 184.

[44] (TAD) (MM) 172/1893/07. Letter from the Secretary of Mines to the Inspector of White Labour, 2 October, 1907.

the Inspector of White Labour, the Mayors of Roodeport and Krugersdorp and representatives from the municipalities of Springs and Benoni, the committee set itself the task of providing work for the unemployed.

The presence of Lionel Phillips guaranteed the mines' cooperation and indicated how much the relations between *Het Volk* and the Chamber of Mines had changed since the granting of Responsible Government.[45] The work of the committee consisted chiefly of registering applications for work and sending out applicants to the mines. The total number of applications was 3,079 of which 1,316 were sent to the Eckstein group's mines. The committee observed the reluctance of white workers to do hard manual work at low wages, a recurrent concern of every commission of enquiry, and proposed a system of blacklisting of lazy, undisciplined and intemperate workers.[46]

The conclusions of the committee reflected the concern that the refusal of white workers to perform unskilled work engendered in all political quarters and charitable associations. The **Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission** (1908) had explained this phenomenon in terms of the relationship developed in the Transvaal between the white and black races that made white workers regard unskilled manual work as "Kaffir work".[47] The social, economic and political consequences of white workers' refusal to performed unskilled jobs were of great importance. Aware of this, the Rand Unemployment Committee concluded that the field of unskilled labour should not be closed to white workers, and that, in spite of the inconvenience that workers of irregular habits caused to employers, it was important to give jobless white workers an opportunity to regain their position in the ranks of the employed by undertaking manual work. The committee pointed out that:

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[45] On the relationship between the *Het Volk* and the mine owners both before and after 1907 see Jeeves, A., 'Het Volk and the Gold Mines: The Debate on Labour Policy, 1905-1910', Seminar Paper, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1980.

[46] (TAD) (MM) 206/1263/08. Report of the Rand Unemployment Committee, 31 July, 1908.

[47] **Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908**, (T.G. 13-08), para. 10. Hereafter **Report Tvl. I. C.**

> Apart from the philanthropic aspect of the matter, the gradual building of a steady class of white labourers will be of the greatest importance for the future of industry in South Africa [48]

The work of the Rand Unemployed Committee overlapped with the functions of the Inspector of White Labour. In response to a memorandum from Robert Shanks to the Secretary of Mines, W. Smyth addressing this problem, a project was presented to the Assistant Colonial Secretary, Jan Smuts, on October 26, 1908. Its aim was to rationalise the work of the different bodies dealing with the unemployed and transform the Office of the Inspector of White Labour into a state department until legislation was passed for the creation of a labour bureau.[49]

Between October 1908 and May 1909 an Intercolonial Convention was held in Bloemfontein. Representatives of the four southern African colonies gathered to discuss the unification of South Africa.[50] As these negotiations were taking place the government of the Transvaal was trying to implement long term measures to solve unemployment. These moves have to be understood not only in terms of the actual economic needs of the colony, but also in terms of the political preoccupations *Het Volk* had on the eve of Union. The government's attitude towards the 1907 miners' strike had alienated the labour movement and with a general election ahead it was

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[48] (TAD) (MM) 206/1263/08. Report of the Rand Unemployed Investigation Committee, 31 July, 1908.

[49] (TAD) (MM) 206/1263/08. Letter from the Secretary of Mines to the Assistant Colonial Secretary, 26 October, 1908.

[50] The idea of union had been growing amongst the political parties in all four colonies for some time. By 1908 these feelings were strengthened by economic depression, economic disputes, mostly related to the intercolonial trade, and the fears aroused by the 1906 Zulu rebellion in Natal. Lord Selborne thought the constitution of the Union of South Africa would reinforce the Imperial power in the colony as the High Commissioner could stop acting as an arbitrator in intercolonial conflicts. Thompson, L., **The Unification of South Africa**, (London 1960) and Thompson, L., 'The Compromise of Union', in M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds.), **Oxford History of South Africa**, (Oxford 1971), vol. 2, pp. 343-9.

imperative to win the support of the white working class electorate.[51]

Unemployment intensified the competition between white and black labour for unskilled jobs.[52] In a climate of economic crisis and political insecurity, the need to establish industrial schools and apprenticing for the younger generation, already mentioned in the **Transvaal Indigency Commission**, found its way into the reports of the Inspector of White Labour, Robert Shanks:

> It appears to be more an obligation to foster the skilled employment here than in other countries. Otherwise a large proportion of the white youths are doomed to remain unskilled labourers who must fight for a livelihood continuously against the competition of the coloured.[53]

Although industrial schools had been established in the aftermath of the South African War, they had a distinct penal function and were quite often a halfway house between school and reformatory. In the context of the growing urban unemployment of 1902-8 these schools were, as L. Chisholm has argued, part of a direct attempt by the state to change the class position of poor whites by transforming old pre-industrial attitudes and values and thus to neutralise rising social and cultural conflicts. Yet it was only after Union that the industrial schools were integrated into a larger educational and penal system.[54]

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[51] "The disillusion of the trade-union leaders with the Transvaal government was summed up in 1908 by Thomas Matthew, who stated that Botha and Smuts were just as 'capitalistic' as Sir George Farrar." Katz, E., **A Trade Union Aristocracy**, p. 134.

[52] "The day may come when the skilled mechanic will have to face the competition of the coloured races, but the unskilled are competing against them now and it is beyond their power to organise in any way to protect themselves." (TAD) (MM) 249/1230/09. R. Shanks, Inspector of White Labour to W. Smyth, Secretary of Mines, 1909.

[53] (TAD) (MM) 249/1230/09. R. Shanks, Inspector of White Labour to W. Smyth, Secretary of Mines, 1909.

[54] Chisholm, L., 'Reformatories and Industrial Schools in South Africa: A Study in Class, Colour and Gender, 1882-1937', Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1989, pp. 58-9. Hereafter 'Reformatories and Industrial Schools'.

On May 31, 1910, the South African Bill was enacted in the British Parliament and Botha formed a new government. The creation of the Union of South Africa not only brought about a political change in the organisation of the government and the creation of a new form of state, it also necessitated the restructuring of the existing local political parties into national ones. This had important consequences in the configuration of alliances and cleavages in the political arena, especially for Afrikaner parties like *Het Volk* and *Oranje Unie*, created by James B. M. Hertzog.[55] The creation of national parties made tactical alliances with English-speaking voters and politicians necessary.[56]

The first national cabinet was composed of members of *Het Volk*, the Cape South African Party and *Oranje Unie*. In 1911 they joined to create the South African Party. Soon enough differences between Botha and Hertzog provoked the first split in the party. In January 1914 Hertzog created the National Party on a platform of South African self-sufficiency, dual-medium education and compulsory bilingualism in the public service. The international crisis of World War I accentuated the divisions between Hertzog and Botha-Smuts who leaned toward the Unionist Party, the most pro-British and capitalist party, for support. This revived the anti-capitalist and anti-British feelings amongst the Afrikaner rank and file. Conflict in the government favoured the growing influence of the South African Labour Party (1910) and brought its leadership closer to Hertzog's National Party.

As these political developments were taking place the situation of the white unemployed at a national level showed no improvement. In 1913, a letter sent to the

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[55] Hertzog, James Barry Munnik (1866-1942). Lawyer and soldier. Practised law in Pretoria between 1893 and 1895. Was judge of the Supreme Court of the Orange Free State 1895-99. Boer general during the South African War. Attorney General and Minister of Education of the Orange Free State in 1907-10. Attended the National Convention (1908-9) and was member of the first Union Cabinet. Excluded from the Cabinet in 1912, established the National Party in 1914 and became Prime Minister of the Union in 1924.

[56] Stadler, A., 'The Party System in South Africa, 1910-1948', Ph.D. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1970, p. 53. Hereafter 'The Party System'.

Secretary of the Interior by the United Municipal Associations of South Africa, created in 1905, acknowledged indigency as a matter of national concern, therefore constituting it a responsibility of the central government.[57] The Grants in Aid Commission of the Johannesburg Town Council recommended in January, 1913, that the council should cease making grants in aid for charitable purposes as the lists of applicants were growing. The widespread feeling in the council was that Johannesburg was "receiving all the poor of the country", and that the provincial administration should assume full responsibility for the matter.[58]

At the beginning of 1913 it was the House of Assembly that took the matter in hand and appointed a **Select Committee on European Employment and Labour Conditions** to look into the extent of European unemployment throughout the Union. The committee was chaired by John X. Merriman, a member of the South African Party and personal friend of Smuts, and counted amongst its members F. H. P. Creswell, a leading Labour Party politician. J. T. Bain, trade union organiser and member of the Labour Party, told the committee that regular employment amongst white workers was the exception rather than the rule. According to Bain a man worked on average eight months of a year.[59] The report, presented in May 1913, did not add much to what was already known about the causes of indigency.

The recommendations of the report were in line with most of what had been said in the **Transvaal Indigency Commission** in 1908. It suggested the opening of labour colonies for the unemployable; the development of agricultural colonies, along the lines of the Kakamas experiment in the Cape; and the importance of starting irrigation

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[57] (TAD) (CS) 970/19901/13. Letter from the Municipal Associations of South Africa to the Secretary of Interior, 9 January, 1913.

[58] (TAD) Mayor of Johannesburg (MJB) 1/1/23. **Minutes of the Johannesburg Town Council**, 28 January, 1913.

[59] **Evidence of the Select Committee on European Employment and Labour Conditions**, (S.C. 9-13), para. 3778. Hereafter **Evidence European Employment**.

and afforestation[60] works as a way of creating employment for white labourers in the countryside.[61] This report, as with all the previous ones, could not come up with reliable figures as to the extent of poverty and unemployment in the country.

A point stressed in the report was the "far from sympathetic" attitude of the mines towards the employment of unskilled white labour.[62] This apparent change in the mining industry's attitude has to be understood in the context of the industry's imperatives of maximisation of profits and minimisation of costs. In the early 1910s, as the better grade ore had been mined out in the central Witwatersrand, many mines were making little or no profit. To counteract this, mining companies put pressure on their workers, both white and black, to increase productivity. This objective was achieved by, amongst other measures, the fragmentation of skilled jobs, which, as we have seen, was one of the reasons for the 1907 miners' strike. In the 1910s job fragmentation was aided by accelerated proletarianisation in the countryside which provided a constant supply of cheap African labour. While in 1907 the issue of the strike had been workers' refusal to operate three instead of two drills, in 1913 it was a common occurrence that white miners supervised six to ten drilling machines.

As the select committee was presenting its report a new wave of working class dissatisfaction broke out in the mines. The strike started at the New Kleinfontein Mine over an apparently minor matter, but the issue sparked other grievances. A strike committee was formed on May 29. Initially it demanded an eight-hour day bank-to-bank but this was immediately followed by a demand for the recognition of trade unions which the mining companies refused. Negotiations failed and the strike began to spread. On July 4, workers voted on a general strike. By then sixty-three out of

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[60] On the history of poor white woodcutters see Grundlingh, A., "'God het ons arm mense die houtjies gegee": Poor White Wood Cutters in the Southern Cape Forest Area, c. 1900-1939', in Morrell, R., (ed.), **White but Poor**, pp. 40-56.

[61] **Report of the Select Committee on European Employment**, (S.C. 9-13) para. 53. Hereafter **Report European Employment**.

[62] **Report European Employment**, para. 35.

sixty-seven mines on the Rand had stopped working and 18,000 men were on strike. The following day all mines had stopped working and the number of strikers had increased to 19,000. The government had proclaimed martial law on July 4. The same day a banned public meeting in Market Square was broken up by police and troops. On July 5, serious clashes took place outside the Rand Club, the haunt of the mine owners, where twenty people died. On that day Louis Botha and Jan Smuts negotiated a settlement on behalf of the owners with the strike leaders.[63]

This strike, the results of which were rather poor for the labour movement, was followed by two other important events. A general strike was sparked in 1914 by the government retrenchment of workers on the railways at the end of 1913. The South African Party government proclaimed martial law and called in the Active Citizens Defence Force to control the workers. The government had not had time to fully evaluate the political consequences of the strike when an Afrikaner rural rebellion, commanded by the same generals who had led the onslaught against white workers in January, began in October 1914.[64]

White workers' and general public dissatisfaction with the way in which the South African Party solved the 1913 and 1914 strikes and the 1914 rebellion was expressed in the 1914 elections. They not only showed an usually high level of participation (73 per cent as against 45.8 per cent in 1910)[65] but it also gave the Labour Party an

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[63] On the 1913 general strike see, Simons, H. J. and Simons, R. E., **Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950**, (Harmondsworth 1969), pp. 156-60; Katz, E., **A Trade Union Aristocracy**, pp. 321-60; Davies, R. H., **Capital, State**, pp. 120-5; Ould, C. R., 'General Smuts' Attitude', pp. 70-88.

[64] The causes of the 1914 rebellion are complex. South Africa aligned itself with the British government after the outbreak of World War I. At British request South Africa was to send troops to invade German South West Africa. The rebellion started when Generals Beyers and de la Rey refused their commission in October 22. The generals found support in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. The rebels were united by nationalistic feelings. But there were also far more complex and deeper economic and social forces at play that facilitated the spread of the rebellion. See Bottomley, J., 'The Orange Free State and the Rebellion of 1914: The Influence of Industrialisation, Poverty and Poor Whiteism', in R. Morrell, (ed.), **White but Poor**, pp. 29-39.

[65] Stadler, A., 'The Party System', p. 62.

important victory in the Transvaal, winning twenty-three out of forty-five seats in the Provincial Council.

