319

THE ROLE OF SOLOMON T. PLAATJE (1876-1932) IN SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

by

Brian Peel Willan

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

November 1979

ProQuest Number: 11010557

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.

ProQuest 11010557

Published by ProQuest LLC (2018). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.
This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

ABSTRACT

Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje was born to Tswana, Christian, parents in 1876, and grew up on a mission station near Kimberley. After first working as a post office messenger, in 1898 he moved to Mafeking to become a court interpreter, and served in this capacity during the famous siege. In 1902 he became editor of an English/Tswana newspaper, _Koranta ea Becoana_, and established his reputation as a journalist and spokesman for his people. Shortly after Union in 1910 he moved to Kimberley and became editor of another newspaper, _Tsala ea Becoana_, and was then prominently involved in the founding of the South African Native National Congress, becoming its first Secretary. He took a leading role in the campaign against the Natives' Land Act of 1913, and in 1914 travelled to England as a member of a Congress deputation to the imperial government. Here, he wrote and published _Native Life in South Africa_, together with two books in Tswana. Returning to South Africa in 1917 he resumed his political role, and sought to establish an organisation known as the Brotherhood Movement which he had encountered in England. In 1919 he returned to England with a second deputation, and subsequently carried his campaign to North America, seeking to publicise the grievances of his people and to raise funds for his Brotherhood work. Writing extensively in both black and white newspapers in South Africa in the 1920s, Plaatje came to devote more of his time and energy to literary activities of various kinds; his novel, _Mhudi_, was published in 1930. Involved in his later years in a temperance organisation, whose journal he edited in 1931, Plaatje died in Johannesburg in 1932 after a lifetime of ceaseless activity.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used:

APS	Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society
DFA	Diamond Fields Advertiser
ICS	Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London
JAH	Journal of African History
JSAS	Journal of Southern African Studies
LMS	London Missionary Society
OFS	Orange Free State
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SANAC	South African Native Affairs Commission, 1903-05
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNISA	University of South Africa, Pretoria
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

CONTENTS

		Page
ABSTRACT		1
ABBREVIATIONS		2
INTRODUCTION		4
CHAPTER 1	: Early Years: Pniel and Kimberley	22
CHAPTER 2	: 'The Essential Interpreter'	45
CHAPTER 3	: Editor of Koranta ea Becoana	69
CHAPTER 4	: Union, the South African Native National Congress, and the Natives' Land Act of 1913	96
CHAPTER 5	: England, 1914-17	135
CHAPTER 6	: Sechuana Proverbs and A Sechuana Reader	161
CHAPTER 7	: South Africa, 1917-19	183
CHAPTER 8	: England and America, 1919-23	211
CHAPTER 9	: The 1920s: A Leader without a People?	240
CHAPTER 10	: 'A Pioneer in Literature'	270
CHAPTER 11	: Final Years and Retrospect	306
BIBLIOGRAPHY		319

INTRODUCTION

Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje was born in 1876 and died in 1932. During the course of an exceptionally full and varied life he was, at various times, an assistant teacher at a mission school, post office messenger, court interpreter, newspaper editor and journalist, political leader, social worker and educator, writer and novelist.
A man of immense natural talent and ability, Plaatje rose by his own efforts to become, during his lifetime, one of the best known black South Africans of his generation, in the forefront of the public affairs of his people for the greater part of his adult life. One of the founders of the South African Native National Congress - forerunner of today's African National Congress - Plaatje twice travelled overseas to represent the interests of his people, and wrote a political book, Native Life in South Africa, that stands to this day as one of the most powerful polemics - and there have been many - to have been written on South Africa.[1] He was a prolific political journalist, writing both in his own newspapers, and - in his later years - for other African and European newspapers. And he made an outstanding contribution in the field of literature: in collecting the proverbs and folk lore of his native language, Tswana; in collaborating in a pioneering phonetic study of the same language; in translating Shakespeare; and in writing a novel, Mhudi, one of the most imaginative and sophisticated works to have emerged out of the coming together of African and European cultures in the continent as a whole.[2]

---

1. S.T. Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa (London, 1916).

To say that Plaatje's life and career - remarkable enough by any standards - have been neglected would be an understatement. For some thirty years or so after his death few references to him could be found in the secondary literature. Most of these were confined to noting in the briefest terms the part he had played in the early days of the South African Native National Congress, and that he had been the first black South African to have written a novel in English. Not that Mhudi was taken very seriously. When not ignored, the treatment it received was usually superficial and often patronising.[3] It is only within the last ten years or so - thanks mainly to the work of Tim Couzens - that Plaatje's literary reputation has been established, that Mhudi has come

---

2. S.T. Plaatje, Sechuana Proverbs with Literal Translations and their European Equivalents (London, 1916); D. Jones and S.T. Plaatje, A Sechuana Reader in International Phonetic Orthography (London, 1916); S.T. Plaatje, Diposho-posho/ Comedy of Errors (Morija, 1930); S.T. Plaatje, Dintshontsho tse bo-Juliuse Kesara (Johannesburg, 1937); S.T. Plaatje, Mhudi (Lovedale, 1930); also published - with an Introduction by T. Couzens - in the Heinemann African Writers Series, 1978.
3. For example, J.Jahn, A History of Neo-African Literature (London, 1966), 90, where Mhudi is classified not as "apprentice literature", or "protest literature", but as "neutral", or "hedging"; and characterised by a "padded 'Victorian' style" (p.105); and J.P.L. Snyman, The South African Novel in English, 1880-1930 (Kimberley, 1952), where Plaatje is considered to have been "unable to span the gap and live in the period about which he is writing"; both authors quoted in T. Couzens, 'Sol Plaatje's Mhudi', Journal of Commonwealth Literature, VII, no.1, June 1973, 1-2.

to be seen as anything more than a quaint curiosity;[4] that the discovery and publication of Plaatje's diary, kept during the siege of Mafeking, has drawn attention to his role in one of the best known episodes in British imperial history, and his ability and perception as a diarist;[5] and that a new interest in twentieth-century African political history in South Africa has shed further light on the history of the African National Congress, with which he was - in its early days at least - so closely associated.[6]

The absence for so long of any serious consideration of Plaatje's political or literary significance is comment in itself upon the nature of South African society in general, upon its traditions of historiography and literary criticism in particular. Plaatje is not, of course, the only prominent African figure of his time to have suffered neglect at the hands of posterity. Contemporaries or near contemporaries like Tengo Jabavu, John Dube, W.B. Rubusana -men of the same mission-educated stratum of society - have similarly failed to

---

4. In addition to the above article, see also T. Couzens, 'The Dark Side of the World: Sol Plaatje's Mhudi', English Studies in Africa, XIV, 2 (1971); Introductions to Quagga Press (Johannesburg, 1975) and Heinemann African Writers Series (London, 1978) editions of Mhudi; T. Couzens and S. Gray "Printers' and Other Devils: the Texts of Sol T. Plaatje's Mhudi", Research in African Literature, Vol.9, no.2, Fall 1978; see also S. Gray, 'Sources of the First Black South African Novel in English', Munger Africana Library Notes, December 1976; S. Gray, 'Plaatje's Shakespeare', English in Africa, Vol.4, no.1, March 1971; T. Couzens and B.P. Willan, 'Sol T. Plaatje, 1876-1932: an Introduction', English in Africa, Vol.3, no.2, September 1976.
5. John Comaroff (ed.), The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje: an African at Mafeking (London, 1973).
6. For example, M. Benson, The African Patriots: the story of the African National Congress (London, 1963); L. Kuper, 'African Nationalism in South Africa, 1910-1964', in M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds.), The Oxford History of South Africa, Vol.2, (London, 1971); P. Walshe, The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: the African National Congress, 1912-1952 (London, 1970); T. Karis and G. Carter (eds.), From Protest to Challenge: a Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa,1882-1964 (4 volumes, Stanford, 1972-1977).

attract full-length biographical treatment.[7] Such a state of affairs contrasts sharply with the attention that has over the years been devoted to the lives of the men who were in many ways their predecessors, the African chiefs of the nineteenth century, men who had fought - with varying degrees of success - to preserve and defend their societies in an earlier phase of white expansion. The lives of men like Chaka, Mosheshwe, Mzilikazi, and the others, heroic figures, for the most part, of a past age, have had an obvious attraction. The issues in their lives seem relatively clearcut and easy to understand, and they have appealed to a wide variety of twentieth-century viewpoints, ranging from those seeking inspiration for the pursuit of the armed struggle against the present South African regime, to the popular white South African (and European) imagination that has found in the popularised accounts of the lives of these men not only an exciting and tragic tale, but confirmation of innate feelings of racial superiority. In the life of a man like Chaka there has been something for everybody.[8]

In contrast, the African leaders of a later generation have received far less individual attention. They lived in an age that was far more complex. They lived through a social, political, and industrial revolution, the implications and meaning of which has only recently begun to be explored by historians concerned with nineteenth and

---

7. A short but respectful account of Jabavu's life, however, was written by his son, D.D.T. Jabavu, shortly after his death; D.D.T. Jabavu, The Life of John Tengo Jabavu, Editor of "Imvo Zabantsundu", 1884-1921 (Lovedale, 1922).

8. See, for example, P. Becker, Path of Blood: the Rise and Conquests of Mzilikazi, Founder of the Matebele (London, 1962); P. Becker, Rule of Fear: the Life and Times of Dingane, King of the Zulu (London, 1964); C.T. Binns, The Life and Death of Cetshwayo (London, 1963): J.M. Chirenje, Chief Kgama and his Times (London, 1978); S.M. Molema, Montshiwa (Cape Town, 1966); R.K. Rasmussen, Mzilikazi of the Ndebele (London, 1977); P. Sanders, Moshoeshoe, Chief of the Sotho (London, 1975); L. Thompson, Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, 1786-1870 (London, 1975).

twentieth-century South African history.[9] The lives of those who sought to represent the interests of the African people of South Africa through this period of change are not easy to understand. The new African leadership stood between two societies, African and European, part of each, but wholly accepted by neither. It is difficult to be sure on whose behalf they were speaking, how valid were their claims to represent a wider constituency than the mission-educated stratum from which they themselves came. Probably many of them were unsure about this as well. Drawing their ideals, their aspirations, their very identities from two overlapping worlds, their motivation and behaviour has appeared both ambivalent and ambiguous.[10]

Until recently the lives and activities of these men have not had a great attraction for South Africa's historians. Having evidently failed to make much of a mark upon the world in which they lived, their fate seemed to be that which has often befallen the 'unsuccessful' in history generally.[11] Within the particular context of South Africa, their beliefs - embodying a commitment to a common South African society - have done much to disqualify them from the degree of attention given to an earlier generation of African 'resisters'; whilst their methods - and conspicuous lack of success in finding the means of

---

9. Most notably by Charles van Onselen in his work on the social history of the African working class; see especially, 'The Witches of Suburbia: Domestic Service on the Witwatersrand, 1890-1914', ICS Collected Seminar Papers, Vol.9, 1978; 'South Africa's Lumpenproletariat Army: The Regiment of the Hills, 1890-1920', ICS Collected Seminar Papers, Vol.7, 1976.
10. For an exploration of these themes, see S. Marks, 'The Ambiguities of Dependence: John L. Dube of Natal', Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol.1, no.2 (1976).
11. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, 1968), Preface, 12-13.

realising these aspirations - have failed to attract even those who might have been more favourably disposed towards what they stood for; there has been little reason to seek in their lives lessons likely to be of much relevance to the resolution of the problems (which were often fundamentally the same) faced by those that came after them. From a similar perspective, men like Tengo Jabavu perhaps appeared - as Louis Harlan has written of Booker T. Washington, 'too compromising and too unheroic....to win a place in the black pantheon'.[12] Jabavu has been remembered instead - as one South African historian has recently written - 'not for what he did, but for what he could not do':[13] a harsh fate, surely, for anybody.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, however, the activities of 'modern' African political leaders in South Africa did begin to receive a great deal more attention and interest than had been the case hitherto. Influenced by Africa's 'independence decade', by the 'Africanist' historiography that was emerging out of it, and by the increasing state repression in South Africa in the 1960s, new efforts were made to rescue historical documents and to reconstruct twentieth-century African political history.[14] Perhaps the best representative of this school was Peter Walshe's study of the organisation with which Plaatje and many of his generation had been most closely associated, the African National Congress. Entitled - for reasons that are not wholly explained or justified - The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, Walshe's

12. L. Harlan, Booker T. Washington: the making of a Black leader, 1856-1901 (London, 1972), Preface.
13. L.D. Ngongco, 'John Tengo Jabavu 1859-1921', in C.Saunders (ed.), Black Leaders in Southern African History (London, 1979), 155.
14. See footnote 6.

study is a valuable, detailed account of the origins and history of the organisation. For all this it nevertheless has a curiously impersonal approach to the lives of the men who led, or belonged to, the ANC. One of its major shortcomings - as one reviewer pointed out - was its neglect of the social origins of these men, a failure to place them 'in their full social context', to recognise the reality or the depth of their roots in the African society - or societies - from which they came; the picture of the ANC is thus one of 'an elitist organisation in a social vacuum';[15] of the men themselves, a view that is one-dimensional and unconvincing.

A further - though related - characteristic of Walshe's approach that has detracted from an understanding of this early generation of Congress leaders has been a readiness to characterise as 'naive', 'unrealistic', or 'inappropriate', the moderate, constitutional methods that these men adopted, or the beliefs and ideals that they held. Writing from the perspective of South Africa in the 1960s - when the possibility of non-violent change seemed more remote than ever before - it is not difficult to see how and why such a view evolved. The effect, nevertheless, has been to distort our understanding of the lives of these early twentieth-century African political leaders by failing to see them sufficiently as men of their times, not ours: the view of them has been, in some ways at least, unsympathetic.

Much the same kind of perspective - although arrived at from a viewpoint that owes more to Marxism than 'Africanism' - is evident in

15. S. Marks, Review of Rise of African Nationalism, Journal of African History, XII, 4 (1972).

Simons and Simons' Class and Colour in South Africa, published in 1969. Here, the tone at times verges on the patronising:

> The conservatives [referring to Mahabane, Mapikela, Skota, Selope Theme, Dube, Xuma, and their white liberal advisers] never quite understood their societies or its power structure. They persisted in believing that liberation would come through reasoned argument, appeals to Christian ethics, and moderate constitutional protest. Because of timidity, as Bunting alleged, or want of confidence in their people, they refused to utilise them for the mass struggle.[16]

Throughout the book, in fact, one perceives a note of puzzlement over the failure of these 'conservatives' to cast aside restraining 'false ideologies' and assume their supposedly rightful place at the head of a mass working class movement. When faced with the problem of explaining why this did not happen, Simons and Simons fall back upon individual characteristics - "timidity", "want of confidence in their people", or even sheer stupidity ("never quite understood their society or its power structure"). As with Walshe, the picture of this early generation of Congress leaders is by no means a wholly sympathetic or understanding one. A similar approach - essentially that of "reading history in the light of subsequent preoccupations" - was noted in a different, but comparable, context by E.P. Thompson in his Introduction to The Making of the English Working Class. Seeking to "rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the 'obsolete' hand-loom weaver, the 'utopian' artisan, and even the deluded follower of Joanna Southcott, from the enormous condescension of posterity", Thompson stressed the importance of recognising that "their aspirations were valid in terms of their own experiences".[17] The same point can be made with equal

16. H.J. and H.E. Simons, Class and Colour in South Africa (Harmondsworth, 1969), 429.
17. Making of the English Working Class, 13.

force about the aspirations of men like Plaatje, Dube, Tengo Jabavu, and the others. Their aspirations were also "valid in terms of their own experiences", different as these were from those of the people with whom Thompson was concerned. It is time that this was more fully recognised.

This study of the career of Sol Plaatje seeks, therefore, to understand him in the context of the times in which he lived, to assess his role for what it was, not as others would have liked it to be. As a result, I hope it will become clear during the course of this study, for example, why it was that Plaatje did not exhort his people to join 'the mass struggle' in the way that Simons and Simons would have wished; and why it is of such importance to see men like Plaatje in terms of the wider social background from which they came. Without a recognition of the latter, indeed, Plaatje's literary activities - quite apart from his political career - make no sense whatever.

The narrow political focus of much of the historiography of the 1960s and 1970s has also contributed to the unconvincing and sterotyped picture that has emerged of Plaatje and his generation. The stage of modern African political history has been peopled by one-dimensional cardboard figures who come into view only when involved in activities considered 'political', or relevant to such notions as 'the rise of African nationalism'. I have sought to present a rather more rounded picture. Though concerned with the many-sided career of one particular individual, I hope this thesis may also be considered as a 'case study', of relevance to an understanding of the lives of other prominent members of the mission-educated stratum of Plaatje's generation: one often learns much about a group, or a class, of people through a study of a single representative of it, however exceptional a representative that individual may be.

The approach that I have adopted is, broadly speaking, a chronological one. I do not believe that one can hope to understand a man like Plaatje if his many interests and accomplishments are treated in a purely thematic way, as though separate from one another, however convenient this may be from the point of view of organising a thesis. An understanding of the life of any man in the context of his own times also requires that due attention is given not just to those features of it that have been considered attractive or significant by later writers, but those which have not. The Brotherhood Movement or the International Order of True Templars have not attracted the attention that has been devoted to the African National Congress, and seem unlikely to do so. They were nevertheless very important in Plaatje's life, so I have attempted to give them due weight and consideration. I feel I need make no apology, too, for concerning myself (although, for reasons of space, not to nearly the extent that I would have liked), with Plaatje's early years, before he became "significant". It is a truism that no man's life or career can be understood without an assessment of his background and formative years. Again, the relative neglect of these factors has been a further element in the unsatisfactory picture that we at present have of Plaatje and his generation of Congress leaders from the 'Africanist" literature of the 1960s and 1970s. In this respect, as in others, I hope that other scholars may be encouraged to examine more closely the careers of other prominent Africans of his time. It is only then that it will be possible to achieve - amongst other things - a fuller appreciation of the character, the stature, and the significance of Plaatje himself.

The material upon which this thesis is based has been drawn from a wide variety of sources. Some of this has been readily accessible - Plaatje's published works, for example; much has not. Newspapers have perhaps been my most important (certainly they have been the most extensive) single source. I have been fortunate in that the South African Library in Cape Town has preserved substantial runs of the newspapers that Plaatje edited - Koranta ea Becoana (Bechuana Gazette), 1901-1908; Tsala ea Becoana/Batho (Friend of the Bechuana/People), 1910-1915; and his periodical, Our Heritage (1931). The largest gap in these holdings is for Koranta for the period 1905-8, and there do not appear to be extant copies elsewhere. Later, Plaatje wrote extensively for other European and African newspapers in South Africa, most notably Umteteli wa Bantu, the Pretoria News, Diamond Fields Advertiser, and the two main Cape Town daily newspapers, the Cape Times and Cape Argus. The systematic search that I have made of these and other newspapers and periodicals (English, South African and American) has been a time-consuming business, but very rewarding in terms of material located - articles written by Plaatje, or reports of the various activities in which he was engaged. Other newspapers and periodicals (a full list is to be found in my bibliography) were examined more selectively: after a while one develops an almost instinctive sense of where to look.

Plaatje's extensive journalism is valuable not only for what it indicates of his views on the political - and other - questions of the day, but also, because of a style that was often very personal, of his experiences as well. This has in turn suggested new sources that have - on occasion - proved very fruitful. The same has been true of reports

about Plaatje's activities as well. To take just one example, a perusal of the Diamond Fields Advertiser for the year 1918-19 alerted me to the likelihood of there being correspondence with Plaatje in the De Beers archives in Kimberley on a matter that received a great deal of coverage in the paper at the time - Plaatje's success in persuading De Beers to give him an old tram shed in Kimberley for use as an assembly hall, and its conversion into the "Lyndhurst Road Native Institute". Had I not known that the "Native Institute" was in Lyndhurst Road, I would never have been able to track down the file that existed in the De Beers Estate records.

The search for manuscript (rather than newspaper) material has presented challenges - and rewards - of a different kind. The obvious point of departure for a study of Plaatje's career was an investigation into the fate of his own papers. The first indication that any of these had survived came with the discovery in 1969 of Plaatje's unpublished Mafeking siege diary by John Comaroff, an anthropologist working amongst the Tshidi Rolong in the Mafeking district. This, together with other unpublished material of Plaatje's, had found its way to Mafeking via his daughter Violet, who had married into the well known Molema family, members of which Plaatje himself had been closely associated with. Subsequently, the papers were dispersed, some of the material passing to her eldest son, Barolong Molema, some of it to Dr. S.M. Molema, Violet's brother-in-law, who intended to write a biography of Sol Plaatje. He completed the biography, but after his death in 1966 such papers of Plaatje's as he had were dispersed further. What has survived of them is now preserved in three different institutions - the School of Oriental and African

Studies, London; the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg; and the University of South Africa, Pretoria.[18]

The SOAS collection - which includes Plaatje's genealogy in his own hand, and a short unpublished biography by Isiah Bud-M'belle his brother-in-law - was deposited, on loan, by Dr. Comaroff in 1975. The University of the Witwatersrand collection, comprising letters, unpublished manuscripts and other material relating to Plaatje, to various members of the Molema family, and the affairs of the Rolong as a whole, is much larger. These papers were located by Tim Couzens and myself during the course of several research trips to Mafeking in 1976 and 1977, and subsequently purchased by the Wits University Library. Included in this collection ('The Silas T. Molema and Solomon T. Plaatje Papers') is Plaatje's unpublished MS, 'The Essential Interpreter', and a substantial number of Plaatje's letters to Silas Molema, dating mainly from the first two decades of this century.

Also part of this collection - now excellently catalogued by Marcelle Jacobson[19] - is Dr. S.M. Molema's 96-page unpublished biography of Plaatje. Whilst extremely valuable for Plaatje's family background and early years, and as a personal memoir of a man whom Molema had

---

18. Some of Dr. Molema's own papers were microfilmed in the early 1960s under the auspices of CAMP (Co-operative Africana Microform Project, Center for Research Libraries, Chicago), copies of which are available in a number of different libraries. These papers relate primarily to Dr. Molema's involvement in the African National Congress in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, and do not include any of Plaatje's papers.
19. M. Jacobson, The Silas T. Molema and Solomon T. Plaatje Papers (Wits University Historical and Literary Papers, 7, Johannesburg, 1978).

known very well, it is of limited value in other respects. It is not based upon a wide range of documentary material, and references are for the most part not cited. It also contains many factual inaccuracies, and many aspects of Plaatje's life and career are left untouched. I have therefore been very careful and selective in my use of this document for the purposes of my own study.

A further section of Plaatje and Molema papers are held by the University of South Africa in Pretoria. These are not originals, but photocopies (made in 1977) of letters and unpublished material of both Plaatje's and Dr. Molema's that are currently held in the Education Ministry offices in the Bophutatswana "Bantustan", which today has its capital close to Mafeking. Material of Plaatje's here includes a number of leaves of Tswana translations of Shakespeare; a short autobiographical fragment in Plaatje's hand; and - the single most important item - an unpublished MS by Plaatje on the history of the Bhaca people.

A great deal of extremely important material of Plaatje's has thus come to light during the period of research for this thesis. Other important material and information was very kindly made available to me by other members and descendants of the Plaatje family. Mr. Johannes Plaatje (a grand-nephew of Sol Plaatje), who lives in Kimberley, showed me the Plaatje family Bible and Prayer Book which he had in his possession, and which contains - inscribed within - valuable information about Plaatje's family background. A niece of Sol Plaatje's, Mrs. Martha Bokako, of Thaba Nchu, now in her late 80s, gave me hours of her time to tell me all that she knew about the Plaatje family history. She also helped to direct me to the Rev. J. Dire of Edenburg, O.F.S.,

who had in his possession the mission register of the Bethanie Mission Station, where Plaatje was baptised, thus clearing up (exactly one hundred years later) the uncertainty that had until then existed as to the year of Plaatje's birth.

This research "in the field" was supplemented by research in a wide range of archival repositories. Again, a full list is to be found in my bibliography. Of those outside recognised library or archival institutions, the archives of the De Beers company, Kimberley - who kindly permitted me to examine material they possess - was by far the most productive. Of the government archives, perhaps the most fruitful have been the relevant Colonial Office files in the Public Record Office for the light shed on the second SANNC deputation to England in 1919, which Plaatje led; and the Attorney-General's files in the Cape Archives which - by virtue particularly of Plaatje's frequent applications for an increase in salary - provide a great deal of information on his period as a court interpreter between 1898 and 1902. This latter category of material was located after my visit to Cape Town, and I am extremely to Andrew Reed (Department of Journalism, Rhodes University, at present engaged on a study of Plaatje's journalism) for providing me with copies.

In many cases archival collections - official or non-official - yielded only a few items (sometimes no more than one) of direct relevance to Plaatje's career. This was the case, for example, with the Xuma, Smuts, and Hertzog papers. In some cases I was unable personally to consult the archival collections from which I have drawn material; here I have benefited from the generosity of fellow researchers who have pointed out references, and from the kindness of archival and library staff who have carried out searches on my behalf.

Other collections that I did personally consult, however, have yielded considerably more than the odd item. In the Molteno Family Papers at the University of Cape Town, and the Colenso Collection in the Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg, there is a substantial and very interesting correspondence that emerged out of Plaatje's association - particularly in England - with liberal (mainly female) sympathisers. Other important groups of letters of Plaatje's were located in the DuBois Papers, University of Massachusetts; in the Moton Papers, Tuskegee Institute, Alabama; and in the archives of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, Rhodes House, Oxford. One further archive that I was unable to consult personally, but from which I have nevertheless benefited greatly, is that of the Berlin Missionary Society in East Berlin. For this I am indebted to Dr. Werner van der Merwe (History Department, UNISA), and to Dr. Heinz Blauert of the Okumenisch-Missionarisches Zentrum, Berlin, for the work they carried out on my behalf.