In terms of social and economic development the period 1913-1918 was contradictory. On the one hand, industrial disturbances in 1913 and 1914, and the 1914 rebellion, created a climate of economic insecurity that deepened unemployment. Building operations, which had been constantly improving for four years, experienced a decline. In 1915 the estimated value of buildings approved for construction by the Transvaal Municipalities was more than half a million pounds sterling less than in 1914.[66] As the recovery of the mining industry in 1910 had attracted many workers to the Transvaal, the slump in the construction industry created an unusually high level of unemployment. The 1913 strike caused widespread retrenchments on the mines. At the end of July 1914 there were 2,340 fewer men employed on the mines than in June 1913. The war itself saw a shedding of white labour on the mines at an average of 85 men per month.[67] At the same time the restrictions on international trade, imposed by the war in Europe, increased opportunities to develop local industries. This, combined with the fact that a large number of white workers had left the country as part of the Defence Force, made for a temporary upswing of the labour market for white workers.

Applications to the White Labour Bureau for all categories of work decreased between 1914 and 1916, as men left for the front, but so did the demand for workers and therefore the ability of the Bureau to place workmen.[68] The government's main

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[66] South African Archives Bureau (SAB), Minister of Labour (MNW) 283/MM 1599/1915. Inspector of White Labour. Report for the Year ended 31st December 1914.

[67] (SAB) (MNW) MM/2997/16. Inspector of White Labour, Summarised Report for 1914-16.

[68] In 1914 there were 4,224 applicants while the number of positions available was 816. Yet the office only managed to place 688 workers. In 1915 there were 2,278 applicants, 308 jobs available and 237 men were sent to work. In 1916 1,325 workers applied for jobs, the positions available were 321 and 213 workers were placed. (SAB) (MNW) MM 2997/16. Inspector of White Labour. Summarised Report for 1914-16.

and afforestation[60] works as a way of creating employment for white labourers in the countryside.[61] This report, as with all the previous ones, could not come up with reliable figures as to the extent of poverty and unemployment in the country.

A point stressed in the report was the "far from sympathetic" attitude of the mines towards the employment of unskilled white labour.[62] This apparent change in the mining industry's attitude has to be understood in the context of the industry's imperatives of maximisation of profits and minimisation of costs. In the early 1910s, as the better grade ore had been mined out in the central Witwatersrand, many mines were making little or no profit. To counteract this, mining companies put pressure on their workers, both white and black, to increase productivity. This objective was achieved by, amongst other measures, the fragmentation of skilled jobs, which, as we have seen, was one of the reasons for the 1907 miners' strike. In the 1910s job fragmentation was aided by accelerated proletarianisation in the countryside which provided a constant supply of cheap African labour. While in 1907 the issue of the strike had been workers' refusal to operate three instead of two drills, in 1913 it was a common occurrence that white miners supervised six to ten drilling machines.

As the select committee was presenting its report a new wave of working class dissatisfaction broke out in the mines. The strike started at the New Kleinfontein Mine over an apparently minor matter, but the issue sparked other grievances. A strike committee was formed on May 29. Initially it demanded an eight-hour day bank-to-bank but this was immediately followed by a demand for the recognition of trade unions which the mining companies refused. Negotiations failed and the strike began to spread. On July 4, workers voted on a general strike. By then sixty-three out of

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[60] On the history of poor white woodcutters see Grundlingh, A., '"God het ons arm mense die houtjies gegee": Poor White Wood Cutters in the Southern Cape Forest Area, c. 1900-1939', in Morrell, R., (ed.), **White but Poor**, pp. 40-56.

[61] **Report of the Select Committee on European Employment**, (S.C. 9-13) para. 53. Hereafter **Report European Employment**.

[62] **Report European Employment**, para. 35.

sixty-seven mines on the Rand had stopped working and 18,000 men were on strike. The following day all mines had stopped working and the number of strikers had increased to 19,000. The government had proclaimed martial law on July 4. The same day a banned public meeting in Market Square was broken up by police and troops. On July 5, serious clashes took place outside the Rand Club, the haunt of the mine owners, where twenty people died. On that day Louis Botha and Jan Smuts negotiated a settlement on behalf of the owners with the strike leaders.[63]

This strike, the results of which were rather poor for the labour movement, was followed by two other important events. A general strike was sparked in 1914 by the government retrenchment of workers on the railways at the end of 1913. The South African Party government proclaimed martial law and called in the Active Citizens Defence Force to control the workers. The government had not had time to fully evaluate the political consequences of the strike when an Afrikaner rural rebellion, commanded by the same generals who had led the onslaught against white workers in January, began in October 1914.[64]

White workers' and general public dissatisfaction with the way in which the South African Party solved the 1913 and 1914 strikes and the 1914 rebellion was expressed in the 1914 elections. They not only showed an usually high level of participation (73 per cent as against 45.8 per cent in 1910)[65] but it also gave the Labour Party an

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[63] On the 1913 general strike see. Simons, H. J. and Simons, R. E., **Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950**, (Harmonsdsworth 1969), pp. 156-60; Fatz, E., **A Trade Union Aristocracy**, pp. 321-60; Davies, R. H., **Capital, State**, pp. 129-5; Ould, C. R., 'General Smuts' Attitude', pp. 70-88.

[64] The causes of the 1914 rebellion are complex. South Africa aligned itself with the British government after the outbreak of World War I. At British request South Africa was to send troops to invade German South West Africa. The rebellion started when Generals Beyers and de la Rey refused their commission in October 22. The generals found support in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. The rebels were united by nationalistic feelings. But there were also far more complex and deeper economic and social forces at play that facilitated the spread of the rebellion. See Bottomley, J., 'The Orange Free State and the Rebellion of 1914: The Influence of Industrialisation, Poverty and Poor Whiteism', in R. Morrell, (ed.), **White but Poor**, pp. 29-39.

[65] Stadler, A., 'The Party System', p. 62.

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concern was that once the men in the Defence Force were demobilised unemployment would worsen. Under these circumstances the White Labour Superintendent presented a General Report in Connection with the Poor White Problem to the Minister of Mines in 1916. The report pointed out the growing number of white labourers employed on the railways, which had increased from 300 in 1906 to 4,230 in 1915, and the success of the system of training and promotion implemented by the Railways' Administration.[69]

The report pointed out that the public had been induced to take a certain measure of responsibility for the poor white problem and that:

> The indigent classes are also beginning to realize that the government is taking an interest in them and making earnest and practical efforts to effect an improvement in their conditions.[70]

As a consequence of this, according to the report, dissatisfaction amongst urban poor whites was gradually disappearing.

In 1917 a more decisive effort to quantify the number of poor whites countrywide was attempted. A census was taken in the four provinces. However, the lack of an appropriate budget stood in the way of gathering detailed information. This was particularly evident in the case of big cities like Johannesburg. The statistics collected suggested the following results:[71]

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[69] For a detailed analysis of poor white employment on the railways see Pirie, G., 'White Railway Labour in South Africa, 1873-1924', in R. Morrell, (ed.), **White but Poor**, pp. 101-14.

[70] (SAB) (MNW) 354/MM 2878/16. General Report in Connection with the Poor White Question, 1916.

[71] (SAB) (MNW) 386/MM 2161/17. White Labour Department, Statistics on Poor Whites.

	HEADS	WITH FAMILIES
EXTREMELY POOR FAMILIES	10,409	39,021
POOR FAMILIES	16,605	67,497
TOTAL	27,014	106,518

The greatest concentration of poor whites was in the Transvaal and, within it, on the Witwatersrand.[72] As will be seen in the following section, the careful questionnaire designed for the census not only reflected the need to quantify the poor white population but also the ways in which poor whiteism was defined.[73]

In the same year, 1917, a new effort to coordinate the work of the different bodies engaged in relief was undertaken in Johannesburg, the Rand area and Pretoria. Enquiries were made to establish how many people were receiving relief from these institutions; their monthly expenditures; the class of people assisted and the methods adopted for the distribution of relief. Correspondence between the Labour Department Superintendent and the Inspector of White Labour from Johannesburg on these matters emphasised the need to organise a conference to deal with the question of begging and vagrancy in Johannesburg and Pretoria, an indication that these problems

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[72] Macmillan's analysis of the records of the Johannesburg Public Relief Board shows a clearer picture of the permanent influx of the countryside population into Johannesburg. According to him nearly 30 per cent of all the applicants for relief between 1916 and 1917 had not been six months on the Rand. Macmillan, W. M., **Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History**, (London n.d.), pp. 57-8.

[73] This was the questionnaire. (1) Number of persons with no adequate means of support. men-women-boys-girls. Number of children not attending school. (2) Number of persons out of employment. Poor and destitute. (3) Number of persons unemployable being a) habitual drunkards and b) incorrigible vagrants. (4) Number of persons unable to work owing to a) chronic disease b) old age. c) injuries. (5) Number of persons who own large or small stock but not sufficient to maintain themselves or their families. (6) Number of persons who came from or desire to return to the land. (7) Number of persons living with natives and coloured people. (8) Number of persons who received food, or assistance from the government, churches, or charitable institutions.

remained serious in the large cities of the Transvaal.[74]

The cost of living had been increasing steadily since 1914 due to the inflation in international prices that followed the outbreak of World War I. The low wages received by white unskilled labourers, between 17s 6d and 25s per week, did not allow them to meet the high cost of accommodation and foodstuff.[75] The period 1918-1922 was a time of serious economic crisis, felt most severely by the Afrikaner poor.

The war and immediate post-war period faced the mining industry with a new profitability crisis. As mentioned earlier, the Witwatersrand gold mines had a particularly sensitive cost structure. While during the period 1901-1912 the mining industry experienced a steady expansion of output and profit - the output of the mines rose during this period by 14.2 per cent per annum - the period 1913-1922 showed the opposite tendency. Between 1913 and 1922 the rate of output of the gold mines fell by 1.9 per cent per annum.[76] This process was the result of a combination of three main economic factors. First, war-time inflation affected the cost of materials and foodstuff. Between 1914 and 1920 the total cost of stores consumed by the gold mines rose by about 40 per cent.[77] Secondly, after 1915 the supply of cheap African labour began to fall. The shortage of African labour reached its most serious point in 1918 when the industry was getting only around 60 per cent of the necessary supply of cheap labour.[78] Thirdly, the industry was also experiencing a shortage of white skilled and semi-skilled labour, which in turn increased white workers' capacity to secure better wages and working conditions, thus raising the cost of white labour in

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[74] (SAB) (MNW) 392/MM 2482/17. Letter from the Inspector of White Labour, Johannesburg, to the Labour Department, August, 1917

[75] **Economic Commission, 1914.** (U. G. 12-1914), para. 35.

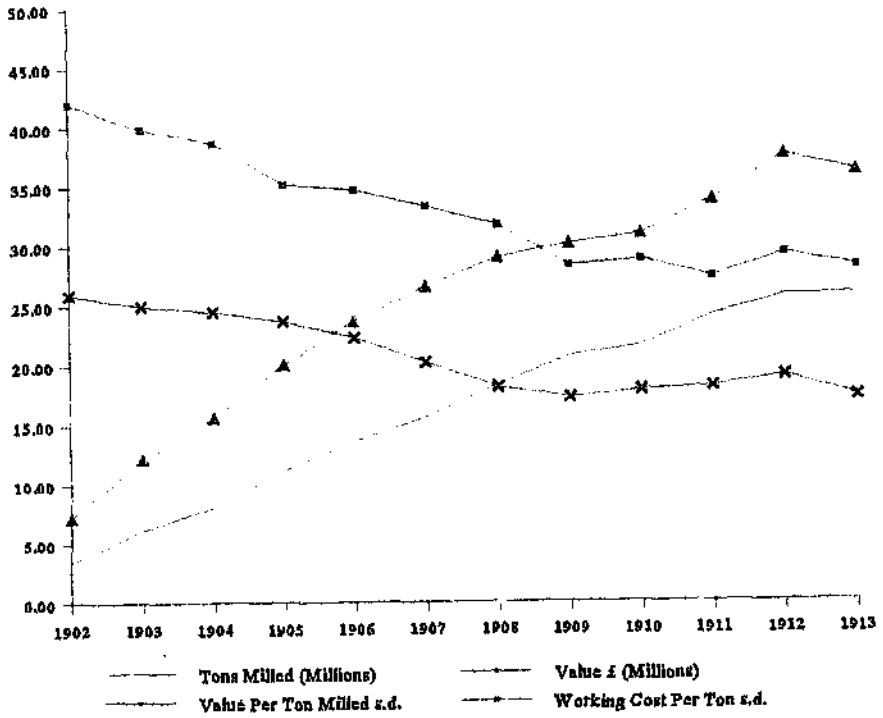
[76] Johnstone, F. A., **Class, Race and Gold**, p. 94.

[77] Johnstone, F. A., **Class, Race and Gold**, p. 96.

[78] Johnstone, F. A., **Class, Race and Gold**, p. 97.

GRAPH 2

WITWATERSRAND MINES: STATEMENT OF TONNAGES MILLED, GOLD VALUES , AND WORKING COSTS, 1902-13



Source: Kubicek, R.V., **Economic Imperialism in Theory and Practice: The Case of the South African Gold Mining Industry**, (Durham 1979), p. 50.

the mines.[79] The decreasing margin of profits and dividends thereby caused was felt most acutely on the low grade mines, those mines which were working at a profit of less than 2s per ton milled. By 1917 fourteen of thirty-five working mines on the Rand had fallen into this category. Two years later, in 1919, three low-grade mines had closed down and eleven more had fallen into that category.[80] Between mid-1919 and 1920 a temporary premium in the gold price helped to offset the fall in the profit margins, but the gold price started declining again in 1921.[81] Thus by the end of that year the Chamber of Mines urgently needed to address two of the structural problems of the industry - rising costs and plummeting output - in order to weather the crisis.