****

As will be evident from the above I have incurred very many debts of gratitude during the course of my work on this thesis. The greatest of these must be to the family and relatives of the man I have chosen to write about - to Mr. Morara Molema, Mrs. S.M. Molema, Mr. Barolong Molema, Mrs. Mary Plaatje, above all, perhaps, to Mr. Johannes Plaatje and Mrs. Martha Bokako, who gave so generously of their time and memories, and who extended to me a welcome that has made the research for this thesis an unforgettable experience. I am similarly grateful to those who had known Sol Plaatje as friend and colleague. They have

also been extremely generous in sharing their memories with me, in particular Mr. Michael Van Reenen, who for some fifteen years lived in the house opposite to Plaatje's in Angel Street, Kimberley, and who was one of the pall bearers at his funeral; also Mr. Simon Lekhele, Dr. James Moroka, Mr. Selby Msimang, Mr. Ben Tyamzashe, and a number of others. To Miss E.M. Westphal, of Johannesburg, I am indebted for her vivid and extensive recollections of her mother and father, the Rev. E. Westphal, missionary at Pniel where Plaatje spent his early days.

I have used a great number of libraries and archives in Britain, South Africa, and the United States: without exception their librarians and archivists have been unfailingly helpful, and I hope they will not take it amiss that, for reasons of space, I cannot mention them all by name. There are some, however, to whom I feel I owe an especial debt: to Mrs. Macey, Kimberley Public Library; to Connie Minchin and Audrey Renew in Mafeking; Mrs. P.E. Stephens at the University of Cape Town; to Mike Berning and Sandy Fold at Rhodes University, Grahamstown; to Mrs. Annika van Gylswyk at UNISA; and to Marcelle Jacobson and Mrs. Anna Cunningham at Wits University. Many other people went to great lengths on my behalf to deal with the stream of enquiries that I sent out by post, particularly to the United States and Canada. Again, I cannot thank all by name, but would like especially to mention Robert McDonnell, University of Massachusetts; Mr. Bert Wees, Kent Historical Society, Chatham, Ontario; Professor Robert Hill, UCLA; Mr. Moore Crossey, Yale University; Mary-jo Stevenson, Toronto University Library; Leon Spencer, Talladega College, Alabama; Professor R. Hunt Davis, University of Florida; Mr. David Crippen, Ford Archives, Dearborn, Michigan.

Much of the work for this thesis was done while I was in receipt of a Governing Body Award from the School of Oriental and African Studies; I have benefited, too, from a grant from the Central Research Fund of the University of London to cover translating costs. I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Shula Marks, for her encouragement and guidance: without it I could not have written this thesis. With Tim Couzens I have shared the excitement of discovery, and have profited immensely - as have so many others - from his expertise and feeling for South African social and literary history. He has helped me in countless other ways and I owe him a special debt of gratitude. To John Comaroff, also, I am indebted for help and advice at various times, above all for having aroused my interest in the subject of this thesis, and for having encouraged me to proceed with it at a point when its viability seemed by no means assured; and to Tony Atmore and David Rycroft I am grateful for suggestions on draft chapters. Many other people have provided references and helpful comment. Finally, I would like to thank those who have helped me with translations: A.B. Ngcobo, Simon Lekhele, Gillian Smith, Heidi Suhr, Connie Guettler.

CHAPTER 1

EARLY YEARS: PNIEL AND KIMBERLEY

Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje was born on October 9th, 1876, on a farm called Doornfontein in the north-western part of the Orange Free State, some thirty miles north-east of Kimberley.[1] His parents were Rolong, one of the four main sub-divisions of the Tswana-speaking people who lived in what is now Botswana and the northern and north-western part of South Africa. Sharing a common language and culture that revolved around the keeping of cattle, the Rolong traced their origins back to the founder of their royal line, Morolong. By the time of Plaatje's birth, however, the Rolong were no longer a united people. After a prolonged period of civil war and secession in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Rolong split into four main groups - the Ratlou, the Tshidi, the Seleka, and the Rapulana, all conscious of their identity and traditions as Rolong, but now living under what was in effect independent chiefly rule.[2]

Sol Plaatje's mother was a direct descendant of a grandson of Rapulana, a son of Tau (the last chief of a united Rolong people) by his youngest wife, Mhudi.[3] One side of his ancestry was thus Rapulana.

---

1. Bethany Mission Register, entry 795, 9 October 1876. I am most grateful to Rev. J. Dire, Edenburg, O.F.S., for showing me this register, and to Mrs. Martha Bokako (Thaba Nchu) for information leading to its discovery.
2. J. Comaroff, 'Competition for Office and Political Processes among the Barolong boo Ratshidi of the South Africa-Botswana Borderland' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1971), 39-41; Z.K. Matthews, 'A Short History of the Tshidi Rolong', Fort Hare Papers, 1, 1945; S.M. Molema, Montshiwa: Barolong Chief and Patriot (Cape Town, 1966); S.M. Molema, 'History of the Barolong' (unpublished MS, Plaatje/Molema Papers [Wits], Ad 6.1).
3. 'Ancestry/Family Tree', in Plaatje's hand, in Plaatje Papers, SOAS Archives.

On the other side, Plaatje's ancestors were amongst the few Rolong who did not consider themselves to be part of any of the four main chiefdoms. They were Rolong ba ga Modiboa, direct descendants of Tsheshebe, the eldest son of the sixteenth century Rolong chief, Modiboa, who had lost (and never regained) the chieftainship to a younger brother. When the royal line subsequently divided into Ratlou, Tshidi, Seleka, and Rapulana, the ba ga Modiboa remained apart. Probably no more than a handful of families, they were forced to seek protection with larger and stronger Rolong chiefdoms (particularly the Seleka), but managed to resist, nevertheless, full incorporation into any one of these, and remained intensely conscious of their own genealogical superiority.[4]

Plaatje was thus born into a Tswana family that was conscious of an identity as Rolong, but very aware at the same time of the particular traditions of each side of the family ancestry. Plaatje's family were also Christians. This was a matter not simply of the beliefs they held, but of a way of life as a whole that in many respects set them apart from other Africans. Plaatje's forbears had been amongst the first Rolong to have come into contact with the Christian missionaries who came to spread the Gospel among them in the early part of the nineteenth century. Threatened by Ndebele incursions in the period of the Mfecane, the ba ga Modiboa and other groups of Rolong found in these missionaries a degree of protection that they were unable to provide for themselves. When more peaceful times returned, many of these people -

4. J. Comaroff (ed.), The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje (London, 1973), Introduction, XIV; 'A Short History'; 'History'; interview with Mrs. Martha Bokako, Thaba Nchu, April, 1976.

having no desire to submit to a new form of authority when it was safe to avoid doing so - left the missionaries and went elsewhere. Others, however - amongst them Plaatje's own grandparents - found that the way of life offered by a continued association with Christian missionaries had more to offer, and they stayed.[5]

Plaatje's father, Kushumane (Johannes), was born in the Maamuse (Schweizer-Reinecke) district on 23 January 1835. His mother, Martha Mokgosi, was born on 18 November 1836, in the Phillipolis district.[6] They met - and married - in the early 1850s after Kushumane and other members of his family had moved to Phillipolis, and it was probably here that his father's name changed from 'Mogodi' to 'Plaatje', a name given to Plaatje's grandfather - so it is believed - by Griqua land-owners amongst whom they lived and for whom they seem to have worked. And it was here, too, that Sol Plaatje's three eldest brothers were born - Simon Plaatje, the first, being born on 28 February 1855.[7]

Shortly after the exodus of the Griqua people from Phillipolis in 1861-2, Plaatje's young brothers, parents and grandparents moved south to the large mission estate of Bethanie, run by the Berlin Mission Society. Here they remained for some ten years, playing an increasingly important part in the life of the mission community.[8] In

---

5. S.M. Molema 'Biography of Sol T. Plaatje' (unpublished MS, Plaatje/Molema Papers [Wits], Ad 6.4); J.D. Omer Cooper, The Zulu Aftermath: a Nineteenth Century Revolution in Black Africa (London, 1966); M. Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the Missionaries, 1780-1940: the politics of a frontier zone' (unpublished PhD thesis, UCLA, 1969); R.L. Cope (ed.), The Journals of the Rev. T.L. Hodgson, Missionary to the Seleka Rolong and the Griqua (Johannesburg, 1977).
6. Handwritten entry in Plaatje Family Bible, in possession of Mr. Johannes Plaatje, Kimberley. I am most grateful to Mr. Plaatje for making this available to me.
7. Ibid., interview with Mrs. Bokako (Theba Nchu) 1976; 'Biography', 15-16; R. Ross, Adam Kok's Griquas (London, 1976), especially Ch.6.
8. Bethanie Mission Register, miscellaneous entries, 1867-1876.

1876 Johannes Plaatje took his family to a large farm near the Vaal River, Doornfontein. The move did not indicate a severance of ties with the Berlin Mission Society, for Doornfontein seems to have been owned by the Society and functioned as an outstation of another of their mission stations, that at Pniel, further down the Vaal River.[9] At Doornfontein, on 9 October 1876 - very shortly after the family had arrived there - Martha Plaatje gave birth to her fifth child. Three months later they returned to Bethany for the child's baptism, an indication in itself of the degree of attachment that Johannes and Martha Plaatje felt to Bethany (where many relatives still remained), and of the importance that they attached to Christian rites and ritual.[10] Like his elder brothers, Plaatje was given a biblical Christian name, the most obvious mark of the family's identity as Christians. His middle name, Tshekisho, is a Tswana word that means 'purity', and came - so Martha Plaatje (daughter of Plaatje's eldest brother) Simon) recalls - from Sol Plaatje's mother, who sought thereby to cleanse her heart, in the eyes of God, for having wished for a girl as all her previous children had been male.[11]

Plaatje's parents remained at Doornfontein for several more years. When he was three or four years old, however, they moved again, this time to the Berlin Mission Society's station at Pniel, near Barkly West in

9. O.F.S. Archives (Bloemfontein), Land Registry files Akt.2/1/36 and 2/1/31, 508, entries for Doornfontein, Berliner Missionsberichte, 1880, 136-7.
10. S.T. Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa (London, 1916), 345-6; Bethany Mission Register, entry 795.
11. "Biography", 18; interview with Mrs. Bokako.

the Cape Colony.[12] Pniel at that time had a population of 500 men, women and children, living on an estate of some twelve square miles. The majority of its inhabitants were Koranna, but increasing numbers of Tswana were settling there as well - something that was actively encouraged by the missionaries who considered them to be far more promising missionary material. Pniel had had a somewhat turbulent history. The discovery of diamonds on mission land in 1869 had involved the Society in a protracted dispute with the British colonial authorities over the validity of their claim to the land, and the influx of diggers - over whom the missionaries were never able to establish real control - had greatly hindered the establishment of a godly life amongst the residents of the mission.[13] In the early 1880s there arose further problems. Several missionaries were dismissed for such misdemeanours as "gross carnal sin" (Mecklenburg) and "severe disobedience to his superiors" (Callenburg), and when a new missionary - Meyer - took over at Pniel in June 1881, he found the mission in a parlous state. Dues were not being paid, the mission school had deteriorated, and the spiritual life of the inhabitants - so he reported - had sunk low. Meyer did not prove to be up to the task of reconstruction, and in October 1882 he was forced to return home to Germany through ill-health. The real task of reconstruction fell instead to the Rev. Martin Baumbach, and to a young apprentice missionary by the name of Ernst

---

12. S.T. Plaatje, evidence to South African Native Affairs Commission (Vol.4, Evidence), 264; Archives of Berlin Missionary Society (East Berlin), Tagebucher (Pniel), July-October 1881, and Inventor (Pniel), January 1882; Missionsberichte, 1882, 193. I am most grateful to Dr. Heinz Blauert, of the Okemenisch-Missionsarisches Zentrum, Berlin, and to Mr. Werner van der Merwe (History Department, UNISA) for work done on my behalf in these archives.
13. For the history of the Pniel mission, see Diamond Fields Advertiser, 22 July 1895, and 1 March and 5 April 1963. I am most grateful to Mrs. M. Macey, Kimberley Public Library, for these last two references and for other assistance on Kimberley sources; Missionsberichte, 1891, 134-8.

Westphal. They had arrived within a few months of each other in the middle of 1882, and formed a partnership that was to last until Baumbach's death ten years later.[14]

The Plaatjes were important people in the life of the Pniel mission. Prosperous cattle and livestock owners, they were in an ideal position to benefit from the high prices paid for agricultural produce in the nearby towns of Barkly West and Kimberley.[15] They formed part of a core of dedicated African Christian families, regular church-goers and Bible readers, who played a vital role in assisting the missionaries in the day-to-day running of mission life. They were one of a dozen or so families from whom were drawn the interpreters, the elders and other 'native helpers' without whose assistance Pniel (or any other mission) would have been unable to function. Plaatje's father, Johannes, was made a deacon (one of four at Pniel) in 1881, and Simon, his eldest son, was appointed as an elder shortly afterwards. With a family tradition of contact with Christianity that went back to the 1820s, it is not difficult to see why they should have been given such responsible positions: somebody who was capable of addressing the church congregation on 'The Advent of Christianity amongst the Barolong', as Johannes Plaatje did in 1883, was clearly an asset to the two new missionaries at Pniel. So, too, was Simon Plaatje who acted as their guide and interpreter.[16]

---

14. Missionsberichte, 1882, 154-6; 1883, 114; 1884, 154-6.
15. P. Kallaway, 'Black Responses to an Industrialising Economy', unpublished paper presented at Wits University Labour Conference, 1976; Native Life, 61-2.
16. Tagebucher (Pniel), July-October, 1881; October 1883; and subsequent entries relating to the attendance of Simon and Johannes Plaatje at meetings of the church council; Missionsberichte, 1887, 146-7.

Living at Pniel in the 1880s Sol Plaatje grew up to a world that combined the traditions and identity of the Tswana with the values and way of life of a Christian mission community. He later recalled that it was mainly from his mother and two aunts that he learnt to speak Setswana, his native tongue, and heard from them of the history and traditions of his people.[17] From his parents, elder brothers and other relatives, Sol Plaatje no doubt also learnt something of the ideas and values that came with the religion that they espoused - of the virtues of hard work, frugality, thrift. One man in particular soon came to play an important part in his life - Ernst Westphal, the young missionary who arrived at Pniel when Plaatje was six years old. Then in his mid-twenties, Westphal came from a wealthy Prussian bourgeois background and was sent to Pniel with the specific task of restoring some order to the chaotic state of affairs on the Pniel estate.[18] When he arrived, however, he was also given responsibility for running the mission school, and it was here that he really made his mark. Under his direction, the mission school rapidly recovered from the state of near collapse that the Cape Education Inspector had reported in 1882.[19] Two years later, Pniel was visited by Dr. Wangemann, Director of the Berlin Mission Society, who wrote afterwards that he had never seen a better run school anywhere else in Africa or Germany - a remarkable tribute to Ernst Westphal, and to Thomas Katz, his Koranna assistant.[20]

---

17. S.T. Plaatje, Sechuana Proverbs and their European Equivalents (London, 1916), 7.
18. Obituary in DFA, 17 January 1922; interview with Miss E.M. Westphal (Johannesburg), November 1977.
19. Annual Report of Superintendent General of Education for 1882 (Cape Govt. G3, 1883), Supplement, XXXVI-XXXVII, report on Pniel mission school.
20. H.T. Wangemann, Ein zweites Reisejahr in Sud-Afrika (Berlin, 1886).

Sol Plaatje's education at the Pniel mission school was to be the only formal education he received. 'The garden of the future community', as Martin Baumbach described it on one occasion, the Pniel mission school did not set its sights very high. As with other mission schools, its main purpose was to teach the children to read the Bible and to inculcate those values deemed essential to living a Christian way of life - punctuality, cleanliness, hard work, and perhaps above all, discipline. 'As missionaries', explained one Berlin Society missionary, 'we do not think it advisable to make them [African children] big scholars. As long as they know how to read and write, know their Bible, and know how to write a letter, we are contented as missionaries'.[21]

Sol Plaatje was undoubtedly fortunate to have reached school age at a time when Pniel had - in Ernst Westphal - an able teacher who was capable of recognising and encouraging the ability of a promising pupil. At the age of nine or ten, though, Plaatje's education took a new turn when he attended a Church of England mission school in Beaconsfield, some eighteen miles from Pniel. This almost certainly took place in the late 1880s when Westphal and his wife spent a year in Kimberley (of which Beaconsfield was a part), replacing the missionary who normally ran the German mission there who had returned to Germany for a year's leave. The Westphals, it seems, agreed to take their young protege with them to attend the Rev. H. Crossthwaite's All Saints Mission School,

21. South African Native Affairs Commission, Vol.4, evidence of Rev. H. Grutzner; for African education in the Cape Colony generally, see R.H. Davis, 'Nineteenth Century African Education in the Cape Colony: an Historical Analysis' (unpublished PhD, University of Wisconsin, 1969).

where - so a friend of Plaatje's recalled many years later - 'he learned to spell English words and the rudiments of arithmetic'.[22]

Plaatje's education continued at Pniel when the Westphals returned there early in 1889. Because he was progressing so far beyond the other pupils in the mission school, he began to receive additional private instruction from Ernst Westphal and from his wife. Remembered as 'one of the best types of missionary's wife, patient, brave, shrewd, and infinitely tolerant and wise', Miss Sack (as she was before marriage) came from a wealthy landowning family in Westphalia, and came out to marry her husband in 1884.[23] She had had some experience as a teacher in Germany before she came, and it was perhaps as an outlet for her own intellectual energy that she began to take a close interest in Plaatje's progress. According to her daughter, it was her mother who first taught Plaatje some German, and who first introduced him to the writings of Sir Walter Scott, Schiller, Goethe and, above all, Shakespeare. She was responsible, too, for developing Plaatje's musical abilities, teaching him to play the piano and training his singing voice. At this he proved to be an adept learner, for by 1892, when he was fifteen, he was placed in charge of the children's choir at Pniel.[24]

When he was thirteen years old Plaatje passed the Cape Education Department's Standard IV examination, almost certainly the first pupil

---

22. The Star, 5 July 1932; Missionsberichte, 1888, 32; for Crossthwaite and his mission school in this period, see Griqualand West Church Magazine, June 1887; Quarterly Paper of the Bloemfontein Mission, 15 October 1888, 147-8; 15 July 1889; January 1910; C. Lewis and G.E. Edwards, Historical Records of the Church of the Province of South Africa (London, 1934).
23. DFA, 17 January 1922; interview with Miss E.M. Westphal.
24. Tagebuch, Pniel, July-October, 1892.

at Pniel to have achieved this.[25] Soon afterwards - probably after his confirmation in February 1892 - he was appointed as a pupil-teacher, teaching the younger children at the school and continuing his own education with private instruction from the Westphals. He did not take long to make his mark. By the end of 1892 he was already being referred to by Mr. Schulz, now the second missionary at Pniel, as 'der bekannten klein Schulmeister' ("the well-known young schoolmaster").[26] For his services, as Plaatje himself later recalled, he was paid 'the princely sum of £9 per year'. On such a modest salary, though, he was able to 'live like a lord' because his elder brother, Simon, with whom he now lived, 'not only gave me free board and lodging, but he also bought for me all my clothes, including luxuries, and I rode his horses, using his saddles and bridles'.[27]

Sol Plaatje remained a pupil-teacher at Pniel for three years. At the beginning of March 1894, however, he left the mission station to take up a job in the Post Office in Kimberley as a letter carrier.[28] Probably he now felt that he had learnt as much at Pniel as the Westphals could teach him, and the position he held there cannot have held out very much in the way of prospects for the future. For a pupil of such unusual ability it would have been natural for Plaatje to have gone on to one of the mission colleges (like Lovedale, Healdtown, or Blythswood) in the Cape Colony that provided a secondary education for African children. These were run by other missionary societies (the smaller Berlin Mission Society had no equivalent in South Africa), but they did

---

25. Native Life, 9.
26. Tagebuch, Pniel, July-October 1892.
27. Christian Express, May 1913.
28. Boer War Diary, 107.

take in pupils from other denominations, so Plaatje would, in all probability, have been accepted. For some reason, though, Plaatje's father - who had by now moved to the Mafeking district, leaving Plaatje in the care of his eldest son, Simon - was against such a step. The Westphals, for their part, had - as Plaatje himself later recalled - 'something mapped out for me which they could not quite define', and news of his decision to leave the mission came as a great shock to them: it was, Plaatje said, 'a bombshell to them...when I left the old mission and ventured out into the world by way of the Cape Civil Service'.[29]

Plaatje took with him the characteristic values and ideals of a missionary upbringing, and was to remain committed to these for the rest of his life. With a deep interest and knowledge of the culture, history and traditions of his Tswana people, he combined a faith in the Christian religion and an adherence to the morality that came with it. This moral code that he had internalised was to enable him to cope - without too much difficulty - with the rather different environment of town life. The concern felt by the Westphals and by his brothers and uncles that he would 'fall an easy prey to the temptations of city life' was understandable enough, but Plaatje himself - now seventeen years old - seems to have been well prepared for a life outside the limited confines of the Pniel mission.

****

29. Plaatje/Molema Papers (UNISA), autobiographical MS in Plaatje's hand.

Plaatje began work as a letter carrier in the Kimberley Post Office on 1st March 1894. Amongst mission-educated Africans of the time it was the kind of job that was highly sought after, one of the relatively few avenues of opportunity open to them for employment. The Kimberley Post Office had been the first in the Colony to employ Africans as messengers and letter carriers. The practice had begun in 1880 when the Post Office had found it impossible to secure reliable and inexpensive white labour. The thought had then occurred to the General Manager of Telegraphs, J. Sivewright, 'that the educated Native of the country might be with advantage employed for this purpose'. He then discussed the question with Dr. Stewart, Principal of Lovedale, who agreed to co-operate, personally selected a staff of 'Native Messengers', and sent them up to Kimberley in October 1880. The 'experiment' proved to be a great success, and over the next few years the practice was extended to other towns in the Cape Colony.[30]

By the time Plaatje joined the Post Office in 1894, however, white attitudes to the employment of Africans in the Kimberley Post Office had changed considerably. Since the 1880s Kimberley had become much less prosperous, unemployment amongst whites had grown, and there had developed strong pressure on the Post Office to replace the African messengers and letter carriers by whites. In 1892, for example, an angry debate on the matter took place in the columns of the Diamond Fields Advertiser, the local paper. Mr. J. Henry, the head of the Kimberley Post Office, did not give in to this pressure, however. He had had good service from his African employees, they were cheaper to

---

30. R. Young, African Wastes Reclaimed (London, 1902); Report of General Manager of Telegraphs for the Year 1882 (Cape Govt., G.23/83).

employ, and they were also rather better educated than the whites who were now anxious to do the work.[31]

Plaatje was employed by the Post Office for the four-and-a-half years that he remained in Kimberley. Whether it was as a letter carrier or as a messenger (delivering telegrams) is not clear, for Plaatje described himself - on different occasions - as having done both. Part of a highly efficient and well-organised Cape Civil Service, the Postal and Telegraphs Department in Kimberley insisted upon an extremely high standard of discipline, work and personal behaviour from its employees. John Henry, the Postmaster, had a reputation for maintaining these standards, and transgressors - black and white - were regularly fined for their misdeeds. 'In my day', Plaatje recalled some fifteen years later, 'when a telegram came to "Robinson, Kimberley", Robinson had to get it or the Postmaster-General would know the reason why'.[32]

Certain qualities were considered especially desirable amongst African employees at the Kimberley Post Office. These were exemplified in the person of Nelson Lindie, senior messenger, who as 'sender out' may well have been Plaatje's immediate superior. In 1895 there appeared an article about Lindie in the DFA under the title, 'A Good Example to his Brothers'. Nelson Lindie was, so it said, a 'highly commendable product of native civilisation'. Educated at Lovedale, he had come to Kimberley as part of the original 'experiment', joined

---

31. DFA, 28 May, 4 and 18 June 1892; Imvo, 9 June 1892.
32. Umteteli, 11 October 1924; Cape Archives, AG.1002, 37/1902, Plaatje to Resident Magistrate, Mafeking, 27 March 1902; 'Application for Employment', AG.630, 128/98, Annexure A; Tsala ea Becoana, 16 December 1911. I am most grateful to Andrew Reed, Department of Journalism, Rhodes University, for providing me with copies of this material.

the messenger branch of the Post and Telegraphic Department, and achieved his promotion to the position of 'sender out' in 1895. He was described as 'a well-spoken, well-educated native of respectable demeanour', whose 'loyalty to the government was unquestioned', and who was altogether to be commended 'for his extremely creditable record as a private citizen and servant of the government'. He was considered 'in his own person to represent a satisfactory solution to the native problem', and by his 'general conduct' to provide 'a complete answer to those who are strenuously opposed to native education'.[33]

Such were the qualities that Plaatje was expected to emulate. It seems that he responded: according to Dr. Molema, he soon became known as 'a clever young man who is fast, energetic, who had knowledge of his job, and good manners'.[34]

Working for the Post Office helped Plaatje to improve his command of the English language. Reminiscing on the subject many years later, he described the Post Office as 'his educational institution', and talked of 'the difficulties he experienced with the English language when, as a lad of 15, he came from the country to work in the Kimberley Post Office'.[35] With a knowledge of the English language came a deeper understanding of the values that were part of it. The Post Office formed part of the apparatus of government in a part of the British Empire where the supremacy of British culture and institutions was one of those self-evident facts of everyday life. Learning the English language in such circumstances meant learning about such realities as well.

---

33. DFA, 4 March 1895; for further information about some of Plaatje's African colleagues at the Kimberley Post Office, see J. Stewart, Lovedale Past and Present (Lovedale, 1887); Koranta ea Becoana, 13 April 1904.
34. 'Biography', 22.
35. DFA, 12 November 1928.

Important as the Post Office was for Plaatje in these years, of even greater significance in his life was the way in which he occupied his time outside working hours. In Kimberley Plaatje found himself not an isolated individual in a big city, but a member of a readily identifiable and quite conscious social class whose corporate life he seems to have been - from the beginning - closely associated with. In the 1890s Kimberley had a permanent African population of some 8-9,000, employed in a wide range of activities.[36] At one end of the spectrum there existed what amounted to an African petty-bourgeoisie: a growing and increasingly coherent class of mission-educated Africans who had been drawn to Kimberley because of the opportunities that it provided for employment, and for the utilisation of the skills that they possessed. Kimberley had become, in fact, a focal point for the ambitions and aspirations of hundreds of Africans from different parts of the Cape (and beyond) who shared common ideas, values and experiences as a result of education at the hands of Christian missionaries of one denomination or another.