From 1917 onwards there was growing discontent amongst white workers in the mines. The first sign of conflict was shown in January 1917 in the Van Ryn Deep mine at Boksburg. White underground miners came out spontaneously in an unofficial strike against the employment of black labour in semi-skilled work. The strike was solved rapidly as the government intervened, advising the company to withdraw the black workers, and promised an enquiry into the events. The enquiry, which was conducted by the South African Police, showed that amongst the Van Ryn Deep labour force there were 2,500 Afrikaners from the Orange Free State who had been laid off from the Koffyfontein mine.[82] Inspector J. M. L. Fulford, in charge of the investigation, suggested that the majority of these people were actually agriculturalists who had been forced to seek employment in the mines due to failure of crops and drought. As F. A. Johnstone has argued, the Van Ryn Deep strike was a small but significant symptom of the changes and tensions developing in the gold mines during

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[79] Johnstone, F. A., **Class, Race and Gold**, pp. 98-101.

[80] Johnstone, F. A., **Class, Race and Gold**, pp. 95-6.

[81] On this issue see Ally, R., **Gold and Empire: The Bank of England and South Africa's Gold Producers, 1886-1926**, (Johannesburg 1994), pp. 47-65.

[82] (SAB) Department of Justice (JUS) 250/3/20/17, J. M. L. Fulford, Inspector S.A.P. to Deputy Commissioner of Police, 30 January, 1917.

the war.[83] Successive trade union representations to the Chamber of Mines between 1917 and 1918 managed to obtain them the Status Quo Agreement in September 1918, which reserved certain jobs for white workers. Yet the 1920-22 profitability crisis put white mine workers' position in jeopardy again.

In 1920, as tension amongst white miners was mounting, the South African Party appointed a new commission of enquiry into white unemployment. The terms of reference of the **Unemployment Commission** reflected the major characteristics of unemployment in the post-war conjuncture. The commission had to investigate and report, not only on the extent and causes of unemployment, but also on the best method of preventing the influx of white unskilled labourers into towns; the problems of white employment in the mines; and the possibilities of establishing an insurance scheme against unemployment.

The commission arrived at the conclusion that years of delay and short term solutions had allowed poor whiteism to assume extremely serious proportions. The solution proposed had to do with new forms of agricultural development which could facilitate the re-settlement of poor whites on the land.[84] This reflected the concern amongst all political parties with Afrikaner rural and urban constituencies.

During the mid-1910s white workers were showing increasing disaffection from the ruling South African Party. While the 1913 and 1914 strikes drew English-speaking working class votes to the South African Labour Party candidates in the Transvaal, Hertzog's National Party capitalised on the nationalist discontent of the Afrikaner rural population that erupted in 1914, both in the Orange Free State and in the Transvaal, as well as on the frustration of urban railway workers. The great challenge for Labour and Hertzog's National Party was to capture the Afrikaner working class

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[83] Johnstone, F. A., **Class, Race and Gold**, p. 108.

[84] **Second Interim Report of the Unemployment Commission, 1921.** (U. G. 34-21), paras. 5-7. Hereafter **Unemployment Commission**.

constituencies in Johannesburg which were still concentrated in the old working class neighbourhoods of the city such as Vrededorp and Fordsburg. Yet, according to D. O'Meara, it was the Afrikaner Broederbond, founded in July 1918 by fourteen railway clerks, policemen and clergymen, which was to capture urban Afrikaner nationalism in the Transvaal.[85]

Since 1907 growing numbers of Afrikaners had been incorporated into the Transvaal industrial working force, especially into the mining industry.[86] Up to 1914 the Labour Party had managed to capture some of these new voters in the working class constituencies of Johannesburg. Nevertheless, the internal divisions in the party, between the pro-war, pro-British faction and the "war-on-war" faction, undermined the Labour Party's appeal to Afrikaner workers. The divisions in the party coincided with differences between socialist and non-socialist leaders, which were in turn accentuated by European political developments. The creation of the International Socialist League in 1915 and its incorporation into the newly formed Communist Party of South Africa in 1921 reflected the radicalisation of working class politics during the war and post-war years. Yet, first the Socialist League and later the Communist Party found it difficult to compete for the Afrikaner workers' vote with a platform based on class rather than racial issues at a time when most workers felt their jobs threatened by the advance of African workers in the mines.[87]

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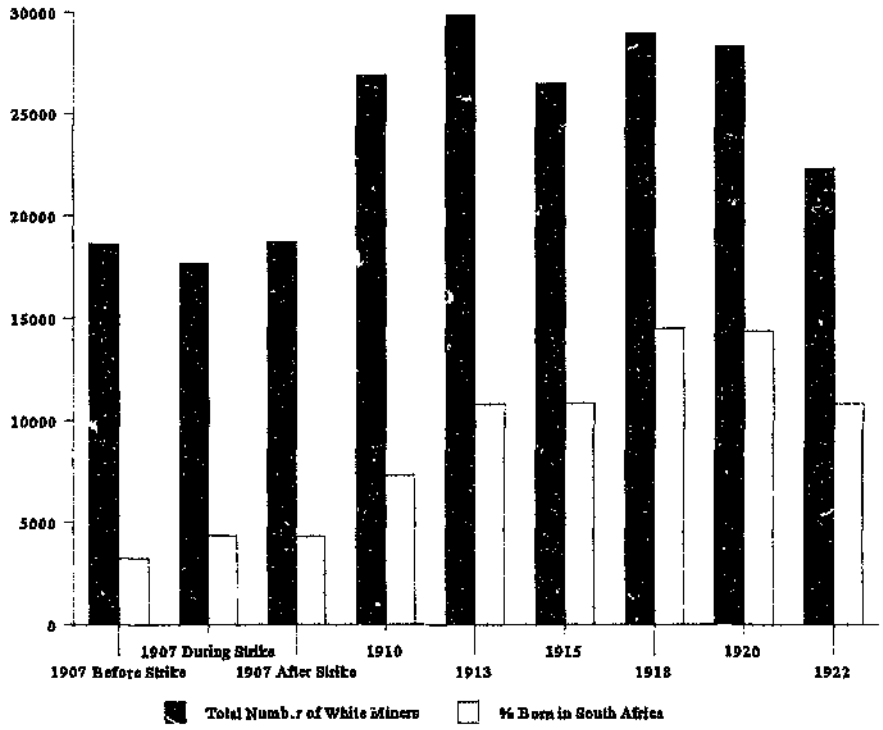
[85] But it was only after 1927 that the Bond became an important force in South African politics. See O' Meara, D., **Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948**, (Cambridge 1983), pp. 59-61.

[86] The proportion of South African born workers in the mining industry in the Transvaal grew from 17.5 per cent in 1907, before the strike, to 48.6 per cent by 1922. Although there is no doubt that these figures reflect the incorporation of Afrikaner workers to the mines, it is important to notice that the category "South African born" also should have included a new generation of workers not necessarily of Afrikaner descent. As argued in Chapter One there was a tendency in the government and mining houses statistics to equate "South African born" with Afrikaner, disregarding the complexities of the demography of the working class and its process of settlement.

[87] On these issues see Simons, H. J. and Simons, R. E., **Class and Colour in South Africa**, pp. 180-3 and Johns, S., **Raising the Red Flag: The International Socialist League & the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932** , (Bellville 1995), pp. 101-4.

GRAPH 3

THE INDIGENISATION OF ORGANISED LABOUR ON THE TRANSVAAL GOLD MINES, 1907-1922



Source: Yudelman, D., **The Incorporation of Organized Labor in the Gold Mining Industry**, p. 132.

In the 1919 elections, Labour and Hertzog's National Party won votes at the expense of the South African Party, but Smuts was once again in government, this time as Prime Minister. In December 1921 the Chamber of Mines announced the implementation of three measures aimed at solving the ongoing crisis: lowering the wages of the better paid miners; the abolition of the 1918 Status Quo Agreement; and the reorganisation of underground work. The immediate and most palpable consequence of this was the retrenchment of 2,000 white workers. A strike ballot on January 8, 1922, gave overwhelming support for a strike. This marked the beginning of the Rand Revolt.

3. KNOWLEDGE OF THE POOR: THE RULING CLASS'S AND THE STATE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE 'POOR WHITE PROBLEM', 1906-1922.

Although white poverty had existed in the Transvaal since the late nineteenth century and had been a source of major concern for the South African Republic government after 1895, it was in 1906, with the appointment of the **Transvaal Indigency Commission**, that 'poor whiteism' became an issue in political and ideological discussion at state level. What follows is an analysis of the ideological construction of the 'poor white problem' between 1906 and 1922 which will attempt to demonstrate how the dominant class's understanding of 'poor whites' changed over the decade and a half that led up to the 1922 miners' strike.

The ways in which colonial society dealt with poverty, and the lines along which the problem itself was thought of, were deeply influenced by the British metropolitan experience. In this sense, the production of knowledge on 'poor whites', what was said about them and the construction of this social group as a problem, have to be understood against the backdrop of the changing British intellectual debate of the late nineteenth century.

With the publication of Darwin's **The Origins of the Species** in 1859, the theory of evolution had become a major force in intellectual and political discussions in Britain. The emerging social sciences turned to biology in the hope of developing a science of the human condition that would include a knowledge both of man's physiology and behaviour.[88] Darwin's theory of evolution influenced contemporary understanding of history, culture, race and society. The interest in determining laws of heredity and establishing the extent to which the social environment was a factor in evolution, generated the development of theories of heredity. Darwinism inspired political thought on the left and the right. Evolution and heredity were seen as confirming both the theory of *laissez-faire* and the need for social engineering proposed by those who supported a more interventionist role of the state in society.[89]

In the 1880s growing unemployment in the United Kingdom, working class riots in London (1886-7) and strikes in 1889 had brought the "social problem" to the forefront of British political thought. In this context Francis Galton's eugenics echoed late nineteenth century fears and pessimism at the same time as suggesting ways to intervene in society. Galton's theory aimed at raising the physical and mental level of the race by controlling its reproduction. He maintained that the high birth rate among the lower classes was a threat to the evolutionary progress of the race. As G. Jones has pointed out, "Eugenics was able to integrate two aspects of late nineteenth century culture - fear of working class disorder and discontent and the rise in their numbers."[90]

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[88] Jones, G., **Social Darwinism and English Thought: The Interaction between Biological and Social Theory**, (Sussex 1980), p. 2. Hereafter **Social Darwinism**.

[89] "Conservative adherents to *laissez-faire* principles were heartened by the notion that, in the struggle for existence, only the fittest would survive. They decried forms of state intervention which supported the weakest members of society and argued that 'mental defectives' and criminal 'types' imposed an intolerable strain on societies' resources. Nevertheless, eugenics was by no means the exclusive preserve of right-wingers. Its powerful potential as a force of social engineering attracted widespread interest within the radical and socialist intelligentsia." Dubow, S., **Illicit Union**, p. 123.

[90] Jones, G., **Social Darwinism**, p. 103.

In late nineteenth century South Africa, Social Darwinism made rapid inroads. Before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War the main concern amongst English speaking intellectuals in the British southern African colonies was about the differences between the British and the Boer. After 1902 the dominant issue in colonial political thought was the 'native problem'. The founding, in 1903, of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science created an institutional framework for those interested in anthropological research and the promotion of scientific knowledge in general. The Fortnightly Club (1906) and the Transvaal Native Affairs Society (1908), both in Johannesburg, addressed similar concerns about the native population of the country and the ways in which the colony should be governed. Lionel Curtis, one of the most conspicuous members of Milner's kindergarten, addressed the Fortnightly Club in 1906 on 'The place of the subject races in the empire'.[91]

The ways in which Social Darwinism penetrated intellectual and political discussion as well as common sense in South Africa were not necessarily institutionalised ones. As S. Dubow has argued:

> Linguistic 'keywords' or root-metaphors provide a useful guide to understanding the dissemination and influence of an idea or set of ideas. In the case of racial ideology, words drawn from the vocabulary of the biological sciences were routinely applied to society from the late nineteenth century onwards.[92]

Both the reports and evidence of the commissions of enquiry and committees, which constitute the main sources of this chapter, offer good examples of the use of the language of Social Darwinism. It does not really matter whether witnesses and members of the commissions had a deep technical understanding of heredity theories and eugenics. What matters is that with the development of Darwin's theories "biology helped create the kind of moral universe in which nature reflected society and

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[91] Dubow, S., **Illicit Union**, p. 129-30.

[92] Dubow, S., **Illicit Union**, p. 8.

vice-versa",[93] and this not only became common sense, at least for the white middle classes, but it also created a secure frame of reference at the time when it was necessary to deal with social fears such as miscegenation and the 1913 moral panic which originated in the perceived increase on sexual assaults on white women by black men.

Social engineers, such as Lionel Curtis, Richard Feetham, and Phillip Kerr, were influential in the reconstruction administration in the elaboration of a political thought that followed the ideas prevalent in Britain at the time. These men were part of the liberal professions that had been so forceful in the development of social thought and practices in Britain. If, as G. Stedman-Jones has argued, charity became a science during the Victorian era,[94] the men that constituted Milner's kindergarten were among the experts in the field.

The **Transvaal Indigency Commission** was led by three of Milner's social engineers Phillip Kerr,[95] Richard Feetham[96] and Lionel Curtis. Its chairman, John W. Quinn, had been involved in the problems of Johannesburg's indigency since the constitution of the Rand Aid Association in 1903. The importance of this commission stems from the fact that it was the first comprehensive investigation into poverty in the Transvaal.

The **Transvaal Indigency Commission** did more than investigate the extent of

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[93] Jones, G., **Social Darwinism**, p. 149.

[94] Stedman-Jones, G., **Outcast London: A Study in the Relations between Classes in Victorian Society**, (Oxford 1971), p. 270. Hereafter **Outcast London**.