Predominant in this group were Africans from the Eastern Cape, the oldest and most successful field of missionary endeavour. Enjoying the best educational qualifications, they had been amongst the earliest arrivals on the Diamond Fields and had thus been in a good position to get the best-paid jobs that were open to Africans.[37] Most of Plaatje's thirty or so African colleagues employed in the Post Office, for example,

---

36. Kallaway, 'Black Responses'.
37. Civil Commissioner's Report for Kimberley, 1892, Blue Book on Native Affairs, (Cape Govt. G.7, 1892).

were either Xhosa or Mfengu. Occupying a role as standard bearers of 'Western Civilisation', these men (and some women as well) had come to assume - by the time Plaatje came to Kimberley - a position of social dominance and leadership amongst what was becoming an increasingly cosmopolitan African community in the town.

It was largely at the hands of this Eastern Cape dominated African petty bourgeoisie in Kimberley that many of Plaatje's ideas and aspirations took place. Seeking incorporation into Cape colonial society they were enthusiastic adherents of its dominant norms and values. United by a deep commitment to Christian belief and morality, they shared a firm confidence in the values of British imperial hegemony whose vision it was that animated so much of Cape society. For most Africans educated in the Cape Colony the concepts of 'civilisation' and British imperial supremacy were inseparable. There existed a strong belief that the survival of the non-racial Cape franchise - which both symbolised the kind of society in which they believed and provided the means of incorporation into it - depended upon the maintenance of direct imperial control. 'Direct Imperial control', as Imvo, the paper that they read, put it in 1897, 'is the talisman engraved on the heart of every Native in the land'.[38]

There were several peculiarly important symbols of the set of beliefs and values associated with this. One was the figure of Queen Victoria, and the one notion that was associated with her name more than anything else - the idea of equality before the law. It followed from this that there was a very deeply held respect for the law, something which was also extended to the men whose business it was to uphold and to practise it. It was no coincidence that the five men 'in whose

---

38. Imvo, 13 May 1897.

hands the Natives of Kimberley safely entrusted their interests" - in the words of one African who had lived in Kimberley in the 1890s - should all have been legal men, or that the law courts should have become their main political arena in the defence of their rights.[39]

On occasions the ideas and beliefs that animated Kimberley's African petty bourgeoisie were made very explicit. One such occasion was Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897. The event inspired the Reverend Jonathan Jabavu, brother of the famous editor of Imvo, to ponder the achievements of her reign during one of his sermons. Addressing his church congregation on 20 June 1897, he noted how the "propagation of the Gospel had put a stop to the many evil practices amongst the natives, and tyrannous acts by the heathen chiefs were prevented"; how "both high and low, if they worked honestly, could attain to the highest position in the State"; how "by a good system of education...the savage had been raised to a better state of life"; and how 'the natives had churches and ministers of their own colour, and were enabled to possess their lands". For all this, Rev. Jabavu concluded, 'might the Lord God bless their gracious Queen and increase her years, and lengthen her days so that she should reign long in the land".[40]

It was a summary of many of the elements that made up the ideological milieu in which Plaatje lived in the 1890s. They were communicated to him through his personal contact with people like Jabavu, and his fellow African ministers in Kimberley, Gwayi Tyamzashe and Davidson Msikinya;[41]

---

39. A.P. Thornton, The Imperial Idea and its Enemies (London, 1966); Umteteli, 23 May 1925; Koranta ea Becoana, 22 November 1902; DFA, 26 March 1925; Cape Times, 14 June 1928.
40. DFA, 21 June 1897.
41. For Tyamzashe, see T.D. Mweli Skota, African Yearly Register (Johannesburg 1930), 104-5; Kaffir Express, August 1874, reproduced in Wilson and Perrot (eds.), Outlook on a Century (Lovedale, 1974); Imvo, 5 November 1896.

and Isaiah Bud-M'belle, High Court Interpreter, whose career and achievements embodied - perhaps more than anyone else in Kimberley at this time - the aspirations and ideals of the class to which he belonged; and who became for Plaatje a lifelong friend after they first met in 1894.[42]

Individual example and friendship was one way in which Plaatje came to share the values held by Kimberley's African petty bourgeoisie as a whole. Another was through participating in their busy social life. The values and ideas which they held in common - whether they were notions of loyalty to the British Empire, or the desirability of 'progress', 'education', or regular church attendance - were shaped, sustained and disseminated not in a fitful, haphazard way, but through a network of regular activities and involvement in churches, clubs and societies. It was the existence and functioning of these that created a sense of class and community out of the cosmopolitan group of mission-educated Africans who lived on the Diamond Fields; and it constituted, too, the most important mechanism for the socialisation of new members.

For Plaatje, an organisation known as the South Africans Improvement Society was of particular significance, providing him with perhaps his most important ideological, social and literary training ground. The name of the Society itself is significant: 'improvement', like 'progress', was an absolutely key concept in African petty bourgeois circles. Founded in June 1895, the Society brought together Kimberley's most able and articulate Africans for meetings and discussion at fortnightly intervals. Its objects were as follows:

---

42. For Isaiah Bud-M'belle's career, see African Yearly Register, 104-5; Imvo, 7 March 1894; DFA, 9 January 1893.

'firstly, to cultivate the use of the English language, which is foreign to Africans; secondly, to help each other by fair and reasonable criticism in readings, English composition, etc., etc.'[43]

Proficiency in the English language in the late nineteenth-century Cape Colony was an extremely important matter for Africans who aspired to a full participation in that society. Plaatje's participation in the meetings of the society contributed greatly to his acquisition of mastery over the English language. Due attention was given to the socially important matter of pronunciation. At the Society's meeting on July 16th 1895, Plaatje read a passage from a book (Max O'Rell's John Bull and Co.) which resulted in his 'style of reading and pronunciation' being 'fairly criticised', whilst the 'mistakes corrected did not only benefit the reader, but also the other members'. It was a literary debut that gave little hint of the reader's subsequent achievements in the literary field, or of the fluency he developed as a public speaker. His choice of text, though, had been a happier one than the piece recited by the previous speaker, W.B. Kawa. His admittedly able recitation from Milton's Paradise Lost was not, according to the unnamed member of the Society who wrote up the meeting, 'highly appreciated by the majority of members as it was too classical to be comprehended by the average native mind'.[44] Kawa had overstepped, it would seem, the limits of social and literary oneupmanship.

Plaatje's contribution to a later meeting of the Society seems to have been somewhat better received. Certainly it gave an indication of the direction of his future interests, the essay he read being entitled

---

43. DFA, 23 August 1895.
44. Ibid.

'The History of the Bechuanas'. 'Being a Bechuana', it was recorded, 'he showed great mastery over his subject'.[45]

The regular meetings of the South Africans Improvement Society played an important part in Sol Plaatje's life during these years in Kimberley. He was very active, though, in a variety of other social activities. At the 'social gathering of Africans' that took place on 21st August 1896 - a farewell gathering for H.C. Msikinya and Chalmers Moss, both of whom had secured places at Wilberforce University in the United States - he played a leading role as secretary of the committee of arrangements, responsible, amongst other things, for proposing toasts to 'The Queen and the Royal Family', and 'The Acting Administrator'.[46] On other occasions he took a prominent role in musical entertainment, another major bond of interest and association amongst the town's African petty bourgeoisie. When one of their musical groups, the Philharmonic Society, made its debut in March 1897, for example, Plaatje was one of the artistes, his contribution on this occasion being a baritone rendering of 'Trusting'.[47] Sport, too, especially cricket and rugby football, was important in the life of Plaatje's friends and colleagues. Plaatje himself was never a great sportsman, but this did not prevent him from being elected to the position of Joint Secretary of Eccentrics C.C., one of the two African cricket teams in the town.[48]

---

45 <u>Ibid.</u>; for more on the activities of the society, see <u>Imvo</u>, 29 August 1895; <u>DFA</u>, 17 January and 4 February 1896.

46. <u>DFA</u>, 25 August 1896.

47. <u>DFA</u>, 13 and 17 March 1897; see also <u>DFA</u>, 23 July 1896; 11 and 12 May 1897.

48. <u>Imvo</u>, 22 October 1896; for further details on African sports activities in this period, see <u>DFA</u>, 1 October 1896; 10 September 1897; 19 May 1897; 24 December 1895; 16 January 1897; <u>South African Citizen</u>, 25 August 1897.

During his years in Kimberley in the 1890s, then, Plaatje was very much to the fore in the affairs of the self-confident and exuberant social life of the town's African petty bourgeoisie, sharing in their values and becoming increasingly conscious of a common identity that cut across - but by no means replaced - older loyalties and ties. In the forging of an identity of this kind intermarriage also played a vital role, and here too, Plaatje made his contribution, although this, admittedly, was not how he saw it at the time. Early in 1898 he was married to Elizabeth M'belle, until then a teacher at the Wesleyan Mission School in Burghersdorp. He had first met her when she came to visit her brother, Isaiah Bud-M'belle, in Kimberley. It was not, however, a popular match on the part of either sets of parents or relatives, for both reacted strongly against the notion of their offspring marrying outside their own ethnic group: what went in Kimberley was not so easily accepted in Pniel or Burghersdorp. Family disapproval notwithstanding (which in any case did not last very long), the couple were married by Special Licence in Kimberley on 25 January 1898, a suitably ostentatious affair that was at the same time a logical - certainly it was romantic as well - outcome of the four years that Plaatje had spent in Kimberley.[49]

Later in the year, on August 5th 1898, Plaatje applied for the position of Interpreter to the Magistrate's Court in Mafeking.[50] He

---

49. 'Biography', 27-8; Boer War Diary, 50; S.T. Plaatje, "A South African's Homage to Shakespeare" in I. Gollancz (ed.), A Book of Homage to Shakespeare (London, 1916), 336-9; DFA, 26 January 1898.

50. Cape Archives, AG.630, 120/98, S.T. Plaatje to Resident Magistrate, Mafeking, 5 August 1898, enclosure (annexure F) in Resident Magistrate, Mafeking, to Secretary, Law Department, 15 September 1898.

had long been interested in the law ('As a boy', he wrote on one occasion, 'I was tremendously fascinated by the work of the Supreme Court'), and had probably been intending for some time to apply for a job of this kind when a suitable vacancy arose. After more than four years delivering letters or telegrams it would have been surprising if he was not feeling by this time the desire for a more challenging form of employment. There was, besides, little prospect of further advancement in the Post Office even if he had been interested in pursuing such a career. Nelson Lindie, it will be remembered, and taken fifteen years to achieve promotion to the position of 'sender out'; and it was by now quite clear that Alfred Moletsane, the only African employee in the Kimberley Post Office to have become an Assistant Postmaster, was going to get no further. There seemed every chance, indeed, that he would be demoted to make way for a white man. Pressure to make the Post Office a white man's preserve was growing stronger all the time.

Plaatje was an accomplished linguist even before he left Pniel. In Kimberley, though, his knowledge and proficiency in both African and European languages had greatly improved, and he had studied hard in his spare time to qualify himself further. He was probably encouraged in this by Isaiah Bud-M'belle, who may also have provided him with the opportunity of practising and developing his skills as an interpreter.[51] One of the most highly regarded jobs in the Cape Civil Service that it was possible for an African to hold, for an able and ambitious young man like Plaatje the position of interpreter was really the obvious choice of career for him.

---

51. 'Biography', 22.

In his letter to C.G.H. Bell, the Resident Magistrate at Mafeking, Plaatje wrote that his "knowledge and ability to translate and retranslate into the English, Dutch, German, Kaffir, Sesuto and Sechunana languages qualifies me for the position I am applying for", and added that if appointed, "I will do my utmost best to discharge my duties satisfactorily".[52] Plaatje got the job, but in one respect there was a disappointment: the salary of £96 p.a. was £6 more than his predecessor had received (Plaatje could read and write Dutch which he could not), but this was exactly what he had been getting in the Post Office in Kimberley, doing what he accurately described as "inferior duties".[53] With a wife to support, and a young son on the way, £96 p.a. was not a massive sum, and Plaatje was quite entitled to feel that his skills were considerably undervalued. He nevertheless assumed his new duties in Mafeking on 1st October 1898, leaving his wife, Elizabeth, with his mother and other relatives at Pniel as she was expecting a baby in a few weeks' time.

---

52. Cape Archives, AG.630 120/98, Plaatje to Resident Magistrate, Mafeking, 5 August 1898.
53. "Form of Application", enclosure in above.

CHAPTER 2

'THE ESSENTIAL INTERPRETER'

The move to Mafeking took Plaatje to a very different environment. With a population of some 1,500 whites and 5,000 blacks Mafeking was very much smaller than Kimberley. It was, though, the largest town for many miles around, important as a railway junction on the line northwards to Rhodesia, as the administrative capital of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and as a market centre for the district; and it possessed - since 1897 - its own Resident Magistrate and Civil Commissioner. Mafeking really encompassed two separate settlements: the European town, founded in 1885, neatly laid out and proud of its recently acquired municipal status, and the older settlement of 'Mafiking' (meaning, in Tswana, 'place of stones', of which Mafeking was a European corruption), founded and occupied by the Tshidi Rolong, and separated by a distance of about a mile from the European town.

When Plaatje arrived in Mafeking in 1898 the great figure in Tshidi history, Montshiwa, had been dead for nearly two years. Memories of him remained extremely strong. Chief of the Rolong for nearly fifty years, Montshiwa had led his people to their new home in the 1860s, and through a mixture of fiece resistance, skilful bargaining and negotiation, and good luck, his people had retained for themselves much of their land and a considerable degree of independence and self-government in the face of white settler expansion in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Wessels Montshiwa, Montshiwa's successor, was not regarded with the respect that was accorded his predecessor. On several occasions, indeed, he had been in trouble with the white

authorities on charges of drunkenness and for failing to pay his debts. Yet as Chief of the Rolong he nevertheless inherited the powers (albeit increasingly circumscribed) and prestige that went with the office. The colonial government - a relative newcomer - was by no means the only source of power and influence in the Mafeking district.[1]

The Tshidi Rolong had had little alternative but to come to terms with the realities of the imposition of white power. Attitudes to the problem nevertheless varied. In the forefront of those willing to make the greatest adaptions and to accept change were the Molema family. The first amongst the Tshidi to become Christians, Chief Molema (a brother of Montshiwa) and his sons had played a vitally important role as mediators (by virtue of their literacy and knowledge of the English language as well as the position within the tribal hierarchy) between the Tshidi and the various colonial and imperial authorities with whom they had been obliged to deal throughout the second half of the nineteenth century; and they had been the leading exponents amongst their people of the values of western 'civilisation' - Christian belief, education, and the pursuit of modern methods of agriculture. At the same time they had retained and increased their position of power and influence within the Tshidi polity that their standing within the tribal hierarchy gave them, something that on occasion had led to friction and tension between them and Montshiwa, whose authority they nevertheless always recognised.[2]

---

1. For Montshiwa's career, see S.M. Molema, Montshiwa: Barolong Chief and Patriot; and J. Comaroff, PhD thesis; for Wessels Montshiwa, see Bechuanaland News, 18 June 1898; Koranta, 16 December 1903.
2. Comaroff, PhD thesis, especially 358-9.

It was with Silas Molema, younger son of the old Chief Molema, that Plaatje went to live when he moved to Mafeking. Silas Molema had recommended him to the position of interpreter at the Magistrate's Court, and undoubtedly regarded Plaatje as his protege, a man whose skills could in due course be put to good use in the interests of the Rolong people as a whole. Born in 1850, Silas Molema had been educated at the Wesleyan Healdtown Institution in the Eastern Cape. Convinced of the virtue of extending education amongst his people, he had returned to Mafeking in 1878 and set up a school where Tshidi children were taught English. Molema combined such activities with his other chiefly duties. 'The School was often interrupted by the several quarrels with the Boers', Plaatje recounted later, 'as the teacher, being a sub-chief, always went on active service at the head of his regiment'.[3] By the 1890s Silas Molema had also become a large landowner in his own right, and had a fairly extensive range of business interests - employing, for example, a white manager to run his store on land that he owned in Pitsani, over the border in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. It was from here, in 1895, that Jameson had launched his unfortunate expedition into the Transvaal. In return, Jameson had promised Molema - if the Raid achieved its object - further tracts of land inside South Africa. He was rewarded instead with payment of £300. Silas Molema at least had done well out of the Jameson Raid.[4]

---

3. Cape Times, 1 October 1927.
4. Ibid.; Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Aa3.1, correspondence re. Pitsani.

Though they were of a different generation, Silas Molema was a man with whom Plaatje had much in common. During his time in Kimberley Plaatje had come to share a sense of identity with other mission-educated Africans from a wide variety of backgrounds, men and women who had made a life for themselves in the cosmopolitan milieu of a large industrial town that was far removed, geographically, from any surviving African chiefdoms. Plaatje's move to Mafeking emphasised the wider social responsibilities that were always part of the make up of this group of people, and in Silas Molema he found a man whose life and activities expressed - in somewhat aristocratic fashion - the sense of duty and responsibility towards his people that was soon to become such an important characteristic of Plaatje's own life and outlook.

****

Plaatje began work at the Mafeking Magistrate's Court on the first day of October 1898. His duties were twofold: interpreting in the Magistrate's Court when it was sitting, and acting as a junior clerk and office messenger in the Civil Commissioner's Office (the Civil Commissioner was also the Magistrate) when it was not. Until 1901 Plaatje's boss, the CC and RM, was Charles Bell, a widely experienced man who had commenced his Civil Service career nearly thirty years earlier as a clerk to the magistrate in Leribe, Basutoland. Thereafter, he had served as a Resident Magistrate himself at various places in the Cape Colony, moving to Barkley West in 1895 where he may well have come across members of Plaatje's family at the Pniel Mission, part of the Barkly West magisterial district. He moved to Mafeking in March 1897, when the new

magistracy was established there.[5] Like Plaatje, Bell was an exceptional linguist, fluent in English, Dutch, and four African languages; and he possessed two other qualities - greatly appreciated by Plaatje - that were perhaps just as essential to being an effective magistrate, patience and a sense of humour. Bell was also a man who insisted upon the highest standards of court interpreting and procedure, and in this respect Plaatje was to consider himself particularly fortunate to have had the opportunity of 'serving his apprenticeship as interpreter' under such a man.[6]

Most of the cases that came before the Mafeking Magistrate's Court were of a fairly minor nature - petty theft, drunkenness, assault, or breaking the town's various municipal regulations and bye-laws. Anything much more serious than this went before the visiting Circuit Court. Occasionally this dealt with cases that generated a lot of local interest, like, for example, the IDB (Illicit Diamond Buying) case in March 1899, remarkable, so the local paper reported, 'for the size of the diamonds found in the possession of the accused', an African by the name of Joseph Ephraim.[7]

Whatever the nature of the court case in which he interpreted, Plaatje always took his duties extremely seriously. Perhaps more than anything else it is this that emerges from a fascinating account that Plaatje wrote on the subject in 1909. Entitled 'The Essential Interpreter', Plaatje's account - hitherto unpublished - is a treatise

---

5. E.F. Kilpin (ed.), Cape of Good Hope Civil List, 1902, 289.
6. S.T. Plaatje, 'The Essential Interpreter', unpublished MS in Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Db2, IV:7.
7. Bechuanaland News, 4 March 1899.

upon the nature of court interpreting in the South African law courts, and emphasises in the strongest terms the importance of court interpreting in the administration of justice under the conditions that prevailed in South Africa. 'The Essential Interpreter' also contains many examples and illustrations drawn from Plaatje's own experiences in the Magistrate's Court in Mafeking, and it accordingly provides a unique insight into the work that he did, and the ideas and feelings that he developed in relation to it.

Even before Plaatje applied for his job he was well aware of the importance and responsibilities attached to the position of court interpreter. Deeply committed as he and his Kimberley friends were to the legal system of the Cape Colony, it had always been one of their major concerns to ensure that the practice of equality before the law for all Her Majesty's subjects, regardless of class, colour, or creed, measured up to the theory. Often, of course, it did not, something that was due in many cases to faulty court interpreting, especially on the part of white interpreters with a very imperfect command of the African languages in which they were supposed to be competent. Imvo was guilty of no exaggeration in 1896 when it claimed that 'on the correct rendering of English into Kafir, and vice versa, depend issues so serious as those of life and death', a point that had been emphasised by 'Biza' - a member of the South Africans Improvement Society in Kimberley and thus somebody that would have been well known to Plaatje - in a letter to the paper earlier in the same year.[8] In Mafeking, though,

8. Imvo, 27 December and 28 January 1896. A comparison between 'The Essential Interpreter' and 'Biza's' letter suggests that 'Biza' may possibly have been Plaatje himself; see also, DFA, 11 April 1893 and Imvo, 5 March 1896.

Plaatje acquired direct experience of the vital role of court interpreting, and wrote by far the best account of the subject that has survived.

When Plaatje first presented himself for duty in Mafeking Charles Bell's first words were to tell him that 'interpreting in Court and interpreting at the sale of a cow were two different things entirely, and that it was as necessary to cultivate the art as to acquire a knowledge of the respective languages'. Plaatje responded immediately to the high standards that Bell set in the courtroom: 'I always made my translation', he wrote, 'with a perfect security, believing that he could rectify my errors, if any. I cannot express the satisfaction this gave me - always - not only because of the correctness of my rendition but on account of the knowledge that the chances of a miscarriage of justice were non-est'.[9]

On some occasions, however, Plaatje found himself interpreting in cases which required him to interpret in languages that Bell was not familiar with. He accordingly felt a much greater sense of responsibility and anxiety, and took even greater pains than usual over his translation. Plaatje described one such occasion, when he had to interpret in German and Koranna, languages in which Bell was 'absolutely unversed' and in which he himself was 'less familiar'. The seriousness with which he approached his duties comes over very clearly:

> Mr. Bell's abilities as a linguist were often the bye word with the motley crew [the court audience], and on that occasion I found an impression among them that the proceedings had given me the greatest satisfaction since for the first time I was able to exercise a free hand to perform a role in which I was

9. 'Essential Interpreter', IV:11.

> not subject to criticism, but my mind was working in the opposite direction. It seemed to me that the Magistrate, prisoner, prosecutor, and spectators could not really believe that I was doing my best in a difficult position, and that it was a very good best. As mistakes are very common in these matters I left no loophole for the slightest error. I took much pains [sic] eliciting my facts and getting the deponent to revise his sentences if they contained a phrase of the meaning of which I was not quite certain. This retarded the proceedings in an unmistakeable manner and my renditions, usually noted for their expeditiousness, were clearly boring. I felt that it was a tedious performance taking up the time of the Court to ascertain minute details which could easily be left unresearched; however, I threw the approbation of the Court and its loafers to the winds and centred my attention in the correct administration of justice only, determined to tell the Magistrate so should he remonstrate with me for delaying the Court more than is my wont.[10]

It is a revealing account that says much about the kind of pressures that existed in the courtroom (which could all too easily affect the judicial process), as well as Plaatje's own highly conscientious approach to his work. On this occasion virtue had its own reward:

> It transpired in the end that this did deserve the approbation of the Court, for in conversation with his Lordship the Mayor, the Magistrate expressed his satisfaction with his new interpreter, who, unlike some he had had, preferred to be understood when he translated and who feels visibly grave and took extraordinary pains when interpreting into and from languages not known to any others, and when he knows that the course of justice depends upon him entirely. Others, he said, considered it <u>infra dig</u> to invite correction, they seem to fear that patient eliciting of obscure facts will be mistaken for incompetence and are happier if they can easily gloss over mistakes in an inaudible tone. Needless to say I was highly elated at the testimony.[11]

---

10. <u>Ibid.</u>, IV:8.
11. <u>Ibid.</u>, IV:10.

Certain legal terms and phrases tested Plaatje's abilities to the limit. One of these was the familiar statement, 'You are committed for trial'. Plaatje had found that many English-speaking prisoners in the dock - informed by the presiding Magistrate that this was what was to happen to them - had little idea of what the words meant. African prisoners were often even more bewildered. Faced with the problem of explanation, Plaatje found that a literal translation was more or less meaningless, and developed instead a 'rather round-about but more satisfactory because better understood' way of expressing it. Retranslated back into English, Plaatje's rendering read as follows: 'Your case will be sent to the Crown Prosecutor at Kimberley. After reading it he will say if you are to be tried by the Magistrate, by the next Circuit judge, or if you are not to be prosecuted at all'.[12]

Another aspect of his work that Plaatje regarded as a great challenge was the business of cross-examination in three different languages. Here, it was not just a question of competence in the three languages that were involved. It required also a detailed knowledge of the actual procedure that was followed, which itself needed to be explained discreetly and efficiently to the prisoner or witness concerned. Not surprisingly, Plaatje regarded these tri-lingual cross-examinations as one of the greatest challenges to his professional ability.[13]

---

12. Ibid., IV:16.
13. Ibid., IV:12-15.

He was very conscious also that absolute integrity, as well as the highest standards of professional competence, was an essential part of his job. Occupying so vital a role in the judicial process, interpreters were an obvious target for bribery and corruption. Some years earlier there had been a famous I.D.B. case in Kimberley - which Plaatje would certainly have heard about - in which Joseph Moss, the African High Court Interpreter at the time, had been offered, and had refused, a £50 bribe to mistranslate evidence.[14] There were many other less dramatic threats to the impartial exercise of the court interpreter's duties. Each South African court, Plaatje therefore insisted, needed 'not only a human tool who can reproduce a Kafir or Sechuana sentence in English but one whose conscience will never permit of any augmentation or garbling in his rendition'. For an interpreter to add anything from his own knowledge which would 'lead the Court to liberate an unfortunate prisoner' was as bad, in Plaatje's view, 'as the other way round'.[15]

Plaatje greatly enjoyed his interpreting work in the Magistrate's Court in Mafeking, and was probably as good an interpreter as any that have served in South Africa's law courts, before or since. Determined to improve his proficiency even further, he also occupied himself - in 1898 and 1899 - in further study of the languages used in court with the intention of taking the Civil Service examinations, an additional qualification that he hoped would earn him an increased salary and promotion to the High Court. In 1899 Plaatje registered, therefore,

---

14. Rojesky v. Ross, High Court of Griqualand West, 25 September 1886, reproduced in Appendix N, Report of the Royal Commission of Enquiry into the Diamond Trade Act, 1887 (Cape Govt., G.3, 1888). I am grateful to Rob Turrell for this reference.
15. 'Essential Interpreter', IV:17-18.

for the papers in Dutch, Tswana, Sotho and Typewriting (the latter being one of his main activities in the Civil Commissioner's Office), planning to travel to Cape Town in December to sit the examinations.[16] But in October 1899, war broke out between the Imperial Government and the Boer republics, and Mafeking - less than ten miles from the Transvaal border - was immediately surrounded by Boer forces. The famous siege of Mafeking had begun. One of its lesser known effects was that it prevented Plaatje from travelling to Cape Town to sit his examinations.