[95] Phillip Kerr came to South Africa in 1904 and worked in the office of the Lieutenant-Governor of the Transvaal. Soon after his arrival in Pretoria he was appointed assistant to Robert Brand at the Intercolonial Council where he worked until June 1908.

[96] Richard Feetham came to South Africa in 1902, became Deputy Town Clerk in that year and Town Clerk of Johannesburg's elected Town Council in 1903. He was nominated member of the Transvaal Legislative Council in 1907. At the time of the appointment of the Transvaal Indigency Commission he was practising as a lawyer in Johannesburg.

indigency in the Transvaal. It established the existence of indigency as a question.[97] The **Indigency Commission** named and classified indigents and organised a typology of the poor, distinguishing between rural and urban indigency. In organising its typology of the poor the commission went beyond the Victorian separation between the deserving and undeserving poor, at least in as much as this was not the main criterion used to divide and classify different types of indigents. According to the **Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission** there were two broad classes of poor: those who experienced actual want of the necessaries of life and those who, having enough, were ignorant and lazy and potentially indigent. Amongst the former group the report included the disabled and victims of industrial conditions, the lazy and the vicious, and the 'poor whites'. 'Poor whites' were those individuals who were able-bodied but incapable of performing skilled and semi-skilled labour and therefore unable to compete as unskilled labourers against the coloured races.[98]

For the commissioners, and the great majority of witnesses before them, poverty was:

> the end product of unhealthy social and economic conditions which affect every class of the community and cannot be dealt with among the indigent classes alone.[99]

It is important to stress that poverty was presented in the report as both a symptom of a sick society and a sickness in itself that needed cure and prevention. The tension between these two aspects of the definition of poverty runs through the entire report. This had important consequences, for if poverty was a problem of weak individuals and their lack of preparation (education) for rising in society, the solution lay with the

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[97] The construction of questions is a central point in understanding the power of the state and its ways of dealing with society. As Ashforth put it, "The larger part of the study of ideational capacities of modern states must thus consist of the study of the power involved in the making of 'questions', this is a power imbricated in language and organized in institutions." Ashforth, A., **The Politics of Official Discourse**, p. 6.

[98] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 7.

[99] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 10.

individual and the guidance the state could give him or her.[100] But if poverty was a consequence of the historical organisation of the colonial society, the solution involved the whole organism and not just the sick individual.[101] With this tension in mind there are two important sections of the **Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission** which need to be examined: the effect of the presence of the 'native' on social and economic conditions in the Transvaal and the sections dedicated to the remedies for urban and rural indigency.

The report developed the theory of the "aristocratic relation" between white and black races that was to be widely quoted in every other report on unemployment as the reason for poor whites' disregard for manual unskilled work.[102] According to the **Indigency Commission**, this "aristocratic relation" was the origin of the poor whites' unwillingness to be engaged as unskilled labourers.[103] But the difficulties faced by unskilled white labourers entering into the labour market were not only due to an ideology founded on racial superiority in a colonial context. There were powerful economic reasons undermining their incorporation into the labour market. On the one hand there was the standard of living both English-speaking immigrants and the local Afrikaner population had experienced and expected in the racially divided Transvaal. On the other hand, the fact that native labour was cheaper made it preferable to the

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[100] "Indigency, except where it is caused by illness, accident or old age, or by some public calamity which ruins or renders unemployed a large number of people, is almost invariably the product of lack of education or some weakness of character. The only way of effecting a permanent improvement in the conditions in which most indigents live is to correct the weakness of character or to make good the deficiency in education or training which is the real cause of their poverty, at the same time that they are afforded means to keep themselves alive." **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 11.

[101] "The problem, however, is a far wider one than that which is concerned with the means by which the necessaries of life can best be supplied to those who are in absolute want of them. The real causes of indigency often have no apparent connection with the actual indigents themselves." **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 10.

[102] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, paras. 40-44.

[103] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 47.

employment of more expensive and, generally, less efficient white labour.[104] Moreover, when white workers were employed as unskilled labourers, the wages they earned were based on 'native' standards and were, therefore, too low to satisfy their needs.[105]

The problems derived from white workers' unwillingness to perform unskilled jobs were aggravated by the accelerated proletarianisation of African labour. In order to fully understand this it is necessary to look at the changing characteristics of the labour market and, especially, at the transformation of the labour process in the mining industry between 1900 and 1920. During the first two decades of gold mining production the proletarianisation of the African labour force proceeded at a relatively slow pace. Despite this, black migrant workers progressively were acquiring skills to perform more complicated jobs.[106] The acquisition of industrial skills by cheap African labour represented a major threat to both skilled and, especially, unskilled white workers. In this context the organised labour movement tried, as we have indicated in the previous section, to secure white workers' position in the labour process. In the context of the 1906-8 depression two objections were raised against extending white employment. On the one hand employing whites in unskilled jobs was not an economically sound proposition. On the other, recession prevented the creation of more skilled positions to be occupied by white workers, particularly in the mining industry.

The **Transvaal Indigency Commission** saw in industrial expansion a way of creating jobs for the less skilled white workers. Yet the racial division of labour which characterised the Transvaal's economy meant that industrial development would

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[104] The debate about the comparative advantage of employing unskilled white labour on the Witwatersrand gold mines was especially live between 1902 and 1905 and again during the 1913 and 1920 profitability crises.

[105] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, paras. 48-50.

[106] The words 'black', 'native' and 'coloured' are used in both the report and the evidence of the **Transvaal Indigency Commission** as synonymous.

depend on the availability of cheap black migrant labour, which would in turn restrict the number of white workers any new industry would be ready to employ. As the **Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission** put it:

> Further, as it is impossible to prevent the coloured worker by means of legislation from doing any skilled work for which he is qualified, it would undoubtedly lead to the contraction of the sphere of the white man's activities as the coloured man became more skilled. We are therefore opposed to any policy that would enable the country to draw upon an unlimited supply of coloured labour from outside South Africa on which to base its industrial expansion. Whether that labour was confined by legislation to unskilled labour and ultimately repatriated or not, the effect on the economic position of the white man would be the same. He would still remain a supervisor only. The pernicious theory that the line between white man and black man's work should coincide with the line between skilled and unskilled labour would continue to dominate the economic situation.[107]

The problem was even more complicated in the mining industry where labour costs could actually undermine the industry's profitability. Towards the end of the 1900s, and especially during the 1910s, the accelerated proletarianisation of African workers, due to the erosion of subsistence farming, made these workers more likely to seek higher wages. Even if the cost of African labour did not seriously increase between 1900 and 1920, demands for higher wages were certainly a potential danger. The most worrying consequence of African proletarianisation, from the point of view of the ruling class, was that the more proletarianised African workers became the closer they got to the socio-economic position of white unskilled workers. The political consequences of this homogenisation of white and black workers, mainly the potential development of non-racial solidarity, needed to be counteracted ideologically. Thus one of the fundamental problems dealt with by the **Indigency Commission** and the investigations that followed it was to find ways to change the class position of 'poor whites'.

In 1908 the commission pointed to two methods of dealing with indigency: one aimed

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[107] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 60.

at preventing the development of poverty through the exploration of its socio-economic causes and the ways of managing them; the other was "curative", aimed at existing indigency and was based on the principle of the moral and economic regeneration of the poor through education, temporary assistance and organised charitable relief. The attitude towards the last two approaches clearly echoed the Victorian preoccupation with indiscriminate alms giving, and stressed, through the testimonies of the Rand Aid Association and the Salvation Army amongst others, the need to elevate charity from a sentimental feeling to a knowledge of the poor and what was best for them.[108] The idea of regeneration and cure pointed once again to the biological treatment of the social and moral world current at the time.

The moralization of the poor implied reforming every phase of working class life from infancy to old age. In order to do this it was necessary to distinguish between the indigent/'poor whites' and the unemployed. The largest group amongst the unemployed were those men who, like many handymen in Johannesburg, were more than unskilled labourers and less than skilled artisans, and who, because of this, were the first victims in an economic depression.[109] Unemployment could be prevented by widening the area of employment for male white workers to include unskilled labour in the mines, the railways and road construction, and encouraging women to work in domestic service; by the encouragement of industrial activity once the depression was over; and by controlling immigration. Of course, once the problem existed, as was the case in the Transvaal from 1905, palliative measures also became necessary. These methods will be discussed in the following section.

The treatment of the indigent began with the recognition of the characteristics or symptoms of this class. White urban indigents, who were mainly British immigrants with little or no mining skills, and the rural poor who had emigrated to the cities,

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[108] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, paras. 9-11 and paras. 318-337.

[109] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para 231.

tended to do casual work, live on money earned by their children and show a strong proclivity towards criminal behaviour.[110] In order to remedy this situation it was necessary to make elementary education compulsory to keep white children off the streets and prevent exploitative employment by their parents, as well as to develop technical education in elementary schools.[111] As for urban life, it was essential to remove certain features of the towns that were instrumental in the perpetuation of indigency and crime. Thus, it was necessary to watch the poorer quarters in town and to prevent the reproduction of "these squalid, unhealthy and demoralizing poor white settlements".[112] In rural areas, where the indigent class was made up of South African born who had neither a good knowledge of farming nor industrial skills, schools were to help to gradually create a qualified workforce, and were to perform an annual medical examination of pupils to detect contagious diseases and any problem that could undermine the health or the psyche of the next generations.[113] Urban and rural indigents as defined in the **Report of the Indigency Commission** came together when the latter, fleeing starvation in the countryside, moved to the city.[114]

Poverty had, nevertheless, a pathological side that was intrinsic to the vagrant, the loafer and the vicious; collectively a class of people considered at the final stage of demoralization and social degeneration. Criminalising mendicity and locking beggars and vagrants in jail for short periods was no solution. It was agreed that these people needed to recover their capacity to work not just physically, but morally. The best method for this was long periods of hard labour as had been organised in Germany

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[110] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, paras. 220-223.

[111] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, paras. 295-298.

[112] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 228.

[113] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 137.

[114] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 7.

(workhouses), Switzerland (labour colonies) and Belgium (beggar colonies).[115] The **Transvaal Indigency Commission** agreed with the report on the Belgian experience that the inmates of a labour colony should not be treated as criminals but that they were:

> The moral, physical and technical patients of the State, who are being subjected to medical treatment suitable to their special complaint.[116]

Social Darwinist metaphors, such as the 'fall in the ranks of civilisation',[117] went together with the conception of poverty as a social disease that needed appropriate treatment and the elaboration of a hierarchy in the types of indigents that went from the unemployed to the criminal. Eugenic thought found its way into the **Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission** through the need to detect in advance mental and physical hereditary diseases that undermined the healthy reproduction of the working class.[118] Both sets of ideas operated on the assumption that down below this class of white indigents there was another group, i.e. blacks, who could never reach the white level of civilization.

In 1908, when the **Transvaal Indigency Commission** presented its report, it was understood that the existence of poor whites was a characteristic of a colonial society whose economic and social organisation permitted the development of an ideological

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[115] In looking for examples of ways of dealing with indigency, the Tvl.I.C. was far more interested in European than in colonial developments. This can be partly explained in terms of the importance that European theory on criminality and social deviation had at the time. The only non-European reference made in the report was to the experience of the American South, but this is easily understandable in the context of the conceptualisation of poor whiteism as a social phenomenon that took place in societies organised in a racial hierarchy.

[116] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 281. My emphasis.

[117] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 7.

[118] On the role of the medical profession in spreading eugenic thought in South Africa from the early 1900s see Klausen, S., '"For the Sake of Race": Eugenic Discourses of Feeblemindness and Motherhood in the *South African Medical Record*, 1903-1926', **Journal of Southern African Studies**, 23, 1, 1997, pp. 27-50.

prejudice against menial work that needed to be redressed.[119] 'Poor white' was understood as being largely a rural phenomenon that would eventually reach the towns, but was not produced there. The rural roots of poverty helped to strengthen the link between 'poor whites' and rural Afrikaners. The solution to the problem lay in the transformation of the rural economy so that 'poor whites' would not move to the towns. In line with this argument, the commission conceded that in the towns the problem was more "how to rescue the individuals than how to remove the causes of poverty."[120] Despite the march of the Afrikaner unemployed to Pretoria in 1897, fears of the urban mob and the perception of cities as the space of degeneration, so prevalent in the European understanding of "the social problem", were not yet fully developed in the Transvaal.

The influx of white indigents from the countryside continued unabated between 1908 and 1912. By 1913 the growing number of poor whites in the cities, especially Johannesburg, the apparent failure of attempts at relief, and the increase of unemployment were again the subjects of an official enquiry. The **Select Committee on European Employment and Labour Conditions** was appointed by the Union government in the context of a generalised moral panic over mounting crime and sexual assaults on women. The situation of 'poor whites' was, at the time seen as a menace for the entire white race in South Africa:

> The importance of the question in South Africa arises from the fact that the

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[119] "Prior to 1834 the whole of South Africa which was within the sphere of the white man's occupation was organised on the economic basis of slavery. The existence of slavery up to that date has had an important influence on the subsequent development of the country. The early settlers in the Transvaal and, indeed, the whole South African born population up to nearly the middle of the nineteenth century, had grown to maturity in the belief that the normal and proper relation of white to colour was the relation of master to slave or serf. They regarded it as the natural province of the white man to supervise the native and to direct his energies, and the duty of the native to perform for the white man the rough manual labour which was required for cultivating his land and tending his stock. Despite the abolition of slavery this tradition remained, and has continued to govern the relations between the white and coloured races to this day." **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para 40.

[120] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 217.