****

Plaatje had a good siege. So much emerges from the diary that he kept for most of the duration of the siege, a remarkable document that provdes a fascinating insight both into the mind of the man who wrote it and into the history of the siege itself.[17] One of the immediate effects of the commencement of the siege for Plaatje was a big increase in the range of his duties. Much of this came about because the two white clerks who usually worked in the Civil Commissioner's office - W.F.G. Geyer and E.N. Grayson, the latter possessed a B.A. - took up arms with the Town Guard, the civilian militia raised for the defence of the town. With the declaration of martial law Plaatje soon found himself interpreting not just at the

---

16. Cape Archives, AG.837 3/1900, Plaatje to Law Department, Cape Town, 6 June 1900.
17. For the history of the siege, see especially B. Gardner, Mafeking: a Victorian Legend (London, 1966); J.A. Hamilton, The Siege of Mafeking (London, 1900); B. Roberts, Churchills in Africa (London, 1970); B. Willan, 'The Siege of Mafeking' in P. Warwick (ed.), The South African War (forthcoming, London, 1980).

Magistrate's Court - which continued to operate under the new regulations - but in two new courts that were set up, the Court of Summary Jurisdiction and the Officer's Board Court. Both provided new challenges. The Officer's Board Court, Plaatje noted in his diary on 23rd November 1899, 'transacts a lot of business in a very short time as evidence is taken by a shorthand writer, which causes one to extremely enjoy interpreting, as you have to fire away without stoppage'.[18] He was also appointed as the Dutch Interpreter to the Court of Summary Jurisdiction. This had not been the original intention of the military authorities, for they had at first required the Staff Interpreter - a white man - to do the job: 'he being incompetent in Dutch', Plaatje related, 'my services were secured'.[19]

Court interpreting in siege conditions was somewhat different from usual. Apart from interruptions from shelling, the conduct of the courts often departed radically from Plaatje's notion of what constituted proper courtroom procedure and decorum. Thus his description of one courtroom scene in December, 1899:

> A lot of boys of the firm of Julius Weil are suing their employers for wages. Mr. Spenser Minchin, LLB, solicitor (now Lieutenant Minchin, Bechuanaland Rifles) appeared for all the plaintiffs, and Mr. L.W. de Kock, attorney (now member of the Town Guard), appeared for the defence. It was a novel court: only the parties concerned looked as usual, but not the court. The plaintiffs' attorney was in military attire; lawyer for the defence, never shaved since the siege, all hairy and dressed in a third-hand suit without a collar, looked more like a farmer than an attorney. Myself in knickerbockers and without a jacket, looked more like a member of the football team or a village cyclist than a court interpreter. All the natives, but one, carried their cases.[20]

---

18. *Diary*, 46.
19. Bell Papers (Cory Library, Rhodes University Library), Plaatje to Lord Edward Cecil, 26 January 1900.
20. *Diary*, 72.

Punctuality, as well as decorum, was something else that suffered during the siege. Plaatje was especially concerned about this when he himself proved to be a fault, as was the case, for example, on 25th November 1899:

> The Summary Jurisdiction Courts are not as particular as our Divisional Courts about punctuality. Night before last I was warned to be at the office at 7.00 pm. I misunderstood the warning and went to the Courthouse until they sent for me half-an-hour later. Last night I was told to be at the office at 6.15. I misunderstood the time this time and turned up ten minutes late. The shorthand writer was also fifteen minutes late. The Officers, finding me an irresolute, unreliable wobbler, engaged the services of a white man as the witnesses were principally Boers - but the fellow being an amateur interpreter was completely flabbergasted when it came to cross examination, and I took his place to immense advantage. This lateness appears to be a disease with which I am affected and I will see to it that it does not occur again as I feel very uncomfortable in consequence.[21]

Carrying out this additional interpreting work, Plaatje believed it was only right that he should receive appropriate remuneration. In January 1900, he presented his case in a letter to the Staff Officer, Lord Edward Cecil (son of the English prime minister). 'I hope your Lordship would remember', Plaatje wrote,

> that except during the week of my indisposition (last Christmas), I have never failed to act to the satisfaction of the Court in that capacity, and also bear in mind that although it would do me an amount of good, it would not hamper the Government in any way if you felt pleased to grant my request.[22]

---

21. *Diary*, 47.
22. Bell Papers, Plaatje to Cecil, 26 January 1900.

The immediate outcome for Plaatje was a severe ticking off for having presumed to write directly to the Staff Officer, rather than through Mr. Bell, and in a manner that was undoubtedly considered rather presumptuous. 'Never write to me again about service matters except through Mr. Bell', he was informed. Plaatje felt obliged to make an abject apology:

> I beg to state that I exceedingly regret the irregularity and humbly request that you will overlook it and kindly have the matter fixed up satisfactorily

- and promptly went on to rephrase and redirect the presentation of his claim: 'You might kindly mention to the Chief of Staff...'[23]

Apart from his additional interpreting duties, Plaatje also rendered 'invaluable service' - as Bell acknowledged after the siege - to the military authorities in several other directions.[24] Acting as a vitally important link between the Civil Commissioner and the Rolong population of the stadt, one of his most important duties was the organisation and instruction of 'Native Runners and Spies and those who went out to capture cattle',[25] and drawing up reports from information taken from them when they returned (those that did return, that is) from their expeditions. As Baden-Powell's local military intelligence was based largely on reports like these, it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the role that Plaatje in rendering this information available to him, via the Civil Commissioner. The report that Plaatje drew up on 7 November 1899, was typical of many:

---

23. Ibid., Plaatje to Bell, 30 January 1900.
24. Cape Archives, AG.837 3/1900, Bell to Law Department, ? June 1900.
25. Bell Papers, C.G.H. Bell, 'Diary during the Siege of Mafeking', 169.

Morena,

> 20 Barolongs, under Paul, accompanied 80 troopers of the Protectorate Regiment during the small hours of the morning and went to about 400 yards from the laager down Molopo, from where they maximmed and musketted it. They nearly put down every tent and many of the Boers fled up Lothlakane. By that time a large number of them was returning from the Eastern Camp and our men retreated slowly with only one Trooper badly wounded. It was the wish of the Barolong to go for no other purpose than capturing their cannon but the whites would not do that. They subsequently discovered that they could have found it very easy indeed if they [had] prepared for it when they started. They were ably assisted by a '7 pounder' from the Refugees Camp. They consider the enemy's loss enormous.
>
> (sgd.) Sol T. Plaatje[26]

Plaatje's reports, Bell acknowledged, conveyed accurately 'what the Native meant', and were, he felt, 'a true record of what happened, from a Native point of view'.[27] Plaatje had several other tasks. Amongst the most important of these was the job of drawing up regular reports on 'the Native Situation' - all 'the doings in connection with Native affairs' as Plaatje noted in his diary, an arrangement which was so satisfactory, Plaatje let it be known later, 'that Mr. Bell was created a C.M.G. at the end of the siege'.[28] As the siege went on Plaatje's range of duties expanded further. In February 1900, for example, he found himself responsible for assisting in arrangements for the departure of large numbers of the African population living within the lines of investment, Baden-Powell's method of solving the food shortage problem. Again, Plaatje was the vitally important intermediary. 'On horseback all day', he wrote in his diary on February 17th 1900, 'gathering people together and

---

26. Bell Papers, Report from Plaatje to Bell, 7 November 1899.
27. Bell 'Diary', 169.
28. Diary, 114; Native Life, 10.

arranging for their exodus tonight'.[29] A month later he was involved in carrying out a census amongst those that remained. It was not something that the Rolong were particularly happy about, and many were reluctant to co-operate. Thus his diary entry for 21st March 1900:

> The people are vexing me exceedingly; one would ask me what I wished to do with the name of the owner of a place; another would object to a repetition of the census as they were counted (registered) twice already during the present siege. Another would say: 'no wonder the present, unlike all previous sieges of Mafeking, is so intolerable for the unfortunate people are counted like sheep'. Another would stand at the door, empty herself of the whole of her stock of bad words, then threaten me to 'just touch my pen and jot down any number of her family'. The so-and-so![30]

Thus the voice of the harrassed civil servant!

On top of official duties Plaatje also found time to engage himself - evidently with the permission of his superior - in several other forms of employment, offering his services to the war correspondents in Mafeking at the start of the siege. One of those who took him on, Vere Stent, the Reuter's correspondent, later told of how he was looking for a 'secretary amanuensis' to help him in his work, and recalled the qualities and characteristics of the young man who presented himself:

> He spoke perfect English and I engaged him at a ridiculously low wage which he named himself and seemed glad enough to get. We commandeered a typewriter and I recognised, in my secretary, an extraordinarily able assistant. To begin with, he could spell - which I can't and never could. He was quick on the machine - I hadn't any occasion to check his shorthand - quickwitted and understanding, and quick to pick up and catch a new expression, ask the meaning and derivation of

---

29. <u>Diary</u>, 124.
30. <u>Diary</u>, 144.

> it, and add it to his vocabulary. As what would now be called a liaison officer, between me and my little corps of native dispatch runners, he was invaluable and I find in my diary entries of substantial sums of money paid to him for distribution amongst them.[31]

Working for Vere Stent and other war correspondents in Mafeking during the siege enabled Plaatje, as he put it, to 'keep pace with the hard times'.[32] He had particular reason to regret the murder (by Lt. Murchison) of his 'dear friend', E.G. Parslow, correspondent for the Daily Chronicle, in the early days of the siege. This murder, Plaatje wrote,

> has not only deprived me of a good friend but it has wrecked me financially. He paid for my little assistance so liberally that I never felt the price of foodstuffs that [have reigned] here since the commencement of the Siege.[33]

Angus Hamilton, the most perceptive of the war correspondents in Mafeking, was another who benefited from Plaatje's assistance. On one occasion, for example, Plaatje took him to the stadt to take some photographs for one of the publications he represented, the Black and White Budget, where they duly appeared.[34] Additional typing practice - and some interesting insights into the thoughts of those around him - came Plaatje's way through typing out the diaries of several people who were anxious to record their experiences for posterity. From 8th February 1900, he had also to keep a regular official diary at his place of work - 'somewhat bothersome as besides this one I am typing Mr. Bell's, Dr. Hayes', and Captain Greener's simultaneously'. This

---

31. Star (Johannesburg), 5 July 1932; for evidence of one such payment, see Vere Stent to Reuters' Agent Cape Town, 31 January 1900 (Stent Papers, Wits University archives).
32. Diary, 44.
33. Diary, 38.
34. Diary, 69.

new 'gratis job' he could hardly refuse to do, however, since 'I am using the office typewriter and share the pay with no one'.[35] Charles Bell, for one, was very pleased with the job that Plaatje did for him in typing out his private diary:

> The typewriting has been done by my faithful interpreter, Solomon T. Plaatje, who shifted his typewriter in order to meet the requirements of the big guns and the Mauser bullets, and varied his accuracy according to the activity of the Boer fire, and who had on many occasions to give it up on account of the firing being too heavy.[36]

Most remarkable of all the diaries kept during the siege of Mafeking was that written (but not typed) by Plaatje himself. It deserves far fuller treatment than is possible here. As an African view of the siege - and indeed of any other military episode in the South African War - it is unique. Plaatje recorded in greater detail than anybody else the extent of the African contribution to the defence of the town, something that was very much played down in other accounts of the siege: the South African War, after all, was supposed to be a 'white man's war', and what had taken place in Mafeking clearly did not correspond with such a theory.[37] But from Plaatje - acting on many occasions as the intermediary between the Rolong and the military authorities - we hear of the brave exploits of men like Mathakgong; of the reactions of the Rolong to the restrictions imposed upon them by the authorities, of their response to the insensitivity on the part of those officers and soldiers responsible for dealing with them.

---

35. Diary, 114.
36. Bell 'Diary', 169.
37. For one piece of work that goes some way towards redressing the balance, see P. Warwick, 'African Societies and the South African War 1899-1902' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 1978).

But more important than what the diary tellus of the siege is what it tells us of the man who wrote it. One is struck at once by his gift for description, his skill in conveying his own mood or that of the people around him, his exploitation to the full of the capabilities of a language that only a few years earlier he had still been having difficulties with. In the diary there is evident the mark both of his missionary upbringing, with its strong moral code ('This lateness appears to be a disease with which I am infected and I will see that it does not occur again as I feel very uncomfortable in consequence'), and its frequent references to the Bible; and perhaps even more clearly, the mark of the years that he had spent in Kimberley, for it was here that he developed the humour, the optimism, the self-confidence, the facility with the English language - those qualities that are perhaps the strongest characteristics of the diary. Plaatje's debts to his friends and colleagues in Kimberley, members of the South Africans Improvement Society and others, is plainly evident in the diary, and it perhaps deserves to stand as their memorial (for they have no other) as well as the remarkable individual product of the most gifted of their number.

****

Plaatje survived the siege unscathed and in relatively comfortable circumstances, unlike most of his less-fortunate countrymen who suffered increasing privation in the latter months of the siege. The return to normality, though, must have come as a considerable anti-climax. Having effectively 'had charge of Native affairs work until June, 1900, when our office resumed work' - as Plaatje wrote - with the ending of

the siege he had to give up many of the additional responsibilities and duties that he had so clearly relished, making way for the two white clerks who returned to their former positions after being demobilised from the Town Guard. Plaatje did retain, though, the position of Dutch Interpreter that he had been given during the seige (and was involved in this capacity in the Treason cases that began soon after), and he continued to receive the Imperial allowance that he had been granted in October, 1899.[38]

In December 1900, Plaatje travelled to Cape Town (the first time he had been there) to take the examinations he had first registered for a year earlier. Intending to take the same four papers as before, he found that he was unable - for what he described as 'official reasons' - to sit the two African language examinations, Sotho and Tswana (probably because the examiner was his brother-in-law, Isaiah Bud-M'belle).[39] He was successful in the two papers that he did take, Dutch and Typewriting, although not - it would appear from the official record - at the head of the list of successful candidates in each subject as he claimed. It was nevertheless a thoroughly commendable achievement, and he was the first African ever to have satisfied the examiners in the recently instituted Typewriting examination.[40]

****

38. Cape Archives, AG.1002 37/1902, Annexure A, Plaatje to CC and RM, Mafeking, 27 March 1902; AG.923 106/1902, Annexure A, Plaatje to CC and RM, Mafeking, 18 July 1901.

39. Cape Archives, AG.1002 37/1902, Annexure A, Plaatje to CC and RM Mafeking, 27 March 1902; Report of Civil Service Commission for 1900 (Cape Govt. G.20, 1901), 4-5.

40. Ibid.; for details of the content of the Dutch and Typewriting examinations for that year, see E.F. Kilpin (ed.), Civil List, 1901.

The reduction in the scope of Plaatje's official duties after the siege was probably more than compensated for by an increase in his involvement in the affairs of the Rolong. Exactly when Plaatje became tribal secretary to the Rolong is unclear, but it was certainly in such a capacity that he organised the presentation - on behalf of the Tshidi chief, headmen, and people - of a silver shield and illuminated scroll to Benjamin Weil, the government contractor, in appreciation of the 'valuable services' rendered to them during the siege, on the occasion of his departure to England in the middle of 1902.[41] Amongst the Tshidi, the tradition of utilising the skills of an educated commoner like Plaatje went back a long way. The position of tribal secretary had been occupied with distinction for many years by Stephen Lefenya, and he had been rewarded accordingly. By the 1890s, though, Stephen Lefenya was growing old, and increasingly incapable of keeping up with the tremendous changes that were taking place in the world in which the Tshidi lived;[42] and a further gap had been left by the death of Israel Molema (eldest son of Chief Molema) in June 1895.

Plaatje was the man who was being groomed as Lefenya's successor. Probably this had been in the mind of Silas Molema, and other members of his family, from the beginning, and they were no doubt well aware of the advantages to be gained from having 'their man' (which Stephen Lefenya never was) in such a strategic position. There was a high

---

41. The silver shield and illuminated manuscript are now in the Mafeking Museumn, having been purchased from a London antique dealer in 1978.
42. For Lefenya's career, see Comaroff, PhD thesis, especially 237 and 304-5; S.M. Molema, Montshiwa, 181-3.

premium on the skills that Plaatje possessed. He had an excellent grasp of the complex political realities of the world in which he lived; he read and spoke both of the white man's languages, and was intimately familiar with the workings of the judicial system. He was the ideal person to deal with the lawyers, the municipal authorities, and above all with the local representative of the colonial government, the Civil Commissioner, in whose office he worked. Over such issues as compensation, for example, Plaatje proved his worth by guiding his people through the regulations and paperwork that were necessary to enable them to claim what was due to them.[43]

At the same time Plaatje was in a potentially very awkward position. He had loyalties both to the Tshidi Rolong people, and to his employers, the colonial government. During the siege the two parties had, by and large, been united in the common struggle against the Boers, but even then tensions had arisen, and Plaatje had found himself on occasions caught right in the middle - carrying out such unpopular duties, for example, as the census in the _stadt_. After the siege relations between the Rolong and the local authorities worsened. Many of the promises that had been made to them during the siege about rewards for their loyalty were not carried out, and the Rolong were especially bitter about having to lay down their arms as soon as the siege had ended - a bitterness that turned to anger when the Boers raided their _stadt_ early in 1902.[44] Increasingly the two main loyalties in Plaatje's life were coming into conlfict. The most dramatic example of this took

43. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), A.979 Cc2, correspondence re. compensation, 1900-03.
44. _Koranta_, 30 August 1902; for details of the broken promises, see _Native Life_, Chapter XIV.

place in 1901 when he was requested by the new Civil Commissioner (Bell had recently departed) to interpret at a meeting in the *stadt*, the purpose of which was to depose the Rolong chief, Wessels. Plaatje had no high opinion of Wessels, but believed very strongly that the government did not possess the right to depose a chief in this manner, and he refused to officiate. The government proved to be unable to carry out its wishes, and Wessels remained in office until he died in 1903. Possibly Plaatje's attitude had something to do with influencing opinion in this direction. Whether this was the case or not, it was a situation that had produced for Plaatje a direct clash of loyalties, and he seems to have been clear as to which one came first.[45]

Plaatje handed in his resignation from the Cape Civil Service on March 27th 1902, to take effect three months later.[46] Probably an increasingly awareness of the difficulties of serving two masters had much to do with his decision. He was also becoming more and more disenchanted with his treatment by the Civil Service. The Imperial allowance he had received since the beginning of the siege was discontinued in April, 1901. He applied for a local allowance to offset this - mentioning the high cost of living, the salaries paid to interpreters elsewhere, and his success in the Civil Service examinations - but was not, it seems, successful.[47] The decision to resign from the

---

45. 'Biography', 34-5.
46. Cape Archives, AG.1002 37/1902, Annexure A, Plaatje to CC and RM, Mafeking, 27 March 1902.
47. Cape Archives, AG.923 106/1901, Annexure A, Plaatje to CC and RM, Mafeking, 18 July 1901.

Civil Service was nevertheless not one to taken lightly. Plaatje certainly considered that for the work he did he was being underpaid (he thought his salary of £130 p.a. 'a waste of time'), and that there appeared to be little prospect of further advancement.[48] He must have been well aware, though, that compared with most other Africans who lived in Mafeking he was very well off, and he was at least assured of a regular source of income (with a pension on retirement that was dependent upon length of service). As he was by now very much a family man (his second son, Richard, was born in 1901), this cannot have been a wholly unimportant consideration.

There was another side to Plaatje's decision to resign from the Civil Service. Since the middle of 1901 he had been involved with Silas Molema in an exciting new venture, the establishment of an English/Tswana newspaper, Koranta ea Becoana, or the Bechuana Gazette. The time at which Plaatje handed in his resignation coincided with the beginning of a new phase in the newspaper's development. Plaatje left the Civil Service not just because he was disillusioned with prospects and pay, but because he had an altogether more attractive and promising job lined up - that of editor of this paper. It is to this, and its background, that we must now turn.

---

48. 'Essential Interpreter', IV:19-20.

CHAPTER 3

EDITOR OF KORANTA EA BECOANA

> The editor of the Mafeking Kaffir newspaper, 'Koranta ea Becoana', is a studious person who used to interpret at the Magistrate's Court. He got into thinking during the course of his duties, and a lot of stored up, compressed thought drove him into journalism as an outlet for it.[1]

Issue No.1 of Koranta ea Becoana ('The Bechuanas' Gazette') appeared on 27 April 1901. Owned by G.N.H. Whales, editor of the local Mafeking Mail, and printed on the Mail's press, Koranta started life modestly - a single page of news, in Tswana, by no means cheap at three pence a copy. G.N.H. Whales had ultimate responsibility for the new venture, and technically he was the editor and publisher. In practice, though, he can have had very little to do with the content of the newspaper. Unable to read or speak Tswana, responsibility here lay rather with Silas Molema with whom he had evidently entered into some form of agreement.[2] After thirteen issues there was a change in the direction of the newspaper's affairs. Whether or not this had been envisaged from the beginning, Molema increased his control over the paper, and on 5 September 1901 - by which time twelve issues of Koranta had appeared - a new agreement was reached, and for a consideration of £25 Molema purchased copyright from Whales and effectively assumed control of the paper.[3]

---

1. Mafeking Mail, 9 May 1905.
2. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Aa3.6.1., 'Memorandum of agreement' between G.N.H. Whales and S.M. Molema, 5 September 1901; Aa3.6.2., memo. from Whales, 31 August 1901; undated draft of letter (in Plaatje's hand), Molema to Whales.
3. 'Memorandum of agreement'.

Agreement had also to be reached over a contract for the printing of the 500 copies of Koranta which probably constituted the extent of its circulation.[4] Under the control of its new proprietor, Koranta expanded. Its issue of 7 September 1901 expanded to two pages and for the first time it began to carry advertisements, mostly inserted by local European dealers and traders in Mafeking. At the end of 1901 and early in 1902 there was further progress. Koranta's circulation was increasing amongst Tswana speakers in the Cape, the Orange Free State, the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and the Transvaal; in Johannesburg, so Rev. J. Moshuela later recalled, 'it was almost marvellous to see how much the little sheet...was in demand out there'.[5] And issue No.42, 22 March 1902, was able to announce that the paper was 'the only authorised medium for publishing Government Proclamations addressed to Natives by Colonial, Protectorate, and Imperial Military Authorities'.

Well before this, however, Silas Molema, as Proprietor, had taken steps to develop Koranta into a far more ambitious publication. Even before he assumed control of the paper in September 1901, it was clear that Koranta was to become an English as well as a Tswana medium paper, and Whales himself seems to have had some intention of becoming its English editor.[6] The biggest step to be taken, though, was the decision to order a printing press to enable Koranta to be independent of the Mail's press, something that was coming to be increasingly costly and

---

4. Ibid.
5. Koranta, 23 August 1902 and 22 March 1902; see also Botswana National Archives, RC.117, 3/10/01, Resident Commissioner's comments on Molema's request for Government advertisements.
6. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Aa3.6.2, Molema to Whales (undated draft).

inconvenient.[7] Exactly when the new plant was ordered is uncertain; what is certain, however, is that there was a long delay before it finally arrived in Mafeking. Requesting the commandant in Mafeking to expedite its delivery, Silas Molema explained - in a letter written on 18 February 1902 - that the new plant was 'urgently required as the Koranta ea Becoana is the only channel through which the truth can be disseminated to the native people of Bechunanaland'.[8]

By this time it is very likely that it had already been agreed that the new editor of the expanded newspaper - when the new press arrived - was to be Sol Plaatje. Plaatje was almost certainly closely associated with Koranta from the beginning (he drafted, for example, several of Molema's letters about Koranta's affairs), and in all probability it had been with Plaatje that much of the initiative for the development of the newspaper had originated. Such, at any rate, is the implication of a statement he made to a government commission in 1904: 'I just started it as an enterprise', he explained, 'and one of the chiefs financed it'.[9] Even if this statement was something of an over-simplification of what had actually happened, it would be surprising if Plaatje had not been, at the very least, a strong influence upon Silas Molema in persuading him to commit his resources to starting up the newspaper.[10] During the siege Plaatje had been closely associated with the war correspondents, and had himself written reports on 'the native situation' for Mr. Bell.

7. Koranta, 6 September 1902 and 25 April 1903.
8. Plaatje Papers (SOAS), Molema to Commandant, Mafeking, 18 February 1902.
9. SANAC Report, Vol.4 (Evidence), evidence of S.T Plaatje, 264. As an employee of the Civil Service, however, Plaatje would not have been allowed to be publicly associated with the paper; see Government Notice, No.805, 15 September 1890.
10. According to Dr. Molema, Silas Molema invested £2,500 in the paper: 'Biography', 37.

Vere Stent had encouraged him to consider a career in journalism, but it seems to have been Cronright Schreiner, whom Plaatje had known in Kimberley, who played the more important part in influencing him in this direction: 'It was largely Mr. Cronright Schreiner', Plaatje wrote later, 'who influenced me to leave the Cape Civil Service and try journalism...'[11] Silas Molema was the only person in Mafeking who was both willing and able to make this possible for him. In view of his own background and interests he probably did not need a great deal of persuading.