> European minority occupying, as it does, in relation to the non-European majority, the position of a dominant race, cannot allow a considerable number of its members to sink into apathetic indigency, and to fall below the level of the non-European worker. If they do, and if they manifest an indifference founded on the comfortable doctrine of letting things find their economical level, sooner or later, notwithstanding all our material and intellectual advantages, our race is bound to perish in South Africa.[121]

In a climate of tough political competition between the ruling South African Party, the National Party and the Labour Party for the vote of white workers it was not possible for the members of the select committee to endorse the *laissez-faire* doctrine, especially when its outcome, because of the demographic realities of a colonial society, would undermine white dominance. With an Afrikaner constituency in mind, the select committee, like the **Indigency Commission** before it, insisted on the importance of agricultural development as a method of preventing 'poor whiteism'.

The novelty in the approach of the select committee was that, notwithstanding the need to find a way of preventing 'poor whiteism' in the rural areas, it focused its attention on the urban poor. It was the perceived decomposition of urban life, and perhaps a tacit recognition that white working class votes were becoming concentrated in urban areas, that made the problem of poor whites in towns a central issue in the evidence and report of this committee. Moreover the identification between poor whites and Afrikaners that started in the **Transvaal Indigency Commission** was developed further during the hearings of the select committee.[122] This shift in the understanding of urban poverty has to be read against the interest that political parties, especially the Labour Party and Hertzog's National Party, were showing in co-opting the white working class electorate in Johannesburg and elsewhere along the reef. But it was also a reflection of the concern that at least som-

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[121] **Report of the Select Committee on European Employment and Labour Conditions**, (S. C. 9-13), para. 2. Hereafter **Report S.C. E.**.

[122] **Evidence of the Select Committee on European Employment and Labour Conditions**, Evidence of Col. T. G. Truter, para.1232; Evidence of J. J. Naude, Inspector of White Labour, para. 1529; Evidence of J. Quinn M L A, para. 3336. Hereafter **Evidence S.C. E.**.

members of the South African Party had about poverty and workers' grievances.

Once again, readily available charity was singled out as prolonging the existence and encouraging the emergence of an undesirable class. Although the presence of multiracial urban slums was not a novelty, in the context of the 1913 moral panic miscegenation, real and imagined, became a recurrent concern. Apathetic indigents were:

> The people who have sunk into the demoralizing and corrupting intercourse with non-Europeans with evil effect on both sections of the p[illegible]ion.[123]

The "misdirected pride" that prevented young white women from working as domestic servants, also mentioned in the **Indigency Commission**, was now seen more negatively since most of these women preferred to take up jobs in Chinese laundries and married Chinese men and lived in appalling conditions in the neighbourhoods of central Johannesburg and Fordsburg.[124] As argued in Chapter Four, laundries were seen as the site of prostitution and work in these places, probably because they were owned by Chinese, was not considered a respectable type of employment for white women.

The extent of the participation of 'poor whites' in liquor trafficking seemed to confirm the criminal tendencies of this class. The fact that some illicit liquor dealers not only supported the families of the white "runners" when they were in jail but also drew children into the traffic, made the problem even less palatable.[125] Every feature of urban life in the slum areas was seen as contributing to the break up of the family unit. 'Poor whites', it was said, did not have a sense of parental responsibility and most of

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[123] **Report S. C. E.**, par 45.

[124] **Evidence S. C. E.**, Evidence of the Minister of Native Affairs, para 833.

[125] **Evidence S. C. E.**, Evidence of P Ross-Frames, member of the Commission into Assaults on Women, paras. 1070-1074.

them had lost their moral sense. This perception became particularly evident during the hearings of the **Commission of Enquiry into Assaults on Women**, appointed on June 18, 1912, and that were taking place simultaneously. The composition of this commission of enquiry is an indication of the understanding of the problem. The commission was chaired by M. de Villiers, who had been criminal judge in the Orange Free State Supreme Court before the South African War and an advocate at the time of the hearings. Amongst its members was General Christiaan R. de Wet, who became a leader of the 1914 rebellion, and three women representing the two most important Afrikaner women associations in the country, the *Zuid Afrikaansche Vrouwen Federasie*, that operated in the Transvaal, and the *Afrikaansche Christelyke Vrouwen Vereeniging*, based in the Cape.

The commission regarded the existence of white women prepared to have sexual intercourse with black men not only as a consequence of widespread criminality, but as an indication of supposed moral perversion. Moral perversion, however, was not an acquired condition but an inherited one, bound to be reproduced in the cities. The medical opinion was that in South Africa insanity amongst poor white people was well marked. Continuous intermarriage produced weak-minded people who, although technically responsible, had not developed their moral sense.[126]

Poor whites' behaviour in the cities was not understood as a survival strategy for desperate men and women. Illicit activities, such as liquor selling to natives and prostitution, were, in the main, indications of hereditary degeneration. But certain low status occupations, such as hawking by females[127] and the selling of flowers and

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[126] The evidence of this commission was not published. Together with the report, it is housed in the Central Archives in Pretoria. (SAB) K. 373. Evidence of the Commission of Enquiry into Assaults on Women, 1913, volume 3 (evidence). December 3, 1912. Dr. T. Gilchrist, District Surgeon, Fordsburg. Hereafter Assaults on Women.

[127] "greatly conduces (women working as hawkers) to a low estimate being formed by the natives of the standard of womankind amongst white races". **Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Assaults on Women.** (U. G. 39-13), para. 98. Hereafter **Assaults on Women.**

newspapers by children[128] were perceived both as an indication of how low poor whites had sunk, and as potential avenues for further demoralization.

The commissioners, drawn largely from rural or small-town backgrounds themselves, viewed urban life as a seed-bed of crime and immorality in which the unemployed easily took root. If this was bad and dangerous in itself, it had a particularly pernicious influence on the black population who got a distorted idea of the white race collectively:

> From his contact with or observation of the white criminal classes and other experiences, the native's estimate of the European virtue has suffered, and from these experiences he probably forms an exaggerated and distorted idea of the vices of profligacy of the white man and especially of the frailty of the white woman.[129]

The demoralizing effect of 'poor white' conduct on the black population was regarded as a social danger of even greater proportions. For what would the future of South Africa be if, in the commission's language, the ruling race could not command the respect of its subjects, if the well constructed hierarchy of race and class was undermined by "the fallen classes of the white races"?

Eugenic thought explained the danger of reproducing hereditary weak traits that were related both to the lower classes' tendency to intermarry and their genetic characteristics. The idea that the environment was an important factor in perpetuating problems of a hereditary nature accentuated the fear of urban slums. Finally, miscegenation, the practical negation of the social hierarchy sanctioned by scientific racism, was seen as the worst threat to the future of South Africa for it implied a

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[128] "poor white children are becoming the dregs of the population. In this connection it is urged that the practice of young white boys and girls selling flowers and other articles late at night in the streets of large towns can only tend to their eventual demoralisation and should be prohibited.", **Assaults on Women**, para. 100.

[129] **Assaults on Women**, para. 88; See also Assaults on Women, Evidence of Major T. E. Mavrogordato, Commissioner of Police, 25 October, 1912.

degradation of the white race.[130]

Following this line of reasoning, F. H. P. Creswell, member of the **Select Committee on European Employment**, a Labour Party representative and a long-standing advocate of a white labour policy, warned the committee about the importance of the 'poor white problem' in South Africa:

> The submerged European population in this country [means] something worse than the submerged European population in an European country.[131]

The Select Committee on European Unemployment and the **Commission into Assaults on Women** used the language of Social Darwinism to define the constitutive elements of the 'poor white problem'. The shared language and preoccupations are hardly surprising for not only did the select committee and the commission of enquiry hear evidence from the same witnesses like, for instance Colonel T. G. Truter, Commissioner of the South African Police, but also at least one of the members of the commission, Percival Ross-Frames, gave evidence before the select committee. Moreover, by 1913 the attempts to deal with poverty and unemployment and the involvement of private and public institutions in the matter had created a group of expert witnesses on the issue. This group drew on the members of the Rand Aid Association, the Salvation Army, and the medical profession; women involved in associations such as *Zuid Afrikaansche Vrouwen Federasie* and *Afrikaansche Christelyke Vrouwen Vereeniging*;[132] the police, the church, state officials and

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[130] **Assaults on Women**, para. 128, see also paras. 55; 88; 92. **Report S.C. E.**, para. 2, and **Evidence S. C. E.**, Evidence of F. H. P. Creswell, para. 2663.

[131] **Evidence S. C. E.** para. 2664.

[132] The ACV was created in 1904 in Cradock, Cape Province, under the leadership of Elizabeth Roos. It was an offshoot of the Afrikaner women's movement around the South African War, and it was connected to, though not controlled by, the Dutch Reformed Church. Since 1907-8 the association had been active in helping Afrikaner poor women and had a deep nationalist content in its ideas and policies. The ZVF was founded in 1903 and its bilingual character and its search for a South African identity brought it closer to *Het Volk* first and to the South African Party later. Yet both organisations had in common their concern about poor white women.

politicians. All of them contributed to find a solution to a problem that concerned political, educational, religious, industrial and state organisations alike.

Nevertheless, despite all the concern and fear aroused by the 'poor white problem', there was no explicit comment in either the report or the evidence of the select committee or the commission of enquiry on the potentially dangerous effect of unemployment in political terms. While there was a clear perception of 'poor whites' as a social and political danger to the state, in the sense that their very existence subverted the racial order on which South African society was based, there was no indication that the misery of the submerged classes could explode into political or social revolt.

Industrial and rural unrest in 1913 and 1914 and the results of the national election of 1914 showed that white workers were almost completely alienated from the governing South African Party. In 1915, probably influenced by his participation in the **Select Committee on European Employment**, John X. Merriman, a friend of Smuts' and member of the House of Assembly for the South African Party, let Smuts know his view on the recent events:

> I refer to the question of the Poor White. This question constitutes a great and growing evil - of the four really important questions before us it is by far - to my mind - the most important as its growth and persistence threatened the very foundations of our national existence. I need not enlarge on the magnitude of the disease - recent events both in the rebellion and the elections that followed, must have convinced even the dullest of us - and I hope neither of us is dull - of the dire possibilities that lie before us from this course.[133]

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[133] J. X. Merriman to J. Smuts, 20 December 1915, quoted in Bottomley, J., 'The South African Rebellion of 1914: The Influence of Industrialisation, Poverty and Poor Whiteism', Seminar Paper, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1982, pp. 2-3. Two years earlier, in an address delivered at Stellenbosch, Merriman pointed out that what had triggered the 1913 strike was the conditions in which poor white people lived. "Like the well-to-do - I fear generally - we shrugged our shoulders and said Am I my brother's keeper? Ah, gentlemen! Our brother will soon let us know, as he has done in the past few weeks, whether we are his keeper or not. Those poor young fellows, who were incited to violent outrages, and who behaved like hooligans, are the result of our negligence in the past, and it is our duty that that negligence is amended as soon as may be." Merriman, J. X, **The Strike and its Lessons**, Stellenbosch, 5

Despite the fact that at least some of the members of the government saw the warning signs of the danger that growing and persistent 'poor whiteism' implied for both the South African Party and the country, the outbreak of World War I somehow displaced the government's preoccupations. As social conflict subsided during the war years and unemployment receded temporarily, there were no more investigations into social issues related to 'poor whiteism' until the end of World War I.

The post-World War I years brought about not only growing unemployment but also a new profitability crisis in the mining industry. Politically the war produced important political cleavages within the Labour Party that eventually gave rise to the organisation of the International Socialist League as an independent party. The 1917 Bolshevik revolution seemed to justify the hopes of the more convinced and militant socialists on the Rand.

In 1920, the South African Party appointed yet another commission of enquiry into unemployment. The tone of the **Report of the Unemployment Commission**, published in 1921, was very different from that of its predecessors:

> Every responsible citizen must shudder when he contemplates the pauper curve through the last two or three decades, and ask himself what the number of poor whites must be in another generation or two. Presumably with the world movement of revolt against similar conditions, and whether due to their own fault, or whether remediable or not, these people of ours too, will not continue under such conditions in silence indefinitely. Urged by specious propaganda they will in ignorance seek remedies which will prove to be merely aggravations of their trouble, but it will be difficult to restrain them. If, therefore, we wish to save them, and avoid possible disaster in the direction indicated we shall have to show them that we have something better to offer them, not only something better than they have today, but something they can look forward to as a means to them and their families of living life upon a civilised scale.[134]

August, 1913.

[134] **Unemployment Commission**, para. 25.

By 1921 it had become clear that poor whites making a living in the illicit occupations and indigents had unemployment in common and that, aside from its moral dimension, unemployment was an economic problem with potentially serious political consequences.

The socio-economic developments that took place between 1908 and 1913 created a shift in the definition of the 'poor white problem'. While, as has been indicated, the **Indigency Commission** in 1908 understood the condition of 'poor whiteism' as being largely rural in origin, in 1913 the **Select Committee on European Employment** and the **Commission into Assaults on Women** perceived 'poor whites' mainly as a product of urban conditions. In 1913, 'poor whites' became a social category that included urbanised men, women and children who did not have the appropriate skills to find employment and who, quite often, turned to a life of crime because they lacked a sense of morality. This perception of the poor and unemployed was accompanied, as argued earlier, by a view of the cities, especially Johannesburg, as the site where moral degradation, miscegenation and the social reproduction of 'poor whites' took place.

In 1913 the poverty of 'poor whites' was still seen as a moral problem while unemployment was held to be basically an economic problem which could be dealt with through relief measures. It was only in the post-war years that this view started changing. In 1921, at the time of the publication of the **Report of the Unemployment Commission**, 'poor whiteism' had become an economic problem of ominous dimensions for the state and 'poor whites' a social group whose political loyalty was not clear.

4. THE STATE AND THE 'POOR WHITE PROBLEM': *LAISSEZ-FAIRE* VERSUS SOCIAL ENGINEERING IN THE TRANSVAAL, 1906-1922.

The distinction between indigency and unemployment, developed by the **Transvaal Indigency Commission** between 1906 and 1908, was fundamental to deciding which part of the problem fell into the state's sphere and which into the private sector's. As was argued in the previous section, growing urbanisation, development of slums, and increasing criminality in Johannesburg changed the definition of poverty between 1906 and 1922. The economic crises of 1906-8, 1913, and 1920-2 accentuated the unemployment problem. Each of these critical economic junctures opened the discussion about the need for, and scope of, state intervention to alleviate or remedy poverty and unemployment. Two opposing views were at stake. One relied on market forces to solve unemployment. The other counted on the state's action both to prevent poverty and unemployment and to provide assistance to the unemployed. After the proclamation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, state action was largely focused on preventing poverty and unemployment. This was mostly done through the development of an educational system devoted to disciplining and teaching technical skills to 'poor whites' in order to facilitate their insertion into the labour market. This section examines the problems and contradictions of state involvement in the solution of poverty and unemployment in the context of the changing perceptions of 'poor whiteism' that took shape from the time of the appointment of the **Transvaal Indigency Commission** in 1906 until the eve of the Rand Revolt of 1922.

Prior to 1906 churches, private organisations and the state had been involved in both charity and unemployment relief without making any effective attempt at centralising the work of the many organisations active on the Witwatersrand. The creation of the Rand Aid Association in 1903 by the Milner administration and the mine owners was a move in this direction. Nevertheless, permanent overlapping with other agencies, including the Office of the Inspector of White Labour, indicates the confusion that existed at the time over the boundaries and definition of poor relief.

Amongst the terms of reference of the **Transvaal Indigency Commission** was the need to establish who should take responsibility for alleviating indigency. The commission's recommendations regarding the prevention of poverty and unemployment have already been examined. We have now to analyse the **Indigency Commission's** suggestions as to how to deal with existing indigency and unemployment. The first important recommendation in this regard was that the state should not provide work for the unemployed at a standard wage. According to the commission's report, free competition in modern industrial society implied that, at times, both capital and labour would be idle and no artificial provision of work could change this.[135] The British liberal conception of the state and the economic relations that informed this argument allowed no place for direct state intervention in the labour market. Nor did it take into account that in a racially divided society free competition in the labour market did not exist to any meaningful extent.

The other form of temporary relief suggested by the **Indigency Commission** was the establishment of labour colonies for the unemployed. Although at first sight an attractive proposition, the commission's report pointed to the downside of this recommendation. Labour colonies ended up serving as shelter for the 'loafers' and ultimately encouraging idleness instead of teaching the discipline of work.[136] Even in those cases where colonies had proved successful, as in the experience of the Salvation Army, the **Indigency Commission** did not propose direct state intervention. Colonies for the unemployed, as well as supervised land settlement for families, such as the colony at Kakamas, managed by the Dutch Reformed Church, benefited a very small section of the population, and did not attack the root causes of unemployment. Consequently, they should be left to the private initiative of churches and charity organisations. As for the creation of a labour bureau, its function could not be to increase employment, but to try to reduce the level of temporary unemployment. And

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[135] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, paras. 249-251.

[136] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, paras. 254-256.

in this sense it was also a short-term solution that should not be taken up by the state. Finally, disregarding the actual existence of the Office of the Inspector of White Labour, in the **Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission** it was recommended that the labour bureau should be under the control of a proposed "central organisation" for the distribution of charity.[137]

The "central organisation" represented the **Indigency Commission**'s idea to absorb all charity work on the Witwatersrand into one body responsible for coordinating the distribution of funds, and for controlling the follow-up of cases assisted by the institutions involved. The backbone of this "central organisation" would be the Rand Aid Association which was already, in the commission's words, a semi-public institution, i.e. an organisation in which the state already had an influence.

According to the **Indigency Commission** the state was particularly unsuited to taking up charity work, and, although it could and should contribute to funding of private institutions, it should not get directly involved in the actual administration of funds for two reasons. First, there was always the risk of the state being accused of favouritism and political corruption due to its lack of an appropriate mechanism to investigate each case presented to it. Secondly, the state had to count on paid employees who, having no preparation or training to deal with indigents, would be neither discerning nor sympathetic to the idea of administering charity. The organisation of charity was designed to prevent indiscriminate almsgiving, but also as a way of moralising the poor. As the function of charity was not only to distribute temporary relief but to morally rescue the poor through observation and actual interaction, state bureaucracy was considered inappropriate to the task.

The commission's report reflected, as argued in the previous section, older British concerns about charity. In analysing the work of the Society for Organising Charitable

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[137] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, paras. 264-266.

Relief and Repressing Mendicancy, better known as the Charity Organisation Society. In mid-nineteenth century London, G. Stedman-Jones has argued that charity was a gift with a social function.[138] In rural communities, especially, the gift had four defining elements: it was a voluntary sacrifice, it generated prestige, it reinforced subordination, and it implied an obligation. Stedman-Jones argued that in the cities the separation between classes produced the deformation of the gift. It turned into indiscriminate almsgiving and was depersonalised. Thus, the work of the Charity Organisation Society in London was an attempt to return charity to its function as a mechanism of social control, that is, a system of 'scientific' observation by which the problems of the poor could be detected and cured.

Charity, it was argued in the **Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission**, should be based on the investigation of each case as well as on follow-up investigations through visitation and supervision to avoid the negative effects of indiscriminate almsgiving:

> In order to secure this elasticity, and to avoid the granting of relief in cases where it might pauperise the recipient, a proper system of inspection and visitation is essential. Careful enquiry must be made by a competent person before assistance is given at all, and the case must be kept under constant supervision during the whole period that is being relieved. Efficient visitation is the key to success in the work of charity.[139]

Visitation was considered essential to rescue the poor from their lack of education, thriftlessness, drunkenness and idleness. Visitation as a system of gathering information about the poor was a way of raising charity to the level of a science of the poor. Thus conceived, charity itself became a mechanism of social control. For it not only helped in detecting the existence of the poor and in classifying them it also performed two more functions. On the one hand, it contributed to the rescue of the poor by educating them in new and better habits of work and hygiene. On the other

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[138] Stedman-Jones, G., **Outcast London**, pp. 252-5.

[139] **Report Tvl. I. C.**, para. 320.

hand, based on the obligation contracted in receiving charity, it developed a sense of subordination and gratitude amongst the poorer popular classes that was to neutralise deeper social dissatisfaction.

It is interesting that in assigning the functions of the "central organisation", in spite of the initially clearcut separation between the unemployed and the poor, this body was also to have the control of the labour bureau. This not only meant putting poverty and unemployment in the same category. It also restricted the action of the state to the provision of relief works during crises and the partial funding of charity.

The most important role assigned to the state in dealing with this matter was the provision of education, especially technical education. It is noteworthy that state intervention through education was, by definition, directed to the new generation and not to the population already in distress. Compulsory education for white children had been introduced in the Transvaal in 1907. The need to take children off the streets, which became more demanding after Union when the socialisation between black and white children was seen as part of the process of miscegenation of poor whites,[140] implied more than simply putting children into school. As L. Chisholm has argued, taking children off the streets was a way of punishing the parents and families who had allowed children to enter into the criminal classes. Also the school gave the state the possibility of reforming those elements of the lower classes' culture and ideology that were contrary to the state's need for a disciplined white work force.[141]

The identification of Afrikaners with 'poor whites' that started developing during the 1906-8 economic depression occurred in a context of nationalistic revival amongst the Afrikaners. The movement to defend and re-create an Afrikaner identity that had started soon after the South African War gained strength with the creation of Prellers'

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[140] **Evidence S. C. E.**, Evidence of P. Ross-Frames para. 1062; Evidence of Col. T. G. Truter, para.1306; Evidence of Rev. A. Luckhoff, Dutch Reformed Church, para. 1709.

[141] Chisholm, L., 'Reformatories and Industrial Schools in South Africa', p. 75.

Afrikaansche Taal Genootskap in 1905, which supported the use of written Afrikaans instead of Dutch. The need to preserve *taal* and *volk* became especially important in two ways. On the one hand it was seen as a way of counteracting Milner's active and aggressive policy of Anglicisation, particularly in the system of education. On the other, it would help to preserve family values and ethnic identity that were being eroded as a consequence of the rapid urbanisation of poor white families.[142] It was in this context, and against the backdrop of the redefinition of women's role within the Dutch Reformed Church, that organisations like *Afrikaansche Christelyke Vrouwen Vereeniging* insisted on the need to create industrial schools for girls and stressed the fact that illiteracy and lack of education were the major components of the 'poor white problem'.[143]

In the early 1910s the preoccupation with infancy and education took the forefront in the debate about 'poor whites'. During the hearings of the 1913 **Select Committee on European Employment** much stress was put on the need to reform the unhealthy and immoral urban environment. The deficiencies of the 'poor white' family should be partly compensated for by the school. According to Rev. A. D Luckhoff, minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in Darling, Cape Province:

> There you would reclaim the child of the fallen classes and the child who is reclaimed is an asset to the state, whereas if he is left to himself he is a liability and a serious liability too. I think in almost every district in the country should be an institution for the reclamation of these destitute children and children of the criminal classes. [144]

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[142] Hofmeyr, I., 'Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnicity, 1902-1924', in Marks, S. and Trapido, S., (eds.), **The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa**, (London 1987), pp. 95-123.

[143] Du Toit, M., 'Women, Welfare and the Nurturing of Afrikaner Nationalism: A Social History of the Afrikaanse Christelyke Vroue Vereeniging, c. 1870-1939', Ph.D thesis, University of Cape Town, 1996, p. 94.

[144] **Evidence S. C. E.**, Evidence of Rev. A. D. Luckhoff, Minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, para. 1704.

The Prisons and Reformatories Act of 1910 and the passing of the Children's Protection Act in 1913, that put white children under the protection of the state, were part of a wider movement of state intervention in the social sphere which had two main objectives. On the one hand it attempted to criminalise and racialise poverty. On the other, it aimed at preparing and training the future generations of 'poor whites' to compete in an increasingly racially structured labour market.[145] The fact that industrial schools depended on the Administration of Prisons indicates how punishment and re-education complemented each other in the state's perception of the 'poor white problem'. As Jacob de Villiers Roos, Secretary of Justice and Director of Prisons for the Union, put it in his evidence before the select committee:

> Other institutions which we have and which are not really criminal are the industrial schools for European juveniles, waifs and stray male and female, whom we pluck away from circumstances and surroundings which would cause them to drift into crime.[146]

In investigating the areas of employment available for white unskilled workers in the country, the members of the 1913 **Select Committee on European Employment** found themselves face to face with the problem of the social reproduction of the white working class. The findings of the **Commission into Assaults of Women** reinforced the sense that something had to be done to save entire families of white workers from degradation and degeneration. There is not one line of evidence in which the expression "respectable working class" was used. Nevertheless, by 1913, the concern that the future generations at least should be won over to the discipline of work, to healthy habits, to temperance and to thrift echoed the British preoccupation with separating the "residuum", casual workers with no habit of industry and criminal tendencies, from the disciplined and healthy workers.[147]

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[145] Chisholm, L., 'Reformatories and Industrial Schools in South Africa', p. 130.

[146] **Evidence S. C. E.**, Evidence of J. de Villiers Roos, para. 4829.

[147] Stedman-Jones, G., **Outcast London**, pp. 192-3; pp. 303-8; and pp. 309-12.

The preoccupation with health, defective birth and degenerative features in the new generation found its way into the points discussed during a Child Welfare Conference held in Cape Town in 1917.

> There are a large number of poor whites because they are mentally defective and they have not the opportunities which we had.[148]

In view of this it was necessary to make compulsory the early notification of birth to prevent mortality and control the health of the newborn. Health visitors should be appointed to perform this task. As was shown in Chapter Three, the Medical Officer of Johannesburg had already implemented a system of health visitors in 1908. At the same time medical inspections were to be organised in schools to detect the feebleminded, who, according to statistics handled in the conference, were 5 in each 1,000 'poor white' children.

The issue of miscegenation and the need to combat slums, as the foremost place of racial degeneration, was an equally serious concern, particularly in Johannesburg. As was argued in Chapter Three, the urban question and the 'poor white problem' were deeply intertwined, particularly in the post-war years.

As public charity was slowly transformed into welfare in the post-war years, the science of the poor became more sophisticated. Medical doctors, health visitors, teachers, and town planners, no less than the personnel working in the prisons and reformatories, were integrated into state departments dealing with the different aspects of what was regarded as the 'poor white problem'.

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[148] (SAB), (MNW), 386/2193/17. Letter from the Juvenile Advisory Board to the Superintendent Chief Inspector of White Labour, Cape Town, 1917.

5. CONCLUSION.

As van Onselen has observed:

> Clearly, there is no group or class that simply waits patiently in the wings to play its part until such time as it is summoned on to the stage of economic development by a blast on the trumpet of history.[119]

Johannesburg's white poor did not wait. But they did not climb on to the stage of economic development as a monolithic class, easy to define and act upon. Urban poverty was the result of historical processes in which economic forces as well as social conditions and political decisions were involved. If poverty amongst whites existed long before the appointment of the **Transvaal Indigency Commission of Enquiry** in 1906, 'poor whites', as a defined social category, were, in part, also a historical construction because they became a question that needed to be explained and dealt with by the state.