At the beginning of April 1902 - in anticipation of the arrival of the new printing press - Plaatje and Molema together entered into an agreement with Russell Paddon, a white retailer in Mafeking, for the hire (for two years) of a room in his store. The document recording the agreement has survived, and shows that the agreement was between, on one side, Russell Paddon, and on the other, 'Silas Tau Molema and Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje (trading under the style or firm of Silas Molema), Proprietors and Publishers of the KORANTA EA BECOANA, 'Bechuana's Gazette', Mafeking'.[12]

The first issue of Koranta ea Becoana from the new press did not come out until August 16th, and there was a delay of four months between the appearance of the last issue of the two page, Tswana-only version of Koranta and the appearance of the first edition from the new press. The problem was the continued delay in the arrival of the press. There had been difficulties in getting a permit (the war was still on) to transport

---

11. DFA, 15 June 1925.
12. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Aa3.6.1, Memorandum of Agreement, March 1902; Memorandum of Agreement, 4 April 1902.

the plant by rail from Cape Town, and then - having obtained the permit - the railways took two months to transport it up from Port Elizabeth. 'It could not have been delayed much longer', commented the first issue of Koranta when it did eventually come off the new press, 'had we inspanned our ox waggon and personally went to fetch it'.[13]

****

Such had been the background to the ceremony that took place in Paddon's Store on the morning of August 16th 1902, formally opening the 'Bechuana Printing Works' and celebrating the publication of the first number of the enlarged bi-lingual edition of Koranta ea Becoana. It was a successful opening ceremony (despite the enforced absence of Silas Molema, Chief Wessels and other headmen who had to attend another important meeting with Ralph Williams, the Resident Commissioner), attended by a variety of local dignitaries, black and white. Plaatje, as the paper's new editor, had requested Mr. E. Graham Green, the Civil Commissioner formally to start the new machinery. This, he said, he did with pleasure, saying in his speech that it was 'very gratifying to see how the Barolong are progressing in being able to publish and print their own paper'. He went on:

> I should like those, however, connected with its publication to bear in mind that they have a powerful instrument in their hands, for in no way is the saying that 'the pen is mightier than the sword' more exemplified in the publication of a newspaper.

Expressing the hope that the paper would be 'published in the interests of truth, justice, and charity', the Civil Commissioner

---

13. Koranta, No.1, 16 August 1902.

concluded his inaugeral speech by forecasting that if these principles were upheld then the paper 'will certainly be a benefit to the general public and the Natives in particular'.[14]

It was an auspicious enough opening and an important moment in the life of its young editor, then just twenty-five years old, and it launched him into a position of considerable responsibility and influence. For Koranta ea Becoana was, in many respects, an important new departure. It was not, of course, the first African-run newspaper to have been published in South Africa. This honour went to Imvo Zabantsundu, the English/Xhosa weekly that was published in King-williamstown in the Eastern Cape. Founded in the early 1880s, Imvo had been the pioneer in African journalism in South Africa, and it built up a substantial readership and influence among mission-educated Africans in the Cape Colony and beyond. Its editor, John Tengo Jabavu, became one of the best known Africans of his generation, a skilful politician and the leading spokesman for Africans living in the Cape. Although the influence of Imvo had begun to wane by the late 1890s - and was further diminished by the position that Jabavu took over the war - the example of Imvo was undoubtedly prominent in the minds of both Plaatje and Molema in the establishment of Koranta ea Becoana: Koranta was to provide a vehicle for the education and representation of the Tswana in the same way as Imvo had done for the Xhosa. In terms of layout Imvo provided something of a model as well: 'it will be necessary to have about 2 or 3 English columns like Imvo', Plaatje

14. Koranta, No.2, August 1902.

had written on Molema's behalf at an early stage of the negotiations with G.H. Whales.[15]

Koranta was the first Tswana newspaper to be run by Africans. In the past there had been several Tswana-language periodicals that had been published by the Wesleyan, Berlin and London missionary societies. Longest lasting of these had been the monthly, Mahoko a Becwana ('The Bechuana News'), published by the L.M.S. at Kuruman between 1883 and 1898, and it was this that was Koranta's most important Tswana language antecedent. Mahoko's primary concern - as it had stated in its first issue - had been 'teaching people the word of God, and reporting the progress of the service of Good in the world', but it had nevertheless contained a considerable amount of general news, and its correspondence columns had provided an important forum for the expression of opinion on the part of literate Tswana-speaking Africans throughout southern Africa.[16] Plaatje himself had been amongst its readers, and later recalled that 'as a boy' (at Pniel) he had frequently been called upon to 'read the news to groups of men sewing karosses under the shady trees outside the cattle fold'.[17] Mahoko, like Imvo, played an important part in encouraging Plaatje and Molema to embark upon a new venture of their own, and they may well have conceived of Koranta as a quite deliberate attempt to fill the gap left by Mahoko's demise in 1898, the result of the closure of the Moffat Institute at Kuruman at the time of the Langeberg Rebellion.

---

15. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Aa3.6.2, undated draft of letter, Molema [Plaatje] to Whales; Molema, 'Biography', 37; for Imvo, see L.D. Ngcongco, 'Imvo Zabantsundu and Cape Native Policy, 1884-1902' (unpublished MA thesis, UNISA, 1974).
16. D. Jones, '"Mahoko a Becwana": the second seTswana Newspaper', Botswana Notes and Records, IV (1972).
17. S.T. Plaatje, Sechuana Proverbs, 5.

Koranta embodied a vision - shared by Plaatje and Molema alike - of the future progress of the Tswana people under the enlightened leadership of men like themselves. It was intended to provide a means for the education and instruction of their people, to convey to them the values and knowledge that they believed to be essential if they were successfully to come to terms with the world in which they now lived. Koranta was to be concerned - as Plaatje explained to government commissioners in 1904 - with 'supplying information to my people' and with 'the welfare of the people generally';[18] it was to be devoted, so its title page came to proclaim at the head of every issue, to 'The Amelioration of the Native: Labour, Sobriety, Thrift, and Education'.[19] Koranta was to be concerned also with the political representation of African interests. Like the African press generally, it was conceived as providing a forum for the expression and formulation of 'native opinion', the means of conveying aspirations and grievances to the authorities (hence the importance of having some columns in English), and providing the authorities themselves with a means of communicating more effectively with the African people as well. As the connecting link between two very different cultures and societies, Koranta saw itself as assuming the leadership of the one in the hope of achieving incorporation - on as favourable terms as possible - into a world largely determined by the other.

Koranta was born - along with several other new African newspapers in other parts of the country - in a period of widespread political

---

18. SANAC Report, Vol.4 (Evidence), evidence of S.T. Plaatje, 264.
19. Koranta, 25 October 1902 and subsequent issues.

expectation which seemed to make it all the more important that a 'mouthpiece' (one of their favourite expressions) should be available to Africans throughout Southern Africa. Both during and after the Anglo-Boer War many Africans had come to believe that their prospects of political recognition and advancement were greater than ever before.[20] Encouraged by the rhetoric of British war propaganda and by the very visible and direct intervention of the imperial government in the affairs of the sub-continent, there seemed every possibility of a major restructuring of Southern Africa's affairs. In such circumstances it seemed more important than ever that the African voice should be heard, that the authorities should be reminded - in the great changes that were expected to take place - of the loyalty of Africans to the imperial government, and of the strength, maturity, and moderation of African opinion generally. Koranta did not claim social equality with whites - so an early (and much repeated) editorial ran - but only 'our just dues...political recognition as loyal British subjects'. 'We have not demonstrated our fealty to the Throne for the sake of £.s.d.', Koranta explained further, 'But we did it to assist in the maintenance of the open door that we now ask for, so it cannot be said that we demand too much'.[21]

The first issue of Koranta that came off the press of the 'Bechuana Printing Works' had four pages, cost three pence, contained articles and news in both English and Tswana, and advertisements that took up

20. Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism, 15-19; B.P. Willan, 'African Responses to European Rule in the Transvaal, 1901-8' (unpublished MA thesis, SOAS, 1972).
21. Koranta, 13 September 1902.

considerably more than half of the newspapers' space. Koranta's first issue, however, was produced in a great hurry as a result of the late arrival of the press, and issue No.2 contained two additional pages. Several weeks later Koranta's size increased further, issue No.8, 4 October 1902, being the first to contain eight pages. At the beginning of 1904 the format changed again: the number of pages was reduced to four, but were much larger than before. From May 1903 Koranta was printed in larger and improved premises in the middle of Mafeking which the Plaatje/Molema partnership now owned rather than rented.[22] Unlike several of its shorter lived contemporaries, Koranta seemed to have established itself as a viable and permanent concern that compared very favourably, for example, with the Mafeking Mail, the other Mafeking newspaper.

The general form of Koranta - in terms of the ratio of English to Tswana, or the proportion of advertisement to news and comment - remained fairly constant, at least until the end of 1904, after which no copies have survived. Perhaps the best way to gain an idea of its content and appearance is to look more closely at a single issue. Let us take issue No.34, 11 April 1903. Of its eight pages, the first two and last two were composed wholly of advertisements in Tswana. With several exceptions (a government proclamation, for example, and an advertisement for the Bethel Institute in Cape Town, run by the African Methodist Episcopal Church) these advertised the wares of European dealers and retailers in Kimberley, Mafeking, Vryburg, Lichtenburg, Barkly West, Johannesburg, and in smaller towns in the

22. Koranta, 30 May 1903.

Bechuanaland Protectorate and in Tswana-speaking areas of the three South African colonies. Pages 3 and 6 contained further advertisements, and a mixture of reports from local correspondents - in this issue from Bloemfontein and Johannesburg - and a variety of short items about local, national, and international news, several of them based on reports that had appeared in English in the previous week's issue. Page 4 was divided between an invitation to Koranta's readers to sample the goods on sale at Rowland and Sargent, a Mafeking dealer, and a mixture of letters, translated extracts from other newspapers and more general news items.

Page 5 - with the exception of two small advertisements was in English. There were short paragraphs about J.F. Flynn, a local Justice of the Peace, and P. Ross Frames, 'the iron member of the Rhodesian legislature' who had just resigned his seat. Two longer items - reproduced from the Diamond Fields Advertiser and from one of the Johannesburg papers - related to questions that Koranta had touched on on several occasions in the past: the treatment of Chief Galashewe, the Tswana chief who had been imprisoned for the last six years for his role in the rebellion of 1897; and the question of Chinese labour, over which African newspaper editors found themselves in somewhat unusual agreement - in opposition to its introduction into South Africa - with spokesmen for the white working class on the Rand.

Page 5 also provided the main forum for editorial comment and opinion. In Koranta's issue of 11 April 1903, the leading article was on the subject of 'Bogwera' (circumcision ceremonies), an interesting and typically forthright piece:

> In some pity we record that during this, the fourth month of the third year of the twentieth century, the Barolong have revived the ancient circumcision rites which had long since gone down beneath the silent power of Christian civilisation. Scores of young men have during the week been taken away from their profitable occupations into the veld to howl themselves hoarse and submit to severer flogging than is usually inflicted by the Judges of the Supreme Court. The fact that in the year A.D. 1903 the sons of Montshiwa can safely solemnize a custom, the uselessness of which was discerned by their father, and which the rest of Bechuanaland has for years relegated to the despisable relics of passed barbarism, shows that someone has not been doing his duty. A startling state of affairs is that there are still to be found such a large number of youths who being accustomed to dress like Europeans, and live on three meals every day, and others who again have been living under luxurious circumstances behind shopkeepers' counters and in white men's kitchens, willingly surrender their contentment and volunteer to expose themselves to all kinds of weathers, in the open air, besides the thousands and one other tortures forming part of this ceremony, the nature of which ex-pupils of the weird hedonism are not permitted to tell us.

It was through these editorials, or leading articles, that Plaatje left the clearest mark of his own personality and convictions upon Koranta ea Becoana, and which did most to achieve its reputation and influence amongst its readers. On this occasion, Plaatje was speaking with the voice of the educator and 'modernizer', a man who had a strong sense of responsibility for the leadership of his people along the path of 'Christian civilisation', and a belief in his duty to condemn any deviation from such principles as he saw. He was never afraid to criticise his own people - the Rolong - for failing to live up to the 'civilised' standards to which he believed they should adhere. If one was committed to the notion of 'equal rights for all civilised men' - and Koranta stated its commitment to this belief on numerous occasions - it was necessary, after all, to demonstrate the latter part of the equation before claiming the former.

On many other occasions Plaatje's strictures were directed not against his own people, but against the actions of the governments, the judiciaries, or the local authorities of the areas in which Koranta circulated. Take, for example, his leading article in Koranta on 18 November 1903, on the sentence passed on four Bakhatla for their part in an incident that had occurred during the war, indicating as it does something of the tone and style of much that Plaatje wrote:

> After all, Chief Linchwe had to undergo the shock of seeing four of his men receive the death sentence, on the finding of a British jury, for being too conspicuously loyal to the British Government during the late war. We do not of course hold that nobody should be blamed for the regrettable tragedy - the shooting of a white man, and looting of his farm; but for the protectorate and military authorities, after reaping the benefit of the daring gallantry of the Bakathla, to disown all responsibility for the part played by this nation during the war, is a bit too pusillanimous. The verdict of guilty, however, was accompanied by a recommendation for mercy, 'owing to the disturbed condition of the country'. In view of the peculiar and exceptional circumstances surrounding the case, this verdict and rider sounds almost as farcical as the action of certain jurors in Natal. They condemned a Native to death last month, and whilst the gallows were being adjusted for the grim purpose, the same jurors petitioned the Governor asking for the pardon of the unfortunate man on the grounds that they had convicted him justifiably, but wholly on circumstantial evidence as deceased had identified a different Native as his assailant before his death, but why the recantation came so late in the day, 'No fellah can understand'.

Plaatje's strongest and most consistent criticisms were reserved for the administration of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. It was here that the contrast between the hopes engendered amongst Africans during the war, and the reality of what happened in its

aftermath, was strongest. In the absence of any means of direct political representation for Africans living in these colonies, Koranta and its editor assumed a particularly important role in drawing attention to their disabilities, and Plaatje himself came to spend an increasing amount of his time travelling in both colonies, observing conditions and personally campaigning on behalf of Africans who lived there over such issues as their treatment in the courts, on the railways, or the discriminatory practices condoned by the municipality of Bloemfontein. On broader questions of policy, also, he was critical of the increasingly evident subordination of African interests to the demands of the mineowners. Along with all the other African newspaper editors he was strongly opposed to the decision to introduce Chinese labour to resolve the supposed 'labour shortage';[23] and he was highly dubious, too, of the growing consensus in ruling circles in favour of policies of segregation and separate representation as the foundation of'reconstruction policies'; 'No Sir', Plaatje concluded in one discussion of the question, 'The Cape's the only statesmanlike representation which (under the peculiar and exceptional circumstances of South Africa), is the least likely to wound any side'.[24]

The British administration of the Transvaal became the most frequent target for Plaatje's attacks. He criticised the new pass law legislation, the treatment of Africans working in the mines, and the arbitrary actions of Native Commissioners and sub-Native Commissioners. 'All the Natives who write to us from the Pietersburg district', Koranta said in April, 1904,

---

23. Koranta, 20 June 1903; 11 and 25 July 1903; 29 August 1903.
24. Koranta, 19 October 1904.

> unanimously declare that they were far better off under the Field Cornets of the late Government than what they are under the sub-Native Commissioners, as we are sure that never was the name of her late Gracious Majesty, Victoria, dragged in the mire like now, when the cruelty of those officials drives it into the minds of the black people, who lost life and property to establish British rule in their country, that her reign is worse than Krugerism.[25]

Hearing of instances of injustice such as the arbitrary confiscation of property, which underlay many of the complaints from the Transvaal, Plaatje's response was to publicise what had taken place, and to advise complainants to resort to the law to seek redress for their grievances. On occasions this proved to be a very successful approach. Plaatje was closely involved, for example, in a well-known case that established the legal right of Africans in the Transvaal to purchase land in their own name. Until 1904 this had been prohibited by Native Commissioners on the grounds that the laws of the Boer Republic prohibited it, and that the law in question had not been repealed. Plaatje was not convinced. He 'searched the Transvaal Law Book to cover to cover, but failed to find in it a single ordinance prohibiting the sale of land to Natives', and decided to take up the case. He found his opportunity for a test case in the refusal of the local Native Commissioner to allow prospective standholders in the new Kensington Township to acquire proper legal title for the plots of land that they had already paid for. 'Acting on our advice', Koranta stated, the majority of them refused to be intimidated by the 'written word of a snow-white Government official that the laws of the country were against us', and Paulus Malaji, Chairman of the Basuto Association in Johannesburg, made a test case of the issue. The case took a long

25. Koranta, 13 April 1904.

time to be heard, but the decision, when it came, was in their favour. The letter that Plaatje received from the solicitors who were involved, informing him of the decision was, he said, 'the best letter that ever reached us by the Johannesburg mail, since the declaration of peace'.[26]

A similar concern with the arbitrary and illegal actions of government officials in their dealings with Africans was strongly evident several years later in Plaatje's reaction to the imprisonment of the Tswana chief, Sekgoma, at the behest of Lord Selborne, Milner's successor as High Commissioner in Southern Africa. Arrested in highly dubious circumstances in 1906, Sekgoma was detained for four years but never brought to trial. His case became an important one in the legal history of the empire. Plaatje characterised Sekgoma as 'The Black Dreyfus' and afterwards wrote an account of the whole affair - which he had almost certainly covered in the columns of Koranta between 1906 and 1908 - that condemned in the strongest terms the judicial and administrative system of the Bechuanaland Protectorate that permitted such arbitrary actions to take place. The Protectorate was, he wrote, 'a country under the despotic rule of one man, a well-administered country but without any judges and where provincial courts are of a quasi-military nature, presided over by the despot's own subordinates who sometimes sit in judgment over their own acts'. Lacking the judicial machinery (such as that which existed in the Cape Colony) to safeguard the liberty of the subject, 'the protection of the subject

---

26. Koranta, 9 November 1904.

in the said Protectorate', Plaatje concluded, 'exists in shadow only and not in substance'.[27]

As editor of Koranta, Plaatje thus concerned himself with a wide variety of issues, reflecting his commitment to the legal and political ideals associated with the Cape Colony, and his growing sense of identity with both Tswana and non-Tswana-speaking Africans whose interests - he saw - were coming to be increasingly interdependent, He nevertheless retained a special commitment to the well-being of the people amongst whom he lived, the Rolong, and here he was in the forefront of the constant battle to preserve from further encroachment such rights and independence as they still possessed. One issue in which he played an especially important role was the question of the proposed annexation of the Mafeking district of the Cape, and the Bechuanaland Protectorate, to the Transvaal, in late 1902 and early 1903. This was a scheme favoured by a section of local white interests, who made a concerted effort to secure African support for the idea with a view to presenting a petition to Joseph Chamberlain on the occasion of his visit to Mafeking at the beginning of 1903. They succeeded in persuading a number of Rolong chiefs to sign the petition. Plaatje had been temporarily away from Mafeking when this took place, and was very disturbed to hear the news upon his return. 'This is by far the most appalling information we have heard since the war broke out',

---

27. S.T. Plaatje, 'Sekgoma/The Black Dreyfus', Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Db2; for further treatment of the Sekgoma case, see T.Tlou, 'A Political History of Northwestern Botswana' (PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1972), Chapters VII and VIII; J.M. Chirenje, 'Chief Sekgoma Letsholathebe II: Rebel or Twentieth Century Tswana Nationalist', Botswana Notes and Records, Vol.3, 1971, 64-7.

he wrote in Koranta, characterising the chiefs' action as 'nothing but a terrible leap in the dark and never was there a more flagrant case of wilful political suicide', urging that 'for the sake of themselves the Chiefs will see to its early withdrawal before it is too late'.[28] It proved to be a highly effective editorial, and it was with considerable satisfaction that Plaatje wrote in Koranta several weeks later:

> It is with pleasure...that we are able to state that the Barolong chiefs, who previously signed a petition in favour of Annexation have discovered their mistake, as clearly explained to them in these columns, and they have withdrawn it in time for the arrival of Mr. Chamberlain... Attempts have since been made to obtain the signature of the Ratlou Chiefs and Headmen in the further ends of the District. Acting on our advice these chiefs have stoutly refused to associate themselves with the movement and it is right that this should be the case.[29]

Tribute to Plaatje's effectiveness as spokesman and adviser to the Rolong came on this occasion from local whites, who were most upset at the way in which they had been deserted over the annexation question; and from Chief Badirile, whose letter to the Mafeking Mail on the matter speaks volumes for the role of Koranta and its editor. 'The older headmen of the tribe', Badirile wrote,

> are a number of primitive men who know nothing about South African politics, which appear to be difficult to be understood by the white people themselves; if anything affecting the welfare of the nation is under consideration we have enlightened men among ourselves whom we consult under such circumstances, and their counsel may be relied upon to be better than that of a solicitor, as their interests will be at stake.[30]

---

28. Koranta, 13 December 1902.
29. Koranta, 17 January 1903.
30. Koranta, 7 February 1903; Mafeking Mail, 12 February 1903.

There were many other instances of the way in which Plaatje utilised his position of editor of Koranta to uphold and protect the interests of the people amongst whom he lived. The issue of compensation for loss and damage during the siege, for example, was one issue that was frequently publicised in the columns of Koranta; on one occasion, indeed, Plaatje led a deputation to Cape Town to lay their case before Sir Gordon Sprigg, Prime Minister of the Cape Colony.[31] Another matter of direct concern to the Rolong that also received much attention in Koranta was the question of Dog Tax, culminating in a special 'Dog Tax' issue in November 1904, to celebrate victory in the South African Supreme Court against the Mafeking Divisional Council which had claimed the right to levy the tax.[32]

****

Committed to the defence of African rights and interest, Koranta often aroused strong reactions amongst those whites that had occasion to read it. From the white press of the day the response was almost uniformly hostile. The Bloemfontein Friend - christened by Plaatje the 'Foe' - was a frequent adversary, devoting on one occasion a column and a half to abusing Koranta and its editor.[33] The Natal Witness, too, took exception to Plaatje's articles on the 'alleged harsh treatment of the natives', accusing the editors of both Koranta and Imvo of

---

31. Koranta, 1 and 15 August 1903; 5/9 September 1903; Mafeking Mail, 9 September 1903.
32. Koranta, 23 November 1904; see also Mafeking Mail, 7 February 1908, for a subsequent episode in the same story.
33. Koranta, 21 March 1903.

ingratitude towards the British, 'the race to which they and theirs owe everything, and which has fostered, to an almost continental extent, progress among the natives of the sub-continent'.[34] Closer to home was the Mafeking Mail. Despite its initial connection with Koranta, its occasional references to the pronouncements of its local contemporary were nearly always caustic and sarcastic. On one occasion, in May 1905, it went further, describing what Plaatje had written on the administration of the Transvaal and Orange Free State as 'seditious', and quoting with approval some strong comments from one of the Johannesburg papers which wondered how much longer material of this kind was to be permitted to be published.[35] The disapproval of the white press was one of the occupational hazards faced by African newspaper editors generally. Most, like Plaatje, were well able to hold their own in the exchanges that followed.

From the governments of the colonies in which Koranta circulated the response was often less hostile. On one occasion, it is true, Plaatje had been obliged to make a humble apology for a 'disloyal' letter that had appeared in Koranta when he had been away in Cape Town,[36] but by and large the authorities were well aware of the value of African newspapers - at a time of intense concern over the dangers of 'Ethiopianism' - as an open expression of opinion that was far better left in the open than suppressed. Some of these papers,

34. Imvo, 8 September 1903; Ipepa lo Hlanga, 28 August 1903.
35. Mafeking Mail, 9 May 1905.
36. Central Archives Pretoria, Transvaal NA.3034/1903, Civil Commissioner (Mafeking) to Secretary for Native Affairs, 16 September 1903.

indeed (<u>Koranta</u> amongst them), were openly critical of the organisation most closely associated with 'Ethiopianism', the African Methodist Episcopal Church, so the authorities had every reason to see in them a useful agency for keeping what was a potentially volatile African opinion on constitutional lines in seeking redress of grievances. Plaatje may have been highly critical of the British administration of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, but he would not for a moment have associated himself with the 'Ethiopian' fantasies of the white South African imagination; or advocated the kind of armed conflict that erupted in Natal at the time of the Bambatha Rebellion in 1906. It is within this general context that the recommendation of the South African Native Affairs Commission not to take action against the 'native press' should be seen. Whilst acknowledging that it could not be said that 'nothing but good had accrued from it [the native press]', and that 'an infant press could not be expected to be wholly free from mistakes and indiscretions', it nevertheless decided against recommending legislation 'to punish persons responsible for publications in the Native language creating distrust and animosity between the races or likely to produce conflict between them'.[37] As a Basutoland Resident Commissioner put it several years later, 'it is quite as well to know what they [the native press] are thinking about'.[38]

If the colonial governments took a relatively tolerant view of 'the native press' in general and <u>Koranta</u> in particular, in other circles

37. SANAC Report, Vol.1, 65, resolution on 'The Native Press'.
38. Wits University Archives, H. Pim Papers, Resident Commissioner, Maseru, to H. Pim, 22 April 1908; quoted in T. Couzens, 'A Short History of the World (and other Black South African Newspapers)', 6 (unpublished paper presented to Wits University African Studies seminar, 1976).