Between 1890 and 1922 economic development in the Transvaal increased the number of poor amongst the white population, both in rural and urban areas. Especially in the late 1800s the seriousness of unemployment and indigency amongst whites turned 'poor whites' into a question that needed the state's attention. In 1908 the **Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission** argued for a separation between 'poor whites', unemployed and chronically poor, at the same time that it emphasised the rural origins of 'poor whites'. This explanation of the origins of this social group was, arguably, the most influential document in making 'poor whites' largely synonymous with Afrikaners. In the context of the changes in the government and the organisation of a greater South African state that took place in 1907 and 1910, the ethnic character of poverty added a political dimension to the 'poor white problem' as first local and later national political parties started competing for the votes of this sector of the

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[119] Van Onselen, C., 'The Main Reef Road', p. 112.

population.

By 1913, increasing urbanisation and growing numbers of white indigents in cities like Johannesburg, brought about a change in the conceptualisation of the 'poor white problem' and the perception of the pernicious effects of the urban environment. The interest in poor whites as a social category generated in the countryside shifted to the cities. As argued in section 3, this new understanding of the 'poor white problem' combined with a view of the cities as places of degeneration and demoralisation accentuated the ruling class's tendency to criminalise poverty. This, in turn, eclipsed the initial separation between the 'poor white', the unemployed and the chronic poor.

Before the outbreak of World War I the 'poor white problem' was essentially understood as a social and ideological problem. Its most alarming features were the criminal tendencies shown by this sector of the population and the lack of moral sense that allowed them to interact socially and to have sexual intercourse with the black population in the urban slums.

Rural and urban unrest in 1913 and 1914 served as a serious warning about discontent in the countryside, working class disaffection, and the magnitude of white unemployment on the Witwatersrand. Yet most of the proposed solutions to the 'poor white problem' and unemployment aimed at instilling the discipline of work in new generations rather than at solving the existing problem of unemployment.

The immediate post-war years were characterised by an economic crisis in the mining industry, growing unemployment and radicalisation of working class politics. In this context another shift took place in the ruling class's understanding of the 'poor white problem'. The **Unemployment Commission** saw in 1921 that 'poor whites' were not only a menace to the survival of a society that was racially organised, but a political danger for the state because of the international revolutionary climate.

Between 1890 and 1922, and especially in the aftermath of the South African War, Social Darwinism was applied in South Africa to the understanding and explanation of, and the remedies proposed to eliminate, white indigency. The concept of evolution that helped to organise race, culture and society hierarchically not only justified the ruling position of the white race, it also helped to place 'poor whites' lower down on the scale of social evolution. Thus, due to historical conditions as well as moral and biological factors, 'poor whites' were halfway between the heights of European civilisation and the depths of the "uncivilised natives".

Between 1890 and 1906 political intervention in the 'poor white problem' was, as was shown in section 4, restricted to the provision of relief work and to the organisation of institutions to coordinate the distribution of charity. This was in part due to understanding poverty and unemployment as consequences of periodic economic crises and to the idea that it was not a function of the state to offset the forces of the market. But as economic crises made it apparent that, in a racially divided society, market forces left to themselves would eventually undermine white supremacy, state intervention became more active. These modifications in the state's understanding of the 'poor white problem' were intertwined with the tough political competition that followed the constitution of the Union of South Africa in 1910.

Between 1907 and 1922, as 'poor whiteism' acquired a fuller moral and ideological dimension, there was growing intervention by the state to, in Chisholm's words, "change the class position of poor whites". Yet it was precisely the direction taken by the state in addressing the 'poor white problem' - the development of an educational and penal system to discipline and punish the new generation of white workers - that prevented the South African Party government, as much as the opposition parties, from seeing that 'poor whites', together with the employed members of the white working class, could upset the balance of power in South Africa. When the government finally saw the warning signs in 1921 it was almost too late and the Rand Revolt was already in the making.

CONCLUSION

THE MAKING OF THE WHITE WORKING CLASS IN JOHANNESBURG, 1890-1922.

During the thirty-two years that constitute the focus of this study, the making of the white working class in Johannesburg was a continuous and sometimes contradictory process punctuated by five economic crises related to the mining industry: 1890-1;1896-7; 1906-8; 1913-14;1921-22, a costly and bloody war (1899-1902), and three major political changes in 1902, 1907 and 1910. Moreover, the white workers who had been the protagonists of this study belonged to at least two different generations. By 1904 the ravages of silicosis had either killed or disabled most members of the first generation of overseas workers who came to the Witwatersrand.[1] The oft quoted example of the eighteen members of the 1907 strike committee of whom, by 1913, thirteen had died of silicosis,[2] suggests that the process of development of white workers' class consciousness was literally interrupted by the death of the first generation of white miners.

This thesis has tried to show how the economic, social, political and ideological processes that took place between 1890 and 1922 influenced the lives of Johannesburg's white workers creating an embryonic sense of community and identity amongst some of these men and their families. White working class identity and sense of community were, however, far from being clearly defined, homogeneous and coherently articulated in political terms. Like the white working class itself they were also in the making.

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1 Katz, E., **The White Death: Silicosis on the Witwatersrand Gold Fields, 1886-1910.** (Johannesburg), pp.209-13.

2 Katz, E., **A Trade Union Aristocracy: A History of White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913.** (Johannesburg 1976), p. 334. Hereafter **A Trade Union Aristocracy.**

This study has focused mainly on social relations, relations between some men and women; Afrikaner and English; employed and unemployed; single and married workers; law abiding citizens and delinquents, and, last but not least, between the state in different forms and white workers. The individual protagonists of these relationships sometimes had identifiable names, addresses, trades, wives and children, friends. But biographical details that would allow William and Anna Culvert, William and Elizabeth Kirby, Stefanus and Phoebe van Niekerk, John McCurry and the scores of working class men and women recorded in the baptismal registers of the Anglican Church, in the lists of the Inspector of White Labour, in court records, or in the evidence before commissions of enquiry, to become full historical characters are not available. Limits largely imposed by primary sources precluded this thesis from being a narrative of workers' class experiences in their own words. The fragments of their lives that have been possible to reconstruct are only glimpses into working class experiences. As S. Schama has eloquently put it:

> Historians are left for ever chasing shadows, painfully aware of their inability ever to reconstruct a dead world in its completeness, however thorough or revealing their documentation. Of course, they make do with other work: the business of formulating problems of supplying explanations about cause and effect. But the certainty of such answers always remains contingent on their unavoidable remoteness from their subjects. We are doomed to be forever hailing someone who has just gone round the corner and out of earshot.[3]

Despite these epistemological and methodological constraints this thesis has sought to address itself to examine the ways in which economic, political and ideological processes were experienced by Johannesburg's white workers in their day-to-day life. Four major themes have been chosen for that purpose: family, housing, the development of social networks and unemployment.

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3 Schama, S., **Dead Certainties**. (New York 1991), p. 320.

Through the analysis of a data base constructed from the baptismal records of the white working class parishes of the Anglican Church, which involved 2,290 families who had their children baptized in the Anglican churches of Belgravia, Fordsburg, Jeppestown and Johannesburg central, it has been possible to demonstrate two points. First, that the Anglican Church was not the exclusive domain of the English-speaking working class population of Johannesburg. Between 1890 and 1906 British and Afrikaner workers sometimes intermarried and they chose to have their children baptized as Anglican. Secondly, that the principal breadwinners of these families were often compelled to change jobs in times of crisis and that frequently, when this coincided with a new birth, a shift of jobs was accompanied by a movement of the whole family from an acceptable working class neighbourhood to a slum area where rentals were substantially cheaper.

The relevance of these findings is two-fold. On the one hand, they show that amongst some of the newly urbanised Afrikaners 'ethnicity', particularly in terms of their allegiance to the Dutch Reform Church, might not have been that strong a feeling. On the other, they suggest that the geographical mobility of white working class families, due to high rentals and the need to live close to the work-place, together with the fairly frequent changes of jobs of the principal breadwinners, brought British and Afrikaner workers closer. By 1906 these social trends, together with the predominance of Afrikaner women in the population of Johannesburg, which Milner's immigration policy failed to redress, had created the conditions for the emergence of a 'South African' working class that was less British than the reconstruction administration would have liked and less Afrikaner than the ideologues of Afrikaner nationalism would wish us believe.

Demographic tendencies and not yet fully formed Afrikaner 'ethnic' identity, however, are not enough to explain the process of development of a sense of community amongst British and Afrikaner workers in Johannesburg. It has been argued in this thesis that class experience had an important role in this process. The neighbourhood,

the actual type of accommodation where white workers and their families lived, and the characteristics of their day-to-day lives arguably constitute a central part of their class experience.

We have seen in chapter two that between 1890 and 1906 the high cost of working class rental accommodation and the shortage of housing, which acquired serious proportions by 1903, were, to a great extent, a consequence of the mining companies' control over the land and property market in Johannesburg. Two main points have been argued in this chapter. First, that after the South African War the reconstruction administration did very little to challenge the mines' control over land in and around Johannesburg. This was due, on the one hand, to the British administration's non-confrontational approach to the mining industry and to the state's officials' confidence on the market forces left to themselves to eventually solve the shortage of working class housing, on the other. Secondly, that lack of direct state intervention in the housing market accentuated the most striking features of the geography of class in Johannesburg: white workers clustered together in the freehold suburbs east and west of the city centre from where they could easily get access to the mines. The comparative isolation of working class neighbourhoods together with the characteristics of white workers' accommodation were creating the space for the development of a working class identity and sense of community that often cut across 'ethnic' differences.

After World War I there was a change in local and central government's approach to urban problems and, especially, to white working class housing. This change, as argued in chapter three, was the result of two concomitant processes: worsening economic conditions, evidenced in the 1906-8; 1913-14 and 1921-22 slumps, and increased unemployment which accentuated workers' inability to face the prices asked for rental accommodation. This, in turn, enhanced the proliferation of slum properties in and around the city which were progressively seen by the ruling class as the sites of miscegenation and moral decay. The increasingly militant outlook of the working

class as expressed in the 1907, 1913 and 1914 strikes along with the political changes brought about by the granting of Responsible Government to the Transvaal in 1907 and the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, accentuated the political parties' need to win white workers votes making them more sensitive to the problems of the working class electorate.

Chapters two and three, with their focus on urban problems and the political economy of white working class housing in Johannesburg provided an insight into the contradictions between the general political aims of the state, the different forms of its intervention in society and the social and economic processes that took place in Johannesburg during the period 1890-1922. The evidence and argument presented in these chapters attempted to shed some light on an area that, with very few exceptions, has been neglected in South African historiography of the working class.[4]

Chapter four explored white workers' lives in the city between 1890 and 1922, from two different angles. On the one hand it focused on the material conditions of existence in Johannesburg's working class neighbourhoods showing some of the different strategies of survival developed by white working class families when faced with lack of affordable accommodation, general high cost of living and spells of unemployment. On the other, it analysed the development of working class social networks in the city through the study of the constitution of formalised relationships, i.e. marriage and fictive kinship; and informal or circumstantial relations, including several illustrative criminal liaisons, that took place in the context of the working class neighbourhoods and the city at large.

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4 Krut, R., '"A Quart into a Pint Pot": The Working Class and the "Housing Shortage" in Johannesburg, 1896-1906', B. A. Honours dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1979; Parnell, S., 'Slums, Segregation and Poor Whites in Johannesburg, 1920-1934' in Morrell, R., (ed.), **White but Poor: Studies in the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940**, (Pretoria 1992), pp.115-29.

Two sets of findings have been presented in this chapter. First, that in many cases members of British and Afrikaner families chose each other as godparents to their children and had them baptized in the Anglican church. Secondly, that working class social life in Johannesburg developed in overlapping circles in which work-place, trade and neighbourhood intersected.

These findings suggest the need to nuance our understanding of working class culture and identity at two levels. On the one hand, white working class culture was not exclusively based on a separation between home-life and an overwhelmingly male realm of work, bars and brothels. Not only, as shown in chapter one, were working class families between 1890 and 1906 seemingly more important in numerical terms than contemporary politicians' concerns and later historiography had led us believe. Throughout the period 1890-1922 families often played an important role in the configuration of workers' sense of community and identity and were not isolated from other areas of social exchange in the city. On the other, class experience in some cases seemed to have been stronger than 'ethnic' divisions between British and Afrikaner workers at the time of choosing partners, godparents and friends. This does not mean, nevertheless, that the relation between the two main components of the white working class were not contradictory, as the tensions between British miners and Afrikaner blacklegs showed during the 1907 strike, varied over time, and were at specific junctures, such as during the South African War and the eve of the World War I, stressed by different political choices.

Chapter five analysed the 'poor white problem' from an economic as well as from an ideological perspective. Two points have been argued here. First, that between 1890 and 1922 there were at least three important shifts in the ruling class's understanding of the 'poor white problem'. The first one was marked by the publication of the **Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission** in 1908 which acknowledged the existence of a social group called 'poor whites' which was largely of rural origin. This conduced to the identification between 'poor whites' and Afrikaner people. The

second shift came about in the context of the moral panic of 1913 and coincided with the ruling class's growing concern with the degenerative effects of the urban environment on the lower strata of the white working class. From 1913 onwards 'poor whites' were mainly conceived of as a product of urban conditions. Both the 1908 and 1913 definitions of the 'poor white problem' had in common a perception of poverty as a moral problem. The third shift took place around 1921, when the ruling class started viewing 'poor whiteism' as a socio-economic problem with potentially dangerous political consequences for the state.

The second point argued in chapter five was that the conceptualisation of 'poor whiteism' as a moral and ideological problem appeared to have restricted the state's intervention to the establishment of an educational and penal system able to discipline and punish the new generation of white workers. It has been suggested here that this understanding of the 'poor white problem' delayed the realisation, especially amongst certain key members of the South African Party that already existing dissatisfaction amongst the unemployed could, given the opportunity, explode in political violence.