Plaatje did succeed in making himself and his newspaper highly unpopular. He was regarded with a mixture of disapproval and apprehension, for example, by missionaries of the London Missionary Society, the leading missionary organisation working amongst the Tswana. Accustomed up until then to a near-monopoly in the provision of education and literature for the Tswana, several of their missionaries came to resent the influence that Koranta acquired in the areas in which they operated, and to criticise his popularisation of an orthography for Tswana that differed from their own. They were even more upset when Plaatje attacked their society for its failure to make the educational progress that he believed it ought to have done.[39] He became a particular bete noire for W.C. Willoughby, first principal of the LMS's educational institution at Tigerkloof. Willoughby took an instant dislike to the assertiveness expressed in the biblical motto from the Song of Solomon that Plaatje carried in every issue of Koranta: '"I am black but comely" was the proud boast', Willoughby wrote, 'that appeared in heavy type on the front page of every number of a Native newspaper that often used to read'.[40] Willoughby feared - so he wrote to a fellow missionary - that 'the influence of men like Sol Plaatje will prove harmful to you by introducing the spirit of Ba-Ethiopia even if it does not introduce the people themselves'.[41] A.J. Wookey was

---

39. Koranta, 2 November 1904; see also DFA (Weekly Edition), 10 October 1908 (Willoughby Papers, Selly Oak College Library, Birmingham, File 740), when Plaatje was reported to have said at a meeting that the LMS 'was a pioneer society which had outlived its usefulness', and that it 'blocked the way to progress'.
40. W.C. Willoughby, Race Problems in the New Africa (London, 1923), 238. I am most grateful to Rev. John Rutherford for this and the following reference.
41. Moading College archives (Botswana), W.C. Willoughby to W.O. Barratt, 21 September 1904.

another LMS missionary who crossed swords with Plaatje, the issue here being the revision of the Tswana translation of the Bible of which Plaatje was highly critical. He was not the first, nor was he the last, to find out how sensitive Plaatje was on any issue bearing upon his native language. Wookey did not mince his words either. Complaining in 1907 to the committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society (which was sponsoring the revision), he wrote of the 'very scurrilous article on the revision and other things' that had been written by the 'native editor of a not very respectable paper'.[42]

****

By the time this 'very scurrilous article' was published <u>Koranta's</u> demise - which would no doubt have been welcomed by Wookey - was not far off. It had been quite an achievement for <u>Koranta</u>, in fact, to have survived for as long as it did, and it would certainly not have done so without such a high level of personal commitment to the venture on the part of both Plaatje and Molema. Even so, <u>Koranta's</u> survival had often been in doubt. Like other African newspapers, it had faced the fundamental problem that its potential circulation - and accordingly its revenue from advertising - was limited by the low African literacy rate. In view of the relatively low level of missionary activity amongst the Tswana - compared, for example, with the Xhosa in the Eastern Cape - the problem was even more acute than it was for the

---

42. British and Foreign Bible Society archives (London), Editorial Sub-Committee Minutes, 1907-8, extracts from letters from Wookey, 3 December 1907 & 26 February 1908.

Eastern Cape newspapers: it was hardly surprising that Plaatje should have felt so strongly about the LMS's shortcomings in the educational field. With a circulation of between one and two thousand copies per issue, it is doubtful if Koranta was ever able to take in sufficient revenue from sales and advertising to cover the costs of production, let alone make any profit or repay capital expenditure. The problem was resolved only by Molema's willingness and ability (neither of which was limitless) to underwrite production expenses, and both he and Plaatje ran up large debts in securing loans to keep the paper going in the belief - as Koranta stated on one occasion - 'that our people need a mouthpiece'.[43]

For much of its existence Koranta was in a state of financial crisis or near crisis. In 1904 it seems to have been only a £650 loan taken out by Molema that kept the paper going, enabling it to announce in December its 'great satisfaction' at having survived 'the trial and financial struggle of a most trying year'.[44] Until the end of 1904 Koranta had appeared at weekly intervals with only a few short breaks in production. During the second half of its existence - though no copies have been preserved after December 1904 - it seems that its appearance became far more irregular as it ran into increasing financial difficulty. Late in 1906 it seemed as though the end was near. Unable to repay loans and shares, and having exhausted all other possible sources of funds, Silas Molema was informed by his solicitor that he had 'no alternative but to take possession of the

43. Koranta, 4 April 1903.
44. Koranta, 21 December 1904; Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Aa3.6.1, General Bond passed by Silas Tau Molema and the firm of 'Silas Molema' in favour of Charles Wenham.

Printing Plant', and was asked to hand over the keys of the building.[45] What followed thereafter is obscure, but it seems that the paper reverted back to the control of G.N.H. Whales, still editor of the Mafeking Mail, and reappeared in April 1907, after a few months' absence, and with Plaatje still as its editor, although not without a considerable amount of argument and discussion on this point.[46] Koranta then appeared intermittently until the end of 1907 (there were definitely issues on 15 May, 18 October and 1 December); and it must have been an issue at the end of December 1907, or the beginning of January 1908, that attracted hostile comment - by no means the first time that Koranta had done this - in the columns of Izwi la Bantu on 14 January 1908.[47]

Probably the issue to which Izwi referred was one of the last numbers of Koranta to have been published. An unsuccessful attempt was made to transfer Koranta's press and assets to Chief Badirile, but eventually they had to be sold off to satisfy its many creditors.[48] So, too, were the premises from which Koranta had been produced. In June 1909 the Mafeking Mail carried the following advertisement, mute testimony to the problems of running an African newspaper in the first decade of the twentieth century:

> FOR SALE, Portion of Erf 74 in the Township of Mafeking, with Buildings theron, known as the KORANTA Offices. Suitable for Shop or Dwelling.[49]

---

45. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Aa3.6.2, Minchin to Molema, 26 November 1906.
46. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), correspondence in Aa3.6.2; Mafeking Mail, 30 January, 4 February and 23 April 1907; Ilanga, 1 March 1907; Izwi, 31 April 1907.
47. Willoughby Papers, Files 743 and 746, cuttings from Koranta, 10 May, 18 October, 15 November, the last being Vol.IV No.152; Christian Express, December 1907; Imvo, 22 October 1907; Izwi, 14 January 1908.
48. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Aa3.6.2, Minchin to Molema, 14 February 1908.
49. Mafeking Mail, 1 January 1909.

The demise of <u>Koranta</u> marked the end of an important phase in Plaatje's life. <u>Koranta</u> had been, in many respects, a remarkable achievement, tribute to the vision, determination and commitment on the part of the two men most closely connected with it, and perhaps above all to the ability and resourcefulness of its editor. <u>Koranta ea Becoana</u> was one of the liveliest and best written African newspapers in a decade that - in retrospect - can be regarded as the golden age of the black South African press. As well as seeing the birth of a number of new newspapers in the mood of expectation that followed the Anglo-Boer War, the period had seen the emergence of a sense of community amongst their editors, an increasing collective awareness - at a time when there was effectively no national African political organisation - of the role that they could play in the representation and leadership of their people. These newspaper editors had also formed their own organisation - the Native Press Association - to give expression to such ideas, to try and achieve a greater measure of political unity, and to add weight and substance to the developing notion of 'native opinion'. In this too, Plaatje had played his part, having been one of the Association's founders, and its first secretary. As he told the SANAC Commissioners in 1904, it also aimed to 'improve the press of the Natives generally'.[50] After a few years the Association seems to have foundered on the political and regional differences that divided both the editors and their readers (not to

---

50. S.T. Plaatje, evidence to SANAC, 267-9; see also <u>Ilanga</u>, 25 December 1903; Cape Archives, N.A.428 (Misc), Letters Received, Plaatje to Secretary for Native Affairs, 16 February 1904; <u>Koranta</u>, 16 September and 7 October 1903; <u>Izwi</u>, 24 March and 14 April 1908; <u>Imvo</u>, 7 January 1913.

mention the financial and other practical difficulties involved in running an organisation of this kind), but it was nevertheless an important pioneering effort, and part of the development of a wider political consciousness that had characterised the decade as a whole, and which was to find more permanent organisational expression several years later.

CHAPTER 4

UNION, THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIVE NATIONAL CONGRESS AND THE NATIVES' LAND ACT OF 1913

Between 1908 and 1910 the unification of the four South African colonies into the self-governing Union of South Africa was brought about. For the liberal government in England it was the 'magnanimous gesture' that reconciled Boer and Briton, the culmination of the post-war period of 'reconstruction', and the means of ensuring - with the assistance of a group of favourably disposed Afrikaner politicians - the preservation of British interests in the sub-continent. For most Africans in South Africa, though, the terms on which this 'unification' was achieved were a bitter disappointment. Many of them had been led to believe that British victory during the Anglo-Boer War would be followed by due recognition of their political rights in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Yet this the Act of Union - like the Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902 - failed to provide for. Africans did not, however, passively look on as their political future was being decided for them. Meetings were held in different parts of the country, and resolution after resolution was passed in favour of the extension of the Cape franchise throughout the Union. Most significant of all was the meeting of the South African Native Convention in Bloemfontein in March 1909, attended by sixty elected delegates from all four colonies, and the protectorates, and conceived as a deliberate attempt to rival the all-white National Convention then in the process of discussing the proposals for Union. Further resolutions were passed against the 'colour-bar' provisions of the draft Act, and a deputation - accompanied

by W.P. Schreiner - was sent to England to appeal to the Imperial Government.[1]

Of Sol Plaatje's involvement in the background to all of this nothing is known. Certainly he was not among the leading figures in this phase of African political activity, and it must have been extremely frustrating for him to have been without a newspaper in a period of such important political change. Little, indeed, is known of Plaatje's activities at all between the demise of Koranta in 1908 and the appearance of his second newspaper, Tsala ea Becoana ('The Friend of the Bechuana') in July 1910. Not the least of the problems he faced during this period was that of making a living to support himself and his family, a problem which seems to have been only partially resolved - from a financial point of view - by working as a labour recruiter.[2] It was hardly an occupation that he can have relished, but in a small town like Mafeking there were few other opportunities open to him. And he was by no means the only African newspaper editor to have resorted - when things were not going well - to this particular occupation.[3]

---

1. For African reactions to the unification of South Africa, see L.M. Thompson, The Unification of South Africa (London, 1960), esp. 325-7; Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, 19-24.
2. Molema, 'Biography', 47; Plaatje/Molema papers (Wits), Aa3.6.1, 'General Covering Bond', 11 May 1910.
3. A.K. Soga, for example, editor of Izwi, applied for a labour recruiting licence at about the same time as Plaatje; Cape Archives, NA 715/F2, E. Dower (Secretary for Native Affairs) to Civil Commissioner, East London, 20 July 1909. I am grateful to William Beinart for this reference.

Plaatje must have been delighted, therefore, to have been able to resume his profession of newspaper editor with the establishment of Tsala ea Becoana in June 1910. Tsala was in many ways a successor to Koranta - 'our old friend the "Koranta" resuscitated' was how Ilanga lase Natal described the new paper when extending a welcome at the end of July.[4] It was an apt enough description. Like Koranta, Tsala was printed in English and Tswana, was edited by the same person, appeared weekly, was aimed at more or less the same readership, and was conceived as having the same function of educating and moulding African opinion, representing African interests and acting as a channel through which government policy and proclamations could be conveyed to them. Apart from the different political contexts in which Tsala and Koranta were produced, there were several important differences between the two. Tsala, for one thing, was published in Kimberley (whence Plaatje himself moved shortly before the newspaper started) rather than Mafeking; and whereas Koranta had been kept afloat largely through the financial support of Silas Molema, Tsala was owned by an African syndicate based on Thaba Nchu, composed of wealthy Tswana landowners - with whom Plaatje had long been in contact - like W.Z. Fenyang, J. Nyokong, and Rev. J. Goronyane. These were men who had been politically active in the leadership of the large Rolong population of Thaba Nchu, most recently in the agitation over union in which they had taken a leading part. Conscious of their somewhat precarious position in the Orange Free State, undoubtedly part of the stimulus in investing in a newspaper was provided by the unification of South Africa

4. Ilanga, 29 July 1910. 'We are glad to find the able Editor again at work for his people', Ilanga went on, 'and wish him, and the venture, prosperity...'

and the fear that if white farming interests in the Orange Free State went unchallenged then their own land and security would be very seriously threatened. Denied the political means of representation in the Union, a newspaper remained one of the most effective means open to them of enabling their voice to be heard.

Other members of the syndicate included T.M. Mapikela, of Bloemfontein (a member of the deputation to England who had himself sought to start up a newspaper two years previously), and John Tengo Jabavu, editor of Imvo.[5] How and why he came to be involved is not clear. Possibly it owed something to his desire to repair the damage done to his reputation in the northern colonies by his refusal to co-operate with the South African Native Convention in 1909.[6]

Tsala ea Becoana appeared regularly for some two years, building up a circulation of several thousand and a consistent revenue from advertising. Yet like Koranta, both Tsala and its editor were in constant financial difficulties.[7] Plaatje himself was obliged to sell insurance as a sideline, and at least part of his reason for starting to write articles for Vere Stent's Pretoria News (from January 1911 onwards) was his urgent need for money.[8] Something of the plight of Tsala itself is evident in a letter written by Goronyane, a member

---

5. Tsala, 29 April 1911.
6. That Jabavu had hopes of extending his influence into the northern colonies would seem to be substantiated also by his announced intention (Imvo, 16 January 1912) 'to issue a Sesuto or Sechuana edition [of Imvo] for the requirements of the readers in the Northern Province where that language is largely used by our people'.
7. See, for example, various letters between Plaatje and Silas Molema between 1910 and 1914 in Plaatje/Molema papers (Wits), Da.5-Da.40.
8. Letters [unaddressed] from Plaatje to Molema (undated, c.1911) June 1911, Da 17 and Da 18.

of the Tsala syndicate, in June 1911, a year after Tsala had begun publication. 'I herewith beg to report to you', Goronyane wrote to Silas Molema, also involved in the enterprise,

> that the scheme of the Bechuana Friend is not well carried out since the £250 [that] was borrowed from Mr. Masisi was consumed. And that the committee of the Tsala which met in January last appointed Messrs. W.Z. Fenyang and J.M. Goronyane as Treasurer and Secretary respectively. The object in view being that the agents of Tsala may send their subscriptions to them in order that they may pay the Editor, Compositor, etc. You are hereby earnestly requested as an agent of the Tsala to speak with the subscribers to send money monthly to the Sundicate. As it required your serious attention any negligence on your part would mean the total ruin of the Tsala. Your heart and soul in the work would be the only solution to relief [sic] us from the present embarrassment. It is possible that if the money is not paid regularly the manager would abandon the work.[9]

The 'present embarrassment' to which Goronyane refers was evidently overcome, for Tsala continued to appear with only the occasional hint in its columns of its precarious financial position.

Editing Tsala occupied the bulk of Plaatje's time and attention during the first two years of Union, but it was not the only vehicle available to him for the expression of his views on current affairs. The Pretoria News - with a circulation far in excess of that of Tsala - carried some thirty articles, usually of well over a thousand words - written by Plaatje between January 1911 and February 1914, generally under the heading 'Through Native Eyes' - 'an experiment', Stent wrote

---

9. Plaatje/Molema papers (Wits), Aa2, Goronyane to Molema, 8 June 1911.

in an editorial in the paper, 'which will prove a success if only we can persuade the more rabid negrophobes to adopt a moderate and sensible attitude'. The opinion of a man like Plaatje, Stent explained,

> ought to carry weight when Native affairs are being discussed. We have fallen into the habit of discussing and legislating for him without ever stopping to consider what the native himself thinks. No one but a fool will deny the importance of knowing what the native thinks before we legislate for him. It is in the hope of enlightening an otherwise barren controversy that we shall publish from time to time Mr. Plaatje's letters, commending them always to the more thoughtful and practical of our readers.[10]

Plaatje's articles began to appear in the Pretoria News at the beginning of 1911. Well before this his views on developments during the early months of Union were being expressed in the columns of Tsala. Its early issues were concerned largely with the first Union elections and the subsequent behaviour of the first Union government. Plaatje's reaction to both was interesting. Although he urged those of his readers that possessed the franchise to vote for Unionist candidates, he did not regard the victory of General Botha's South African Party as an unmitigated disaster. He argued that the narrow majority with which the SAP won the election worked to the advantage of the African population, and he derived a great deal of satisfaction from the fact that a number of 'anti-native' candidates, from both parties, had been defeated.[11] Both the composition of the first Union government and several of its actions during the first year or so of Union led Plaatje to believe that the new political arrangements were, on balance, to be welcomed. In his first article in the Pretoria News, indeed,

---

10. Pretoria News, 16 January 1911.
11. Tsala ea Becoana, 8 October 1910.

he contrasted the high handed and arbitrary administration of the protectorates with that of the Union, and argued that the inhabitants of the protectorates would be better off if they were incorporated into the Union: 'I do not maintain that the last word in human wisdom has been said in the schedule to the Act of Union', he wrote, 'but I maintain that if the protectorates have to come under one umbrella, that umbrella should be the Union of South Africa'.[12] The jurisdiction of the South African Supreme Court, Plaatje argued, in itself made this a desirable outcome. Plaatje thus came to share the view, expressed earlier by Imvo and the Cape Times, that Africans living in the northern colonies (and, he hoped, the protectorates as well) would, despite not being granted any kind of franchise, benefit nevertheless from their attachment to the Cape by the spread of 'liberalising influences' northwards.

Plaatje's confidence in the jurisdiction of the South African Supreme Court was one reason for his confidence in the new political circumstances brought about by Union. Equally important was his faith in the several 'Cape liberals' who occupied important posts in the first Union government - F.S. Malan, J.W. Sauer and above all, Henry Burton, the first Minister for Native Affairs whom Plaatje had known personally since the 1890s. The son of a magistrate and a member of a well-known Cape legal family, Burton had practised as a lawyer himself in Kimberley when Plaatje worked there in the Post Office, and he had earned the warm admiration of the town's African petty bourgeoisie by his willingness to fight for African rights in the courts. After the Anglo-Boer War Plaatje had had further dealings with Burton as he then acted on behalf

---

12. Pretoria News, 16 January 1911.

of the Rolong in a number of legal cases, acquiring amongst them a firm reputation as a friend and defender of their interests. Plaatje was therefore delighted when Burton was appointed Minister for Native Affairs, and looked forward to sympathetic treatment for Africans generally and for the Rolong in particular.[13]

Burton did not altogether disappoint Plaatje and his other African admirers. Within a few a months of taking office, he was responsible (in part, at least) for releasing the Zulu Paramount Chief, Dinuzulu; for ordering the proclamation of all government notices through the three main African newspapers (Imvo, Ilanga, Tsala); for abolishing the 'sibalo' system of forced labour in Natal, and for several reforms on the railways which were beneficial to Africans. 'Well may the Natives, especially those of Natal', Tsala said in October 1910, 'congratulate themselves that the wonderful year of 1910 that brought what promises to be the inauguration of a sound system in the administration of their affairs, under the most sympathetic Minister who ever administered this Department'.[14]

It was not only the 'natives of Natal' that benefited, for Plaatje himself was on one occasion conspicuously successful in persuading Abraham Fischer, the Minister of Lands, to take action to remedy the grievances of the Rolong of Thaba Nchu. Their particular complaint was that under Chapter XXIV of the Orange Free State Laws Africans were not permitted to inherit title to land. The issue arose to prominence

---

13. For Burton's career, see Dictionary of South African Biography, Vol.1, 138-9; for F.S. Malan, see P. Kallaway, 'F.S. Malan, the Cape Liberal Tradition and South African Politics', JAH, XV, 1, 1974, 113-29.
14. Tsala, 8 October 1910. Fears that 'the Transvaal traditions would control the policy of the Government on Native affairs', Plaatje added, 'were dispelled by the assignment of Mr. Burton of the portfolio of Native Affairs'.

towards the end of 1910 when several Rolong living in Thaba Nchu were left some land, but found that by law the transfer could not go through. Plaatje was therefore deputed to take the matter up with the Minister of Lands, and travelled to Cape Town for this purpose in December 1910. The way that he went about his task after arriving in Cape Town is of considerable interest, indicating as it does the way in which he sought to achieve his ends with the help of the several influential 'friends of the natives' that he knew. On this occasion W.P. Schreiner proved to be particularly helpful after Plaatje had written to him as follows:

> As I will not see you before Tuesday and you will in the meanwhile be seeing the three Native Senators on my behalf, I think I should mention that I wrote to the Rt. Hon. J.X. Merriman at the same time as I wrote to you and Col. Stanford, and if you think that his influence will help us you might ask him to re-inforce the justice of introducing a short relieving bill...With such a combination I am sure we could favourably impress the Rt. Hon. the Prime Minister (who knows me) and the Minister of Lands; for it will be a pity, having regard to what has been done for the participators in Bambatha's rising, if the law-abiding Barolongs of Thaba Nchu cannot get the ear of the Government in a matter which (judging from the Gazette I showed you) the Free State Government was also anxious to redress.
>
> P.S. For the present I am not seeing any of my friends about this. For if it were voiced about the opposition press will make political capital out of it and do our cause more harm than good.[15]

Plaatje's subsequent meeting with the Minister of Lands (which took place in his office at the Houses of Parliament, 'by arrangement', as Tsala noted, 'with the four Native Senators, the Rt. Hon. F.R. Moor, Hon. W.P. Schreiner, Colonel Stanford and Mr. Krogh', went well.

---

15. W.P. Schreiner Papers, South African Library, Cape Town, Plaatje to Schreiner, 17 December 1910.

Abraham Fischer, after hearing Plaatje's presentation of his case, 'replied that he appreciated the disability and promised to bring in an amending Bill during the present session', and that in the meantime 'these two young men could occupy the farms without titles pending the passage of that Bill...and should anyone question their occupancy in any way they could communicate with him'.[16] Plaatje naturally regarded this as a highly satisfactory outcome, vindication of his careful cultivation of networks of influence with prominent public figures, and apparent justification for his view that - as far as Africans in his Free State constituency at least were concerned - Union was something to be welcomed, not regretted.

Plaatje's optimism was not to last for long. He soon had reason to be particularly concerned at the way in which the Union government - under pressure from white labour and Afrikaner nationalist interests - sanctioned the replacement of blacks by whites in various spheres of the Civil Service. Tsala responded with a series of very critical reports and editorials,[17] and Plaatje personally devoted a great deal of time to taking up grievances of this kind with the Ministers or Departments concerned. He managed to achieve for himself a very real degree of consideration and attention. During one week in Pretoria in December 1911, for example, he was sympathetically received (twice) by Henry Burton, Minister for Native Affairs, who in turn arranged for him to see Sir David de Villiers Graaff, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs (who, despite being 'very busy with great matters of State',

16. Tsala, 7 and 28 January 1911.
17. For example, Tsala 20 May 1911; 2 December 1911; 16 March 1912; 27 April 1912.

nevertheless evinced 'the greatest interest in the representations made'). Thereafter Plaatje saw J.W. Sauer, Minister of Lands, the Postmaster-General, the Government Mining Inspector, senior officials from the Department of Printing and Stationary, and Edward Dower, Secretary for Native Affairs, whose department supplied Plaatje - when he went to Johannesburg for the day - with 'an Orderly to facilitate his day's work there'.[18]

Always careful to be well in command of all the details of the causes that he took up, Plaatje clearly made a strong impression upon the people he saw, coming away on this occasion with a number of promises to investigate his complaints and to provide him with written replies when these had been completed. Few people in South Africa, black or white, had this kind of access (and the above was by no means an isolated occasion) to senior members of the government and the administration. As long as the Cape liberal establishment retained a foothold in the Union government, Burton, Sauer, Malan, and several others were prepared to take his representations very seriously and to accept him as a responsible spokesman for his people. Plaatje was, after all, the editor of one of the three main African newspapers in South Africa, whose influence the Minister of Native Affairs, for one, was well aware of. He recognised that Plaatje by now represented and did much to formulate a large body of 'native opinion', and that he was somebody whom it would be unwise to alienate. Besides which, as characteristic products, in their different ways, of a common Cape legal tradition, they still held - despite growing pressures upon it politically and ideologically - a number of shared assumptions over such

---

18. Tsala, 2 and 16 December 1911

notions as equality before the law, fair play, and a firm dislike of the white working class. The Cape liberal tradition may have been riddled with contradictions and ambiguities, but even after Union it had a reality that was expressed in the quite genuine consideration afforded to African political leaders and newspaper editors like Plaatje.

But given the political realities facing the Botha administration, this was about as much as the Cape liberal tradition was capable of. It was one thing for Sauer, Burton, Malan, or De Villiers Graaff to listen sympathetically to Plaatje when he came to them with complaints about the growing discrimination against Africans in the public service; it was another thing actually to do something effective about it. The process of replacing blacks by whites was determined at a local level, and not - it would seem - on instructions from the Minister or head of department concerned.[19] For the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs, or the Minister of Railways, to have taken positive action to reverse this would have been very dangerous politically, and would have played directly into the hands of Hertzog's Nationalist supporters already calling for harsher 'native policies'. The Cape liberals in the Union cabinet in any case occupied a very tenuous position. For Plaatje, the tragedy was that the period that saw perhaps his greatest degree of access to potentially sympathetic government ministers was precisely the period in which they were coming to be outflanked politically, and the period in which the contradictions in their creed were becoming most evident. Their presence in the first Union cabinet did not for long disguise the fact that an important change in the balance of political power in South Africa had taken place. The replacement of blacks by whites in the public service was one outcome of this, and Plaatje - for

---

19. *Tsala*, 16 December 1911.

all his eloquent pleading - was ultimately unable to persuade his friends in the Government to prevent it, or indeed prevent the passage of such legislation as the Dutch Reformed Church Act (which prohibited African membership), the Native Labour Regulation Act, or the Mines and Works Act. Politically, the northern colonies now predominated in the Union: it was essentially their interests and their traditions which the first Union Parliament gave expression to.

****

It was against this background - and the fear that there was worse to come - that the South African Native National Congress was formed in January 1912.[20] The movement was conceived as an attempt to provide a united forum for the representation of African opinion and interests, a response to the coming together of Boer and Briton with the Act of Union and a reaction to their own exclusion from any effective form of representation in the new political structure that had been created. Congress's foundations, however, had been laid during the previous decade when a number of African political organisations had been formed in all four colonies, whilst some experience in trying to reconcile the political and regional differences that existed had been gained in organisations like the South African Native Press Association in which Plaatje had played a leading part. The most important of the SANNC's

20. The best treatment of the foundation of the SANNC is to be found in Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, Chapter 2; Walshe seems to have been unaware, however, of the existence (as a permanent organisation) of the South African Native Convention, and its role as Congress's immediate predecessor.

predecessors, though, was the South African Native Convention, convened in March 1909 at the time of the discussions about proposals for Union. Although called with the specific purpose of discussing the proposed unification of South Africa, the Convention was constituted into a permanent organisation and thus continued to express the ideal - if not in practice very much more than this - of a united body to represent African interests.

Plaatje himself was one of the leading individuals to have been associated with the Convention. Although not one of its office-holders, he enjoyed a close relationship with those who were.[21] He attended the Convention's annual conference in Bloemfontein in March 1910, and shortly afterwards headed a deputation (appointed at the conference) to General Botha, then Prime Minister of the Transvaal, conveying to him 'the heartfelt thanks of the natives of South Africa for the services rendered to them by the Transvaal Ministry in the repatriation of the Chinese'.[22] It is difficult to know, though, how representative of African opinion the Convention really was. It claimed to have had branches in Basutoland, Natal, the Orange River Colony, Kimberley, the Transvaal, and Bechuanaland, but the annual conference, it seems, was only attended by 'native delegates from the Cape, the O.R.C., and Bechuanaland'.[23]

---

21. Office holders of the Convention ~~were as~~ follows:

President:	W.B. Rubusana (E. London)
Vice-Presidents:	Chief Silas Molema (Mafeking)
	J.L. Dube (Ohlange, Natal)
Treasurer:	Moses Masisi (Thaba Nchu)
Secretary:	J. Makgothi (Tweespruit, O.F.S.)

Tsala, 9 July 1910.

22. The Friend, 25 March 1910; Mafeking Mail, 6 April 1910: Ilanga, 15 April 1910.

23. Mafeking Mail, 6 April 1910.

Possibly it was the realisation (on the part of those who did attend) of the need to secure wider support that it was decided to hold its next annual meeting (due to take place in May 1911) in Johannesburg.[24]

It seems to have been a special meeting of the executive committee of the Convention, convened in Johannesburg early in August 1911, and attended by Plaatje, which provided Pixley Seme, an overseas trained lawyer recently returned to South Africa, with the first opportunity to expound his ideas on the need for a new and more vigorious organization.[25] Like Plaatje, Seme (who had close connexions with the Swazi royal family) was acutely aware of the importance of securing the support of the chiefs in any organisation that sought to represent the African people of South Africa, for they retained the allegiance of the vast majority of the African population of South Africa and the protectorates. Seme was well aware, too, that their financial support was likely to be a crucial factor in the success of any organisation of this kind. He had in mind a wide movement that would not only unite politically active Africans and their separate organisations in different parts of the country, but would also achieve a social unity - of the chiefs, the mission-educated petty bourgeoisie, and the masses of the people as a whole. Only by achieving this, he argued, could Africans overcome the political disabilities recently confirmed in the Act of Union, and only with such an organisation would they be able to 'make their grievances properly known and considered both by the Government and by the people of South Africa at large'.[26]

---

24. Tsala, 16 April 1911.
25. Imvo, 29 August 1911; Ilanga, 1 September 1911.
26. Imvo, 24 October 1911; Tsala, 28 October 1911; Ilanga, 20 October 1911.

The meeting of August 5th took the first steps in creating the new body, setting up a special steering committee.[27] Three months later Seme's proposals were more widely publicised when he wrote a letter to all the African newspapers, indicating the steps that had already been taken towards forming a new organisation, and announcing that an inaugural conference would take place in December.[28] Before this was convened a further 'caucus meeting' took place in Johannesburg on 13 November. As in the August meeting, Plaatje was amongst those that attended, and he played a prominent role in the proceedings - being one of the three people (Seme and Makgotho were the other two) to whom votes of thanks were passed for their contributions; he also made a closing speech, 'exhorting the members to be united', as it was reported in Imvo.[29] It was agreed at the meeting to hold the inaugural conference at the beginning of January 1912 (and not in December 1911 as originally planned), the main reason for the delay apparently being the need for more time to sort out problems in relation to the two Transvaal organisations, the Transvaal Native Congress and the Transvaal Native Organisation, and to secure their full co-operation in the new body.

The inaugural meeting of the SANNC duly took place in Bloemfontein in the second week of January 1912. It was attended by chiefs and delegates representing organisations from all four provinces and the protectorates, many of whom were quite conscious of the fact that their meeting constituted an historic occasion. As Seme himself had acknowledged, the idea of achieving unity between all black South

---

27. Imvo, 29 August 1911.
28. Imvo, 24 October 1911; Tsala, 28 October 1911; Ilanga, 20 October 1911.
29. Imvo, 5 December 1911.

Africans was not a new one. What was now created, however, was a permanent organisation that gave far clearer expression to this idea than anything that had preceded it. The proceedings were opened with a speech from Seme, at the end of which he formally moved that the SANNC be established. This was the first time, he said, that 'so many elements representing different tongues and tribes ever attempted to co-operate under one umbrella', and he emphasised the difficulties that they faced. The formation of Congress, though, was the 'first step towards solving the so-called native problem, and therein lay the advancement of the dark races who had hitherto been separated by tribal jealousies'. Seme's motion was seconded by Chief Joshua Molema, and he was followed by Chiefs Maama (Basutoland), Chief Motlaka (Zoutpansberg), Chief Makgalagadi, and finally by Dr. Rubusana 'who also supported the motion in a powerful speech'. The motion was then put to a vote, and passed unanimously 'with loud cheers, all the delegates standing'.[30] The SANNC thus came into existence.

The next business in hand was the somewhat delicate task of appointing office holders. It was widely expected that Dr. Rubusana, of East London, member of the Cape Provincial Council and formerly President of the South African Native Convention, and very much of an elder statesman figure in African eyes, would be elected as President. In fact, the Presidency was offered to another clergyman, the Rev. John Dube, who was not actually present at the meeting, being represented instead by his brother, Charles Dube. Behind this decision lay a desire on the part of the delegates to select at their head as widely acceptable a figure as possible. Involved in Cape politics both as a Provincial

---

30. Pretoria News, 11 and 13 January 1912; Tsala, 10 and 17 February 1912.

Councillor and as a long-standing opponent of the other major Cape African leader, John Tengo Jabavu, Rubusana's election as President would have been anathema to many Cape Africans and would have made it impossible to attract Jabavu's supporters to the movement. John Dube, well known as the principal of Ohlange, editor of *Ilanga lase Natal*, and for many years the leading *kholwa* figure in Natal, was thus much more acceptable: his choice was a product of Congress's wish to achieve as great a degree of political unity as possible, and to emphasise at the same time that African political activity should no longer be centred in the relatively privileged Cape. Rubusana thus had to be content with the post of Vice-President, and the other positions were distributed as widely as possible.[31]

The most important of these was the position of General (or Corresponding) Secretary, and it was to this post that Sol Plaatje was elected. With his many years experience as a newspaper editor and spokesman for his people, there could have been little argument that he was an ideal choice for the position. He possessed several other qualifications that particularly suited him for it. One was a well-known capacity for hard work, an essential quality for making a success of building up any new national movement. Another was his closeness to many of the politically sophisticated Cape Africans, without, however, their degree of involvement in the party and ethnic rivalries of the Eastern Cape. Widely accepted as a spokesman for Africans in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, Plaatje was seen by many as the right person to bring to the movement the traditions and skills of African political life in the Cape, but to direct them more to the political realities that were now imposed by Union. And more than any other

31. *Rise of African Nationalism*, 35-36.

African political leader, Plaatje seems to have acquired the reputation of having ready access to the Union administration. So it was that Plaatje, as his newspaper noted in February 1912, 'besides taking a leading part in the movement, has been saddled with nearly the whole of the secretarial work at the instance of the Native Lawyers who convened the movement'.[32] Possibly - as this suggests - Plaatje was somewhat reluctant to take on the task. Knowing the amount of time and work that was likely to be required in getting the SANNC off the ground, Plaatje must certainly have been aware of the potentially adverse effects that this was likely to have upon his newspaper business. At the same time it was a magnificant opportunity for him, and one that he was not prepared to turn down.

One of the other most important subjects of discussion at the inaugural meeting of the Congress was its constitution. Although no formal agreement was reached on this at the time (the main stumbling block being the question of its financial structure and the size of contributions from the local branches), the draft that was produced gave clear expression to the importance attached to the involvement of the chiefs in the organisation, providing for them an Upper House of Chiefs that corresponded roughly to the House of Lords in the British Parliament.[33] The name of the new organisation was also a point of some contention. During the discussions that took place over this, Plaatje suggested that the new organisation 'be known by a distinctive name, and a native name by preference'.[34] His argument was that there were already in existence so many councils and congresses that an

---

32. <u>Tsala</u>, 10 February 1912.
33. H.J. and R.E. Simons, <u>Class and Colour in South Africa</u>, 134-5.
34. <u>Tsala</u>, 17 February 1912.

additional one would only confuse people further. Although strongly supported by Joshua Molema, the meeting decided by a small majority to adopt the recommendation of the Transvaal organisations represented at the meeting that they should be known as the South African Native National Congress. Plaatje clearly felt strongly about the issue, for when the executive committee was authorised (on his own motion) to remain behind and complete the unfinished work and review the constitution, he again urged that Congress's name be changed, supporting his case this time by reading a letter from Cleopas Kunene (shortly to become editor of Abantu-Batho) who proposed the name 'Imbizo Yabantu' ('Bantu Congress'). 'We are Abantu', Kunene wrote:

> It is only fitting that any organisation - political or otherwise - of ours having a national significance should be named after, and in accordance with, our racial individuality, thus enhancing the recognition of our standing among the races of the world. I wish to appeal to the gentlemen present not to approach this matter from a European's point of view, but from a native's.[35]

Again, though, Plaatje's resolution was defeated - this time by a majority of two - and Section 1 of the revised constitution now read: 'The name of this organisation should be "The South African Native National Congress"'. Agreement was reached, too, on the objects of the organisation, which were defined as follows:

> (a)...the promotion of unity and mutual co-operation between the Government and the Abantu Races of South Africa.
> (b) The maintenance of a central channel between the Government and the aboriginal races in South Africa
> (c) The promotion of the educational, social, economical and political elevation of the native people in South Africa.

35. Ibid.

(d) The promotion of mutual understanding between the Native chiefs and the encouragement in them and their people of a spirit of loyalty to the British crown, and all lawfully constituted authorities, and to bring about better understanding between the white and black inhabitants of South Africa.[36]

****

During the few months after Congress's inaugural meeting, Plaatje, as Secretary, and Dube, the President, took the initiative in attempting to establish Congress's legitimacy - in the eyes of both government and people - as a body representing, as it claimed, the African people of South Africa.[37] The organisation was to be transformed, though, by its reaction to the introduction into parliament of the Natives' Land Act in 1913. The bill confirmed the worst fears of Plaatje and other Congress leaders about the direction in which 'native policy' was now going.[38] It was a piece of legislation that was of momentous significance - for the future direction of Plaatje's life and career, for the South African Native National Congress, and indeed for the future course of a good deal of subsequent South African history. The Natives' Land Act - as it became - was important above all for introducing into South African legislation the principle of territorial separation, or segregation. Its central provision was to deprive Africans of the right to acquire land outside their existing areas of occupation, and to prohibit whites from acquiring land within these

---

36. Ibid.
37. For details of Congress's activities in this period, see Native Life, 22; Pretoria News, 6 April 1912; Central Archives, Pretoria, Union of South Africa, NA 3250/11/F1131, 'Notes of Interview with the Minister of Native Affairs of Representatives of the South African Native National Congress'.
38. The Act is reproduced in Native Life, 46-51; for details of its passage through parliament, see C.M. Tatz, Shadow and Substance in South Africa (Pietermartizburg, 1962), 17-22.

areas, now redefined as 'Scheduled Native Areas'. Few Africans at the time objected strongly to the principle of territorial separation per se, provided it could be implemented in a reasonable and equitable manner, and provided it did not carry with it any wider political ramifications. Along with many others, Plaatje had no illusions about the possibility of either condition being met and had condemned - on a number of occasions - the whole concept of segregation as entirely impractical.[39] His views seemed to be fully vindicated with the publication of the Natives' Land Bill. The bill made it abundantly clear that there was in practice no possibility whatever of territorial separation being implemented in anything like an equitable manner, whilst the debates in parliament suggested that the logical corollary to the bill (in the minds of some, at least, of those associated with it) was the phasing out of the Cape franchise, the only remaining means of direct political leverage that black South Africans possessed.[40]

Under the terms of the Act, only 7.3 per cent of the total land surface of the Union was set aside for African occupation, patently inadequate to support a population that was four times as large as the white population. To meet this objection, a commission was appointed under the provisions of the Act to find and purchase further land for African occupation to add to what had already been set aside - mainly, in fact, the 'reserves', already in African occupation. Under the chairmanship of Sir William Beaumont, a former Administrator of Natal

---

39. Most notably, for example, in his essay written on the subject for a competition organised by C.F. Tainton in 1910. The essay was reproduced in Tsala, 28 January 1911. It won third prize; see also Christian Express, July 1910.
40. Shadow and Substance, 17-22.

and a Supreme Court Judge, the commission was charged with completing its investigations and presenting its report and recommendations within two years. In the interim, though, before the commission reported, Africans were barred from purchasing land except from other Africans, or in the existing reserves where, as Plaatje was quick to point out, this could not be done anyway since land there was held communally.

Neither the idea of territorial separation nor the wider philosophy of segregation which underlay and served to justify the Act were new. Parts of the Natives' Land Act directly implemented recommendations of the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903-05, a vitally important document that had strongly influenced thinking on 'the native problem' ever since it was published, and which in effect found its fullest legislative expression in 1913 and after.[41] The implementation of such grand designs, however, formed only part of the objectives of the Natives' Land Act. Other provisions that it contained - as well as the hasty manner in which it was pushed through the House of Assembly - reflected the response of the Union government to the acute political pressures that were, in 1912 and 1913, coming to be exerted upon it. The strongest pressures were from white farmers in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, whose demands for state intervention on their behalf were becoming more and more insistent. The legislation went further than anything that had been proposed in the past, threatening to cause particularly drastic changes in the Orange Free State. Here, the system of 'sowing on the halves' (widespread in the

41. For SANAC's significance see M. Legassick, 'British hegemony and the origins of segregation in South Africa, 1901-14' (unpublished seminar paper, ICS COLR/73/8), esp. p.4.

province since the Anglo-Boer War), whereby Africans, living on white-owned farms, paid half of their produce to the white landowner in exchange for the seed and for being allowed to farm the land, was made illegal. What many white farmers in the Free State now wanted was not a share in the produce of 'squatters' on their land, but their labour. Capitalist farming had become a much more attractive proposition than hitherto, but depended upon an adequate supply of cheap labour.[42] This the Natives' Land Act - by converting African producers in these areas from peasants into farm labourers - aimed to provide. The segregationist ideology in which the Natives' Land Act was framed, and with which it was justified, barely disguised the manner in which these provisions expressed the new found political power of white farming interests in the politics of Union.

The Natives' Land Act posed easily the greatest threat yet faced by the South African Native National Congress, mobilising the movement in a way that no other issue had yet done. Unlike many of the earlier issues with which Congress had been concerned - travelling on railways, or employment in government service - the Land Act threatened the interests of virtually every section and class of the African population. Congress had come together as an alliance of chiefs and the mission-educated African petty bourgeoisie. It was now presented with the opportunity - in adversity, admittedly - of building a national movement that involved the mass of the African people as well.

As secretary of the SANNC Plaatje took a leading role in mobilising African opposition to the Act. From the time of its passage in June

---

42. For the changes that underlay this, see T. Keegan, 'The Restructuring of Agrarian Class Relations in a Colonial Economy: the Orange River Colony, 1902-1910', JSAS, Vol.5, No.2, April 1979.

1913, until his departure from South Africa as a member of a Congress deputation to England a year later, it was the overwhelming preoccupation of himself personally, of his newspaper, and of the SANNC as a whole. Congress's response from the beginning was to concern itself not with the principle of territorial separation that the Land Act claimed to embody, but with the effects that it was likely to have. Its first move - after the provisions of the Bill first became known at the end of February 1913 - was to call a meeting in Johannesburg, which appointed a deputation to go to Cape Town to protest to the government about the harm that would follow if the bill became law. Plaatje himself was not able to travel with the deputation (which went in May), but he was present at the special July meeting which was convened to hear their report.[43] The delegates had, so Dr. Rubusana related, four interviews with J.W. Sauer, the new Minister for Native Affairs, and further sessions with other members of parliament. Their protests had made no impact whatever, and even their clear willingness to compromise had failed to elicit the slightest response. Lord Gladstone, the High Commissioner - a keen supporter of General Botha's government - offered no hope either. Plaatje had written to him earlier, requesting that he withhold his assent to the bill until he had heard the 'native view'. To this, Plaatje recalled, 'His Excellency replied that such a course "was not within his constitutional functions"'. John Dube, President of Congress, wrote to him after the Act had become law, asking for an interview to inform him of 'the nature of the damage that the Act was causing among the native population'. He received exactly the same reply.

43. Native Life, 172-3.

As the Congress leaders feared, the effects of the Land Act - once it had come into operation on 20 June 1913 - were immediate and devastating. These were discussed at the July meeting of Congress, which heard from delegates from all four provinces of their observations of the way in which white farmers were taking full advantage of the new law by ridding themselves of unwanted tenants, or forcing away others who refused to accept arbitrary demands for their labour. Plaatje himself - on the journey from Kimberley to Johannesburg - came across some of the worst effects of the Act. He had set out from Kimberley in the first week of July in the direction of Bloemhof, on the Transvaal side of the Vaal River, and had found there - barely three weeks after the Act had become law - a large number of African families, with their stock, who had travelled from the Free State, thinking that the Land Act was only in operation in that province. Travelling by bicycle, he encountered many evicted families on the road. On the boundary of the Hoopstad/Boshof districts of the Free State, for example, he described what he saw as follows:

> We passed several farm-houses along the road, where all appeared pretty tranquil as we went along, until the evening which we spent in the open country, somewhere near the boundaries of the Hoopstad and Boshof districts: here a regular circus had gathered. By a 'circus' we mean the meeting of groups of families, moving to every point of the compass, and all bivouacked at this point in the open country where we were passing. It was heartrending to listen to the tales of their cruel experiences derived from the rigour of the Natives' Land Act. Some of their cattle had perished on the journey, from poverty and lack of fodder, and the native owners ran a serious risk of imprisonment for travelling with dying stock.[44]

---

44. Native Life, 68.

Having heard Plaatje and other Congress delegates tell of their experiences of the effects of the Land Act, Congress resolved to appeal directly to the King, to the British Parliament, and to the British public. It was the only constitutional option open to them, and they decided to take it. Opinion was, however, not entirely unanimous over this. Both at this July meeting, and later on in the year, there was some support for the idea of taking strike action to redress their grievances. This was not a view that Plaatje supported. At the July meeting he personally drafted a resolution 'dissociating the natives from the [white miners'] strike movement' after the idea of doing this had been raised,[45] and he took strong issue with several prominent Transvaal Africans who later on in the year favoured abandoning the deputation in favour of strike action themselves.[46] Although Plaatje and the other Congress leaders had few illusions about the chances of the imperial government responding to an appeal to veto any piece of legislation passed by the Union government, they nevertheless believed it essential to exhaust every constitutional option open to them. 'Let our delegates tell the Imperial Government that we have appealed to the highest authorities in South Africa', Plaatje wrote,

> and wait until both our appeals, and the church's representations on our behalf, have been ignored: and let the Imperial Government inform our delegates that His Majesty's kingship over us ceased with the signing of the Act of Union and that whites and blacks in South Africa can do what they please; then only will we have the alternative, and I too will agree that we had better have a general strike, and 'damn the consequences'. Till then I maintain that the consequences of a strike action are too serious, and the probable complications too dreadful to contemplate.[47]

---

45. DFA, 18 February 1914.
46. Kimberley Evening Star, 23 December 1913.
47. Ibid.

The decision to send a deputation to England was accompanied by the setting up of an emergency committee to raise the necessary funds. With Dube and Makgotho, Plaatje then conveyed these decisions to the new Minister for Native Affairs, F.S. Malan. Malan failed to offer any concessions that might have deterred Congress from proceeding with the deputation, but attempted nevertheless to dissuade them from going. For the Congress delegates - who had seen for themselves the effects that the Land Act was having - the Minister's words did not inspire confidence in the prospect of alleviating their people's hardships. He advised them to wait until the Beaumont Commission reported 'as it was rather too early to judge an Act which had been in operation only one month', and that they should wait until there were 'cases of real suffering'. Plaatje asked Malan for a definition of the word 'suffering'. 'If the eviction of all the families he had already told the Minister about did not amount to "suffering"', he said, 'then what did the word mean?'[48]

Disappointed with Malan's attitude, Plaatje travelled back to Kimberley with his colleague from Thaba Nchu, J.M. Nyokong, by way of Vereeniging, Kroonstadt, and Bloemfontein. In all three places he addressed meetings on the subject of the Natives' Land Act, collected further evidence of its effects, and appealed for funds to pay for the deputation to go to England.[49] At the beginning of the next month (September 1913), he set out on another tour to investigate the effects of the Act in other parts of the Free State. He found many more examples of what he had seen during those first few weeks of July: African families wandering from place to place, refusing to accept arbitrary

48. Tsala, 9 August 1913.
49. Tsala, 23 August 1913.

conversion from peasant to labourer but unable to find anywhere else to go. Many of them had congregated around Ladybrand in the hope of being able to cross the border into Basutoland (where the Act did not apply), whilst many of those who actually lived in the area had been given notice to quit.[50] The only advice Plaatje could offer them was that they should travel to Thaba Nchu the following week to listen to an address from Edward Dower, the Secretary for Native Affairs, who was travelling around the country advising on the implementation of the Land Act; and to seek the Governor-General's special permission to live on their farm as provided for in Section 1 of the Act.[51]

Plaatje himself travelled to this meeting, attended also by a thousand or so other Africans. But Dower had no relief to offer. In his first speech, to the astonishment of all present, he failed even to mention the Natives' Land Act. When he finally did address himself to the question he offered not the slightest hope of relief, and displayed no sign that the government was prepared to compromise in any way whatever. He explained that the Natives' Land Act, through introducing the principle of territorial segregation, was in the best interests of the African population, and advised those present to do one of three things: become servants: move into the reserves (unspecified): or sell their stock for cash. He concluded by stating that in the Orange Free State, unlike the other provinces, there was in actual fact no provision for special cases being made through submission to the Governor-General. This concluding statement, Plaatje reported, 'settled the minds of those

---

50. Native Life, 102-7.
51. Ibid., 107; under the provisions of the Act the Governor-General was empowered to sanction land transactions which the legislation otherwise made illegal.

who had expected from the Government any protection against the law, and the disappointment under which the meeting broke up was indescribable'.[52]

Plaatje made one other major tour of investigation into the effects of the Land Act. This was to the Eastern Cape in November 1913. Other Congress leaders were collecting evidence - and raising funds for the deputation to England - in other parts of the country, but nobody had been doing this in the Eastern Cape. Plaatje agreed to undertake the journey, and set out from Kimberley on 1 November 1913. Despite the confusion that existed as to whether or not the Natives' Land Act was applicable to the Cape, Plaatje nevertheless found that some white farmers were taking advantage of the situation to rearrange their relationships with their African tenants in much the same way as was happening elsewhere.[53]

Plaatje had another objective in travelling to the Eastern Cape - to meet and discuss with two prominent individuals who had previously expressed their support for the Natives' Land Act. The first of these was James Henderson, Principal of Lovedale, Plaatje's first port of call. He found that Henderson's views were 'based on second-hand information', and that he had little real knowledge of the Land Act.[54] Plaatje was given the opportunity to air his views in Lovedale's influential journal, the Christian Express, which contained a long letter of his giving his views of the purpose and effects of the Act.[55] The second person Plaatje

52. Native Life, 102-16; Plaatje's account of the meeting was also widely publicised at the time; see Pretoria News, 18 September 1913; DFA, 18 September 1913.
53. For details of Plaatje's observations in the Cape, see Native Life, 146-64.
54. Ibid., 151.
55. Christian Express, December 1913, 187-9.

wished to see was John Tengo Jabavu, editor of Imvo, who lived in Kingwilliamstown. The Natives' Land Act was where South Africa's two leading black newspaper editors finally parted company, and in extremely bitter circumstances. Jabavu was, of course, much the senior of the two. When Plaatje had been working in Kimberley as a humble Post Office messenger in the 1890s, Jabavu was already well established as the editor of Imvo and considered to be the leading African politician of his day. Jabavu undoubtedly provided Plaatje with an example to emulate, and when, during the first decade of the twentieth century, Plaatje himself joined the ranks of African newspaper men, the two seem to have become - despite their differences in age and political outlook - good friends. Jabavu even became godfather to Plaatje's first daughter, Olive, in 1904, and on several occasions stayed with Plaatje and his family while visiting Mafeking and Kimberley.[56] And in 1911, when Jabavu was in Europe to attend the Universal Races Congress, it was Plaatje who took over the edited Imvo during his absence.

In 1913, though, Jabavu came out in favour of the Natives' Land Act, the only African politician of any significance to do so. Tied by many years of involvement in Cape politics to several ministers in the new Union government, Jabavu extended his support to the Act, introduced as it was in parliament by one of his long-time political allies, J.W. Sauer. The measure broke both men. Sauer was reported to have been in tears after introducing the bill into the House of Assembly, justifying his decision to do so on the grounds that Africans would get something much worse if he didn't do so. 'Why', Dr. Rubusana

56. Umteteli wa Bantu, 23 July 1921; Native Life, 168.

had asked him, 'did you not resign in protest?' 'Because', said Mr. Sauer, 'your position without me would have been infinitely worse'.[57] Several weeks later Sauer died, a death hastened - as many saw it - by the anguish of having to introduce a piece of legislation that went against all that he had stood for in a long and distinguished political career. Jabavu, though, continued to support the measure. In doing so he met with almost universal criticism from Africans inside as well as outside the Cape, and he rapidly lost the reputation that he had built up over so many years. Given the position he had taken, this was perhaps inevitable: it was rendered all the more so, however, by Plaatje's determination to challenge him directly over the issue.