This thesis has demonstrated that, in some respects, between 1890 and 1922 white workers in Johannesburg were developing a sense of community and identity, however small and inchoate, which had an important part in the political expression of their grievances. The fluidity of the relations between some British and Afrikaner workers, the growing importance of family, neighbourhood and trade in the constitution of white working class social networks pointed out in this thesis suggest the need for a more subtle and complex analysis of the process of formation of Afrikaner identity and of the characteristics of white workers' political expression, especially regarding the 1913 and 1922 strikes.[5]

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[5] Simons, H. J. and Simons, R. E., **Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950** (Harmondsworth 1969); Katz, E., **A Trade Union Aristocracy: A History of White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913.** (Johannesburg 1976); Johnstone, F. A., **Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa.** (London 1976); Davies, R. H., **Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa, 1900-1960: An Historical Materialist Analysis of Class Formation and Class Relations.** (Brighton 1979); Johns, S., **Raising the Red**

In terms of the study of Afrikaner ethnicity two main trends can be distinguished in South African historiography over the past three decades. During the 1960s and 1970s most of the liberal literature dealing with Afrikaner identity and nationalism was based on two assumptions. On the one hand, it often viewed 'Afrikanerdom' as a discrete identity and organic unity of the Afrikaner people without fully examining the actual process of constitution of such identity. In his study of the relations between the British Empire and the Boer republics prior to the South African War, L. Thompson took nationalism as an unproblematic category and suggested that:

> Among Afrikaners, as among the subject peoples of the Austrian Empire, there were the pre-conditions for a nationalistic movement.[6]

Explaining the origins of Afrikaner nationalism, R. de Villiers has argued that:

> It came about, therefore, that the numerically small and widely dispersed Afrikaner people, descendants of Dutch, French and German immigrants, with a later sprinkling of British, gradually developed a group consciousness which, by the end of the nineteenth century, had grown into national cohesion with its own distinctive philosophy and way of life.[7]

Despite his acknowledgment of the different cultural and demographic influences at play in the configuration of Afrikaner nationalism, de Villiers saw the process itself as unproblematic and comparatively short since it culminated in national cohesion with a distinctive way of life by the end of the nineteenth century.

Authors like H. Giliomee and H. Adam, I. Hexham, and T. Dunbar Moodie attempted

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Flag: The International Socialist League & the Communist party of South Africa. (Bellville 1995); Hirson, B. and Williams, G. A., **The Delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924.** (London 1995).

6 Thompson, L., 'Great Britain and the Afrikaner Republics, 1870-1899', in Wilson, M. and Thompson, L., (eds.), **Oxford History of South Africa.** (Oxford 1971), p. 301.

7 De Villiers, R., 'Afrikaner Nationalism', in Wilson, M. and Thompson, L., (eds.), **Oxford History of South Africa.** (Oxford 1971), p. 366.

a more systematic and subtle exploration of the role of Afrikaner intelligentsia in interpreting Afrikaner history.[8] These authors made a serious effort to distinguish between the culture and identity proposed in the discourse of the intellectual and political elite and ordinary people's reactions to that discourse and their day-to-day experience of their culture and identity. Yet, at times, their analyses slid into the unproblematic idea of a unified and cohesive Afrikanerdom. Moodie, for instance, traced the changes and nuances of what constituted Afrikaner civil religion and theology from the early days of Boer settlement in the Cape to 1948. Referring to the pervasiveness of Afrikaner civil religion in the years immediately prior to and after the South African War, Moodie argued, though admittedly in a tentative way, the existence of an Afrikaner "collective consciousness":

> The best indication of the extent to which this civil religion permeated the "collective consciousness" of those who fought to the bitter end remains in the minutes of the debates at Vereeniging.[9]

The second approach saw Afrikaner identity as historically constructed. The works of D. O'Meara and I. Hofmeyr have done much to question the existence of Afrikanerdom as a discrete unity, suggesting that Afrikaner identity was in fact "a creation" of an intellectual and political elite which saw the need to protect, especially after the South African War, the Afrikaner population from the process of Anglicisation proposed by Milner.[10] Authors like A. Grundlingh have shown how social and economic cleavages within Afrikaner society were expressed in political

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8 Giliomee, H and Adam, H., **The Rise and Crisis of Afrikaner Power**, (Cape Town 1979). Hereafter **Rise and Crisis**; Hexham, I., **The Irony of Apartheid: The Struggle for National Independence of Afrikaner Calvinism Against British Imperialism**, (New York 1981). Hereafter **The Irony of Apartheid**; Moodie, Dunbar T., **The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion**, (Berkeley 1980). Hereafter **The Rise of Afrikanerdom**.

9 Moodie, Dunbar, T., **The Rise of Afrikanerdom**, p. 33.

10 O'Meara, D., **Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948**, (Cambridge 1983). Hereafter **Volkskapitalisme**; Hofmeyr, I., 'Building a Nation from Words: Afrikaans Language, Literature and Ethnicity, 1902-1924', in Marks, S. and Trapido, S., (eds.), **The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa**, (London 1987), pp. 95-123.

terms during the South African War.[11] Yet there are no studies that have pursued this line of research and showed in a more comprehensive and subtle way how Afrikaner 'ethnicity' was experienced by ordinary people in their daily lives in an urban setting where cultural interactions made the preservation of identity in a "pure" state far more difficult.

In terms of the relation between 'ethnicity' and religion, it is still generally assumed, despite the research done by I. Hexham, that the large majority of Afrikaner people lived their Christianity exclusively through the Dutch Reformed Church, which in turn had a unifying function and a decisive ideological effect in the constitution of an emerging Afrikaner 'ethnic' identity. In a recent article J. Kinghorn analysed the inner logic of Afrikanerdom and its usage of ethnicity during the second half of the twentieth century through a study of Afrikaner religion and theology.[12] Referring to the usage of the biblical story of Babel by Reverend J. D. Vorster in 1947, Kinghorn pointed out that:

> Afrikaners were entirely unprepared to deal with the experiences of relativity and insecurity that followed their bewildering exposure to social, cultural and moral plurality. For them, all known parameters had collapsed and were subjected to all kinds of insecurity that people experience as they feel the shattering of their familiar world. A crisis of self-understanding developed. In their efforts to reconstruct their social cosmos, the combination of nationalistic politics and a religiously constructed pre-modern social cosmology seemed to provide an answer.[13]

Although Kinghorn's analysis focuses on the origin of a theological explanation for

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11 Grundlingh, A., 'Collaborators in Boer Society' in Warwick, P., (ed.), **The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902**, (London 1980), pp. 258-78.

12 Kinghorn, J., 'Social Cosmology, Religion and Afrikaner Ethnicity', **Journal of Southern African Studies**, 20, 3, 1994, pp.393-404. Hereafter 'Social Cosmology'.

13 Kinghorn, J., 'Social Cosmology', p. 402.

apartheid, one could certainly read his deconstructionist approach to the story of Babel backwards and make a parallel between the "crisis of self-understanding" experienced by Afrikaner people in the late 1940s and the "shattering of the familiar world" of the Afrikaner folk in the aftermath of the South African War. Yet, in the late 1940s as in the late 1890s, ideology and discourse were not the sole arena in which Afrikaner people sought and developed a sense of identity. For not only were there competing and varied versions of Afrikaner subjectivity and identity at play during both periods[14] but ordinary people did not always, or did not necessarily, assimilate the identity constructed through these discourses. As important as discourse analysis can be in the explanation of ideology and identity, discourses are elaborated in historical contexts and, in this sense, they are embedded in a process by which particular identities are received, incorporated, discarded and transformed according to people's needs and circumstances as well as to political conditions. The outcome of the process is by no means inscribed in the process itself.

Many of the Afrikaners families who migrated to Johannesburg at different stages between the 1890s and the early 1920s showed a great deal of ingenuity in finding an economic and social niche in a rapidly transforming capitalist city. While for many Afrikaners the Dutch Reform Church must have constituted a source of spiritual strength, and cultural identity, it was not the only one.[15] The fact that some British and Afrikaner workers intermarried and in certain cases have their children baptized in the Anglican Church suggests that ethnicity and religion cannot be read off each other in a linear way, and that whatever the force of the ideologues' and politicians' plea people are sometimes more responsive to experience than to discourse.

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[14] On the competing ideas of Afrikanerdom during the 1930s and 1940s see O'Meara, D., **Volkskapitalisme**, especially Introduction, and chapters 5, 11 and 12. See also Giliomee, H., 'The Growth of Afrikaner Identity' in Giliomee, H., and Adam, H., **Rise and Crisis**., especially pp. 83-4 and pp. 112-13.

[15] Fourie, J., **Afrikaners in die Goudstad. Deel 1, 1886-1924**. (Pretoria 1978). See also Hexham, I., **The Irony of Apartheid**, especially pp.70-75.

With reference to the analysis of white workers' political expression most of the literature has been centred on the specific grievances experienced by mine workers. H. J. Simons' and R. E. Simons' account of the 1913 and 1922 strikes have indicated the anger and frustration felt by the white miners involved and the comparatively important part Afrikaner mine workers took in the 1913 strike.[16] E. Katz's detailed analysis of the 1913 miners' strike has been certainly illuminating both in terms of the actual events that took place between May and July and of the ideological underpinnings of the strike leadership.[17] F. A. Johnstone's thorough analysis of the changes of the labour process in the mining industry and the form that the fragmentation of jobs in the mines took between 1914 and 1922 have helped explain the grievances that were at the origin of the Rand Revolt.[18] S. Johns' work looked into the part that spontaneous workers' organisation had at the beginning of the 1922 strike.[19] This literature, however, took these strikes almost exclusively as white workers' direct response to a long standing problem at the work-place. Katz did not pursue her own reference to the participation of women and children in the 1913 strike.[20] Johns did not attribute great importance to the role played by women in punishing strike breakers during 1922. The fact that both in 1913 and 1922 the strikes overflowed from the work place, spilling violence and destruction over the streets of central Johannesburg, and that in 1922 the working class neighbourhood of Vrededorp was literally taken over by the strikers, although indicated in all the literature, was seen rather as a dramatic dimension of the events than as an important element in working class reality which needed exploration in its own right. While this

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16 Simons, H. J. and Simons, R. E., **Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950**, (Harmondsworth 1969), pp. 156-60.

17 Katz, E., **A Trade Union Aristocracy**, pp. 381-446.

18 Johnstone, F. A., **Class, Race and Gold: A Study of Class Relations and Racial Discrimination in South Africa**, (London 1976), pp. 93-150.

19 Johns, S., **Raising the Red Flag: The International Socialist League & The Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932**, (Bellville 1995), 132-5.

20 Katz, E., **A Trade Union Aristocracy**, p. 403 and p. 409.

study has not explored the different dimensions of the 1913 and 1922 strikes in detail, it has suggested some of the conditions that made these events possible.

J. Krikler's recent article on the participation of women in the 1922 Rand Revolt constitutes a refreshing approach to an almost unexplored aspect of white working class consciousness in Johannesburg.[21] Yet, Krikler's concern was more with gender issues amongst the working class than with the complexities of the formation and articulation of workers' class consciousness. The women who took part in the Rand Revolt were presumably the mothers, the daughters, the sisters, the lovers, the wives of some of the strikers and in that sense their visible presence in the streets and on the mines brought closer the domestic world and the work-place. This in itself should constitute an entry point to ask new questions about Johannesburg's white working class identity and consciousness. Here again, this thesis has attempted to point to some of the directions which any new analysis might explore.

Without dismissing in any way the importance of understanding the changes in the mines' labour process in order to explain the 1913 and 1922 strikes or the differences within the leadership to evaluate their development and outcome, it seems necessary to add one more dimension to the analysis. If, as it has been suggested in this thesis, family, neighbourhood and work-place far from being isolated constituted a social continuum, the inter-connection between all three should be taken into account at the time of analysing events such as the 1913 strike and the Rand Revolt. Only a more sophisticated approach to the analysis and the documentation of these episodes will be able to explain why a letter such as the one below was found in the pocket of a non-mining worker arrested under martial law in March 1922:

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[21] Krikler, J., 'Women, Violence and the Rand Revolt of 1922', **Journal of Southern African Studies**, 22, 3, 1996, pp. 349-72.

To the Right Hon. General Smuts,

May the hound of hell chase him over the blue rocks of buggery, over the red rocks of hell, and may his arsehole become a festering sore, dry off and break out in his mouth and remain there a festering sore for the remainder of his bloody life. May his balls fester and drop off into his toes and cripple him for life the bloody bastard. The day he dies we shall walk a hundred miles over broken bottles and tin tacks with our bare feet just to shit in his grave.[22]

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[22] (TAD) Johannesburg Landdroste (LJB) Martial Law, 1922. The King versus Henry Glazer, March 14, 1922. Henry Glazer was a 48 year old Russian tailor.

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4. UNION GOVERNMENT, 1910-1922

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III. SECONDARY SOURCES

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B. SELECT BOOKS AND JOURNALS

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(iii) Refugee Aid Department, 1901-1903.

(iv) *Registrar Special Criminal Court, Johannesburg*, 1901-1903.

(v) Secretary of Mines, 1901-1908.

(vi) Colonial Secretary, Transvaal, 1901-1910.

(vii) Secretary of the Governor of the Transvaal, 1901-1910.

(viii) Secretary, Transvaal Police, 1901-1922.

(ix) Lieutenant Governor of the Transvaal Colony, 1902-1907.

(x) Commissioner Transvaal Town Police, 1902-1909.

(xi) Medical Officer of Health for the Transvaal, 1902-1910.

(xii) Attorney General, 1902-1922.

(xiii) Registrar of the Supreme Court of South Africa, 1902-1922.

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