Plaatje reached Kingwilliamstown on 3 November carrying with him an invitation to address a meeting there about the Natives' Land Act. Jabavu - whom he visited before the meeting was due to take place - refused to see him, and he did not attend the meeting. Several days later _Imvo_ carried a very disparaging report about the meeting, and Plaatje responded with a challenge to a public debate about the Land Act. Jabavu failed to accept it. Details of the whole episode were widely publicised, both at the time and later in Plaatje's book, _Native Life in South Africa_, and contributed further to the decline in Jabavu's political reputation.[58]

The whole episode and what lay behind it perhaps illustrated more clearly than anything else the ambiguous legacy of a Cape tradition to the politics of the Union. Plaatje, whose ideals and philosophy were rooted in the Cape quite as much as those of Jabavu, was able to emerge

---

57. _Tsala_, 30 August 1913.
58. Most of Chapter XIII of _Native Life_ had already appeared, for example, in the _Cape Mercury_ and _Tsala_ and was widely commented upon elsewhere.

as a national African political leader because he was not at the same time tied to the interests and political structures of the Cape. In the process of forging a national African political movement in South Africa there were some sad casualties: Jabavu was one of them, and Plaatje could not afford to display much sympathy for the position in which he found himself.

Throughout late 1913 and early 1914 Congress's campaign to collect funds for the deputation to England continued apace. In February a further conference was called to elect its members. Originally supposed to take place in Johannesburg, the venue was changed to Kimberley because of the martial law restrictions in operation in the Transvaal. Plaatje clearly welcomed the opportunity to have the conference in his home town, and the delegates received in Kimberley the kind of reception which they certainly would not have received in Johannesburg. De Beers assisted in various ways, and the proceedings of the conference were opened by the Bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman.[59]

Shortly after the meeting began its deliberations, Plaatje received a telephone call from the local Resident Magistrate saying that he had received a telegram from Edward Dower, the Secretary for Native Affairs, which read as follows: 'Leaving tonight for Kimberley to attend the Native Congress. Inform Plaatje'. The effect of the telegram - which Plaatje immediately conveyed to the meeting - was to raise the hopes of the delegates that the government was, at last, preparing to make some concession to them over the Land Act. The meeting therefore decided to postpone the election of the delegates for the deputation to England until after Dower's arrival in the hope that it wouldn't prove

---

59. Native Life, 181-93. This source is also used for the following paragraph.

necessary to send them after all. Not for the first time, however, Dower's message came as a great disappointment. He appealed to the conference not to send a deputation to England, and revealed that the Crown had already been advised by the British Government to give its assent to the Act, and he had absolutely no concession to offer. Dower's visit to Kimberley, as Plaatje put it, 'was entirely barren of results, and as such, it left the Congress as it found it, in bewilderment and gloom'. Congress therefore decided (although this decision was by no means unanimous) to proceed with the deputation, and elected five delegates to accompany John Dube, the President, to England. Plaate, with thirteen votes, topped the poll, followed by S.M. Makgotho (9), Saul Msane (6), W.Z. Fenyang (3), and T.M. Mapikela (3). In the event, Makgotho failed to reach Cape Town in time to reach the ship, and W.Z. Fenyang stood down in favour of Dr. Rubusana.

The delegates travelled to Cape Town in the middle of May, Plaatje having previously found out from Henry Burton (now Minister of Railways and Harbours) that he did not need a passport to travel to England.[60] Their hopes that even at this eleventh hour the government was prepared to compromise were again raised when both the Prime Minister, General Botha, and Lord Gladstone, the Governor-General, agreed to see them. Both, however, simply repeated Dower's appeal to them not to proceed to England. It was little consolation for Plaatje and his colleagues to note that Gladstone seemed to be genuinely shocked by what they had to tell him about the effects of the Land Act. Certainly his arguments -

---

60. Central Archives, Pretoria, Union of South Africa, N.A. 3248/13/ F817, Plaatje to Henry Burton, 7 May 1914. 'I have received notice to leave for England next week with the deputation of the S.A.Native Congress', Plaatje wrote. 'I am altogether ignorant of the necessary permits required by one to leave the Province for foreign countries. I would be so glad were you to kindly secure for me the requisite official documents so that I be fully armed with the necessary authorities when I leave'.

as Plaatje's own account of the meeting indicated - lacked conviction. When asked by the delegates what they were to do about the evictions that were taking place, this was the exchange that took place:

> 'Oh well', said Lord Gladstone, 'the Natives are not the only sufferers, even in England people have suffered hardships from time to time, till they were compelled to emigrate to America and other places'. 'That is true, your lordship, but it is to avert such a contingency, if possible, that the Natives appointed a deputation to lay their case before His Majesty the King, as they have no means to emigrate to America, or any other country'. 'Oh, no,', he answered, 'don't misunderstand me; I only use that as an instance, not that the Natives must emigrate'.[61]

A few days later - after addressing several meetings in Cape Town - the delegates sailed for England, bringing with them little real hope that the Imperial Government would revoke the Natives' Land Act but determined nevertheless to exhaust every conceivable constitutional option open to them, and hopeful that the British public might be roused to some action on their behalf.

****

Plaatje was the only one of the delegates not to have been to England before, and he probably regarded the trip as an ideal opportunity (it would have been extremely difficult for him to raise the funds privately) to visit the country from which so many of his values and aspirations originated. At the same time he must have spared more than a passing thought about the future of his newspaper. <u>Tsala ea Batho</u> ('The Friend of the People') had succeeded <u>Tsala ea</u>

61. <u>Native Life</u>, 191.

Becoana in August 1912.[62] It differed from its predecessor in that it was published in Pedi as well as in English and Tswana, the result of a merger with another African newspaper, Motsualle oa Babatsho, whose press Plaatje had acquired.[63] Tsala survived where a number of its contemporaries did not. At the beginning of January 1914 it carried the following comment:

> Three native papers have ceased publication during 1913, but we are still here to tell the story. It is not through any valour on our part, as much as through the liberality of advertising firms throughout South Africa, who stood by us when our natural customers, the native peasants of the 'Free' State and Transvaal, were driven from pillar to post under the cruel provisions of an unprecedented law, and would not send us any money.[64]

The disruptions caused by the Natives' Land Act may have adversely affected the number of paid-up subscriptions that Plaatje received, but Tsala's coverage of the Act - which dominated its columns from mid-1913 onwards - probably brought it a degree of influence greater than either Koranta ea Becoana or Tsala ea Becoana. Not without justification, Tsala claimed to be 'the most accurately informed Native newspaper in South Africa', and by 1914 it carried regular reminders for its readers of a number of notable 'scoops' that it had achieved - news of the death of J.W. Sauer, for example, 'a whole week before any other Native news-

---

62. The first issue of Tsala ea Batho was numbered 94, thus continuing Tsala ea Becoana's sequence, but there seems to have been a gap of some three months between this and Tsala ea Becoana, 8 June 1912; see also Ilanga, 11 October 1912; Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da20 Plaatje to S. Molema, 14 August 1920; Da 21, Plaatje to Molema, 14 September 1912.
63. APO, 15 October 1912; Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da 20, Plaatje to Molema, 14 August 1920; Da 21, Plaatje to Molema, 14 September 1912.
64. Tsala, 3 January 1914. Plaatje added: 'It is doubtful if, even with the aid of the commercial people, we could have survived without the aid of the proprietors of the two English papers of Kimberley, the DFA and the Evening Star', who had 'carefully guided our footsteps both in the typographical and journalistic spheres'.

paper'; it had correctly forecast the names of the commissioners appointed under the terms of the Natives' Land Act 'a whole week before the fact was known to any other Native paper'; it had published news of the return of Dr. Abdurahman as a member of the Cape provincial council 'simultaneously with the daily papers'; and it gave 'the first news to the Natives of the result of the Tembuland election; although one of the defeated candidates is an editor, his defeat became known to the Tsala readers four days before it appeared in his paper'.

By 1914 Tsala had achieved a circulation of 4,000.[65] Although it did not have, as Plaatje noted on one occasion, 'a staff of some half-a-dozen sub-editors' like Abantu Batho (the Congress newspaper which was financed by the Swazi royal family), it was read by 'the heads of several Departments of State both in the Cape and Transvaal Province', and when 'a single copy strayed in the post we got urgent commands to supply another'.[66] On one occasion - during the debate on the Land Act in the House of Assembly - one of Plaatje's editorials on the subject was read out during the course of a speech by T.L. Schreiner.[67] Tsala was without doubt an important and influential newspaper, but it was s still very dependent upon Plaatje's personal ability as an editor and writer, and upon his willingness constantly to seek financial aid, often at considerable personal cost and embarrassment, to keep it afloat.

65. Report of Natives' Land Commission, Vol.2 (Minutes of Evidence), UG 22 '16, evidence of S.T. Plaatje, 93-4. This compared with a circulation of 5,000 claimed by Abantu Batho (De Beers Archives, General Secretary's correspondence, Mabaso to De Beers, 14 February 1914). Walshe's estimates for the circulation of African newspapers at this time (Rise of African Nationalism, 218) are much too low.
66. Tsala, 21 March 1914.
67. Reproduced in Native Life, 40.

It was noticeable that when Plaatje was away from Kimberley - which happened with increasing frequency after he became General Secretary of the SANNC, and particularly after the passage of the Land Act, original editorial comment tended to be replaced by secondhand material from other newspapers and journals.[68]

Although Plaatje's own activities provided the basis for a good deal of what subsequently went into Tsala, he was at the same time very conscious of the dangers of allowing himself to become too preoccupied with Congress affairs at the expense of his newspaper. It was probably this that led him - in February 1914 - to request that he be allowed to resign as General Secretary of the SANNC, 'owing to pressure of other work'. He was, however, persuaded to reconsider and stayed on as Secretary for several months more. But he did resign the position shortly before leaving for England, an indication perhaps that when he returned he intended to devote more time to what he considered - at heart - to be his first priority, editing his newspaper. Tsala's readers, in the meantime, were urged to 'pay up their arrears to keep the paper going during his absence'.[70]

****

68. This was not the only direction in which Tsala suffered during his absence. Returning to Kimberley from a visit to Thaba Nchu in 1912, Plaatje wrote (in a letter to Silas Molema) that 'he found his printing works in a mess'; Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da 22, Plaatje to Molema, 12 December 1912. It was probably not an isolated occasion.
69. Tsala, 7 March 1914. A further factor in his decision to offer his resignation was probably the criticism that had been made of his 'mismanagement' by some of the Johannesburg delegates who had wanted the conference to be held there; Tsala, 28 Debruary 1914.
70. Tsala, 23 May 1914. 'It is satisfactory to note', Tsala said, 'that he has no intention of severing his connection with the Congress although he resigns his Secretaryship'.

The period between Union and the departure of the Congress deputation to England was one of tremendous significance for Plaatje personally, and for the position of black South Africans generally. For Plaatje it was a period that had begun in a mood of cautious optimism. He was established once more as the editor of his own newspaper, and his writings and opinions reached a wider audience than ever before. In a period of relative inaction as far as 'native affairs' were concerned, his hopes that the methods and influence of the Cape would predominate in the new political structure of Union for a while seemed justified. Then there was change. The balance of political power passed to the Afrikaner nationalists, determined to make use of the power of the state to satisfy the demands of the farmers of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. The Natives' Land Act of 1913 struck at the heart of so many of the principles that Plaatje cherished, and uprooted large numbers of his own Tswana people. At the same time it made possible a degree of unity amongst the African people of South Africa that had not existed before. To the development of the organisation that gave expression to this sense of unity Plaatje had perhaps contributed more than anybody else, and as editor of _Tsala ea Batho_ he brought home - to those who would read or listen - the meaning of one of the most drastic pieces of legislation in South African history. Having exhausted all constitutional means of protest open to them inside South Africa, it now remained to be seen how Plaatje and the other elected representatives of the SANNC fared in their mission to England.

CHAPTER 5

ENGLAND, 1914-17

Undeterred by the last minute appeals of General Botha and Lord Gladstone to persuade them against proceeding to England, the five members of the deputation departed on 16 and 18 May, Dube and Rusbusana on the Kinfauns Castle, Plaatje, Mapikela, and Msane on the Norseman. Despite 'nasty forebodings about sea sickness' Plaatje was not affected by the rough weather that they ran into in the Bay of Biscay, unlike 'old stagers like Mr. Mapikela and other passengers who had crossed the ocean many times before'. He spent much of his time on board writing what was eventually to become Native Life in South Africa. 'I am compiling this little book on the Natives' Land Act and its operation', he wrote in an article that subsequently appeared in Tsala ea Batho, 'which I hope to get through the press immediately after landing in England. It keeps me very busy typewriting in the saloon all forenoons and evenings'. After a brief stop at Tenerife - which provided for Plaatje 'the novel experience of landing in a community which did not know any of the languages I speak' - the Norseman arrived safely in Plymouth. Plaatje, Mapikela, and Msane then travelled straight to London to join the other members of the deputation who had already arrived.[1]

John Dube, the leader of the deputation, had received a letter from the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society en route at Madeira, and had gladly accepted the Society's offer of assistance

1. Plaatje's account of the voyage to England was published in Tsala, 4 July 1914; and DFA, 14 July 1914.

and guidance in the deputation's campaign.[2] The Society was, after all, an experienced and influential organisation whose range of contacts was likely to be of great value in enabling the deputation to put over their case in England. J.H. Harris, the Society's Organising Secretary, accordingly took in hand the arrangements for the first part of their campaign, securing an appointment with Lord Harcourt, the Secretary of State for the Colonies.[3] It soon became clear that Harris had his own very definite ideas about how the deputation should conduct their campaign. The Society's policy, as Harris put it privately, was 'to use our influence in the direction of securing a modification of their original programme and an abstention from public agitation pending the exhaustion of every constitutional means open to them. Convinced that there was no chance whatever that Harcourt would disallow the Natives' Land Act, Harris persuaded the delegates to replace this demand with proposals instead for the modification and suspension of part of the Act.[5]

Harris was certainly correct in his view as to the likelihood of the Act being vetoed: the chances were nil. Even before the deputation left South Africa, the South African government had been told that His Majesty's Government 'will not be advised to exercise the power of disallowance in respect of the Act'.[6] However, the delegates were

---

2. Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS Brit.Emp. S19 D3/12, Harris to Dube, 18 May 1914. As requested, Dube went straight to the APS office in London without saying anything to the press.
3. For correspondence relating to this, see Public Record Office, CO 551/64, and Correspondence Relating to Dube/Botha. The Natives' Land Act, 1913, 1914, Cd.7508.
4. S22 G203, APS to L.Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28 June 1914; see also S19 D3/12, Harris to Cecil Beck, MP., 9 June 1914.
5. Ibid.
6. Correspondence Relating to Dube/Botha; S22 G203, deputation's memorandum to CO, 15 June 1914.

persuaded to sign a memorial for presentation to Lord Harcourt which strongly reflected Harris's own predisposition in favour of an idealised form of segregation. This contained the proposition that General Botha's policy of segregation should be given formal approval by the Imperial Government, 'or better still form the basis of an undertaking as a native policy by the Imperial Government and South African Government'.[7]

The APS arranged an interview for the delegates with Lord Harcourt on the condition that they confined themselves to the points laid out in this document. The Colonial Office saw no reason why representatives of the Society, however, should - as Harris wished - accompany them during the interview. The result was quite interesting. Freed from Harris's influence and supervision, the delegates took the opportunity to express their views on the Natives' Land Act in much stronger and forthright terms than Harris had prescribed. Speaking in turn, the delegates strongly criticised the Act, requesting not the imperial government's formal approval of a policy of segregation but an investigation into the effects that the Act was having. But Lord Harcourt was not sympathetic. South Africa was now a self-governing dominion, and Botha's government was held in high esteem by the imperial authorities: Harcourt had no intention of causing him the slightest degree of embarrassment. He felt that an undertaking to guarantee a promise of General Botha's that Africans

7. CO 551/64, minute on despatch cover; CO 551/67, APS to CO, 6 July 1914; S.T. Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa, 194-5.

would be awarded more land under the provisions of the Land Act 'would be insulting', and on every complaint that the delegates made he said he had 'the assurance of General Botha' to the contrary.[8] Plaatje described how the interview went:

> Mr. Harcourt made no notes and asked no questions at the interview accorded to our deputation. He listened to how desperately we resisted the passing of the law; how the Government ignored all our representations, and those of all churches and missionary bodies on our behalf; how we twice applied to Lord Gladstone for opportunities to inform him of the ruin which is wrought by the law among our people; how Lord Gladstone wrote in each instance saying it was not 'within his constitutional functions' to see us. To all this Mr. Harcourt replied with another assurance of General Botha that 'we have not exhausted all South African remedies before coming to England'.[9]

The delegates did not confine themselves to the points expressed in their earlier written communication to Lord Harcourt. They asked, as the Colonial Office put it, 'for certain impossibilities which they did not ask in their written demands'.[10] The APS was annoyed about this as well, but it obviously made no difference to the outcome. Lord Harcourt refused point blank to give any consideration to the idea of interceding informally with General Botha on the delegates' behalf: 'any attempt on the part of H.M.G. to give such an assurance', Harcourt felt, 'would be inconsistent with the responsible Government which has been granted to the Union of South Africa'.[11]

---

8. S.T. Plaatje, Native Life in South Africa, 194-5
9. S.T. Plaatje, 'No Room to Live', Daily Chronicle, 14 July 1914; see also Brotherhood Journal, August 1914; Ilanga, 28 August 1914.
10. CO 551/67, 24532, minute on despatch cover.
11. S22 D4/4, Harcourt to Harris, 11 July 1914.

Harcourt did agree to 'consider' the delegates' request to 'pay their respects' to the King.[12] Neither the King himself nor the South African government thought this was a good idea, however, and the request was eventually turned down. Both General Botha and Lord Gladstone were agreed that this would be 'an inconvenient precedent for the future'.[13] The delegates prepared accordingly to bring their campaign before the British Parliament and people. After the interview with Lord Harcourt, their strategy - carefully managed, still, by the APS - was to achieve a maximum amount of publicity in the press with the objective of influencing the Colonial Office vote in Parliament in July. Harris informed Dube that this was 'your last chance of doing anything effective ... when that is over you can do nothing more in the country for the present'.[14] The vote provided the opportunity for the matter to be raised in the House of Commons by two sympathetic MP's, Percy Alden and Sir Albert Spicer, who urged the Colonial Office to consider some form of representation to the South African authorities on the delegates' behalf. In reply, Lord Harcourt merely repeated what he had said earlier and referred the House back to the recommendations of the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903-05 to demonstrate that the Natives' Land Act, far from being a 'sudden inspiration of the Botha Government' in fact had a most respectable English ancestry.[15]

---

12. Pretoria Central Archives, Gov.-Gen. 50/452, Report of Interview.
13. Pretoria Central Archives, Gov.-Gen. 50/448, telegram from Gov.-Gen. to CO, 4 July 1914; minute from General Botha 3 July 1914. The view of the King had already been made known: 'His Majesty presumes there will be no necessity for him to receive the deputation which does not seem to be a representative one', (CO 551/64, 20301, Ponsonby to CO, 13 June 1914).
14. S19 D3/12, Harris to Dube, 14 July 1914 (private).
15. Native Life, 195-8.

Reluctant to return to South Africa without having done all in their power to protest against the Natives' Land Act, the delegates proceeded to address a series of public meetings with the broader objective of 'educating public opinion'. The campaign could not have been sustained for very long. The members of the deputation no longer had the support of the APS; their leader, John Dube, had returned to South Africa in somewhat dubious circumstances; they were rapidly running out of money; and there were signs of differences of opinion developing amongst the delegates themselves. The outbreak of war at the beginning of August thus provided a respectable pretext as much as a real reason for calling off the campaign, enabling them to invoke a higher loyalty to the British Empire and thus avoid what would otherwise have been a rather undignified end to the campaign. Dube cabled instructions to return to South Africa, and by the middle of September Rubusana, Msana and Mapikela had departed.

Plaatje decided - despite the outbreak of war and the instructions from Dube - to stay on in England to continue the campaign against the Natives' Land Act single-handed.[16] The most determined member of the deputation, he had a number of speaking engagements to fulfil and had been encouraged by the sympathetic response that he had met with from an admittedly small group of supporters, prominent amongst whom were Mrs. Saul Solomon, widow of the famous Cape statesman, and Jane Cobden Unwin, daughter of Richard Cobden and wife of the publisher, Stanley Unwin.[17] Above all Plaatje wanted to complete and publish

---

16. Shortly after the outbreak of war Dube cabled the delegates from South Africa to tell them to call off their campaign and return home; S19 D2/6, Dube to APS, 21 September 1914; for Plaatje's reaction to the telegram, see Colenso Collection (Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg), Box 54, Plaatje to Mrs.Colonso, 31 August 1914.
17. Native Life, 195; for Mrs.Solomon, see W.E.G.Solomon, Saul Solomon: the Member for Cape Town (London, 1948); and Solomon Family Papers, South African Library, Cape Town. Details of Mrs.Unwin's life are to be found in her papers in the National Liberal Club Library, London. Both women deserve biographies.

the book about the Natives' Land Act which he had begun on the ship, and which he had continued to work on since his arrival in England. He was determined that the grievances of his people should not be forgotten by the British people, war or no war.

But Plaatje's decision to stay on in England was a product also of his anger at the way in which the APS had sought to control, and in his view to undermine, the deputation's campaign in England. Relations between Plaatje and the APS were finally broken off at a meeting with J.H. Harris in August 1914. The meeting was concerned with the arrangements for the administration of a loan to the remaining delegates which the APS - faced with the not altogether unfamiliar problem of having a destitute African deputation on its hands - had arranged to enable them to pay their passages home. Convinced that the delegates could only harm the image of the Society - and cause them further expense - by staying on in England, Harris had attached several conditions to their loan, the most important of which were, in Plaatje's words, 'that you sign an undertaking to be out of England on or before September 30th, 1914; secondly, that in the meantime you are not going to speak to any Society or any African friends'. Mapikela, Msane and Rubusana, anxious anyway to return to South Africa, evidently agreed to these conditions, accepted the loan, and departed. Plaatje, although he at first seems to have been willing to travel home with the other delegates, did not. He reacted violently to what he termed 'a string of extraordinary restrictions and humiliating conditions', and refused to accept the conditions of the loan: 'if, on appointing me to the delegation', he wrote, 'the Congress had informed me that I

would be expected to borrow money under gagging conditions, I would certainly have told Congress they were selecting the wrong man'.[18]

The task of interesting the British public in the grievances of black South Africans against the Land Act was thus left in the hands of one individual. In view of the differences that had developed amongst the Congress delegates when they had been in England Plaatje undoubtedly considered that this had certain advantages. At the same time he faced a number of serious problems that were to plague him throughout the period of nearly two-and-a-half years that he was to spend in England. The most immediate of these was his own financial situation. Forced to borrow money from friends and sympathisers, to plead for funds to be sent to him ~~for~~ South Africa, and in the meantime to rely upon the charity of the landlord of the house where he was staying, his prospects did not look promising.[19] Despite assurances from Mapikela and the other delegates made on the eve of their departure, Congress did not provide any assistance at all in this direction, partly because of the difficulties in raising funds in South Africa, but partly also through an unwillingness to do so: several of the delegates, anxious that their decision to return home should not be seen as the wrong one, disapproved of Plaatje's

18. S.T. Plaatje, 'Why I remained in England', Basutoland Star, 15 October 1915, enclosure in S22 D4/8, G. Solomon to Harris, 27 January 1916; for further details - and the APS's version of events - see 'Confidential Memorandum: South African Delegates, 1914', and letters from APS to Rev. Frank Lenwood, 25 August 1914, and APS to the editor, Abantu-Batho, 5 November 1915, all enclosures in above.

19. Amongst those to whom he turned was Ben Weil, the Mafeking storekeeper during the siege who was now living in London; see Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da 39, Plaatje to Chief Lekoko, 6 November 1914; Da 41, Plaatje to Moshoeshoe, 16 June 1916; Plaatje/Molema Papers (UNISA), Plaatje to Lekoko, 10 December 1914.

decision to remain in England. Plaatje was very disappointed to receive reports from South Africa, some months later, of criticism that some of them had been making of his decision to stay on.[20]

Plaatje continued to address meetings for the rest of 1914 and throughout 1915, mostly in and around London, but on occasions travelling as far north as Yorkshire and Scotland. Many of these meetings were held under the auspices of the Brotherhood Movement, an organisation that came to play a large part in Plaatje's life, both during and after the time he spent in England. Founded in 1875 by John Blackham, a Nottingham printer and publisher, the Brotherhood Movement was an inter-denominational religious organisation, in practice drawing its support from members - and ministers - of the non-conformist churches.[21] Its main form of activity was the holding of P.S.A's' ('Pleasant Sunday Afternoons'), Sunday meetings that were devoted to religious and educational instruction. Headed nationally by the British Brotherhoods Federation, the movement enjoyed the support of a number of members of parliament (most notably the prominent Labour politician, Arthur Henderson), claimed a general membership of over half a million, and had links with like-minded bodies overseas, particularly in Europe and North America. The movement's central concern was the practical implementation of Christianity in everyday

---

20. 'Why I remained in England': '...when I saw them off at St. Pancras, he [Mapikela] personally told me that, soon after their arrival, they would urge Congress to send me relief'. The same article also contained Plaatje's comments on the reports he had received from South Africa.
21. B. Matthews (ed.), World Brotherhood (London 1919); A.E.H. Gregory, Romance and Revolution: the story of the Brotherhood Movement (Sevenoaks, 1975); see also J.W. Tuffley, Grain from Galilee (London, 1935). No full, modern account of the Brotherhood Movement exists.

life, and its message can perhaps best summed up in a statement by Arthur Henderson, President of the Federation: 'The Brotherhood', he said, 'must help not only the spiritual part of life, but also in social matters. They should always held the downtrodden, showing the brotherly feeling which was portrayed throughout the life of Christ'.[22]

Plaatje first came across the Brotherhood Movement in July 1914 when he and the other Congress delegates called at its headquarters in London 'to explain to the National Brotherhood Council', Plaatje wrote, 'the object of their mission'.[23] Soon afterwards the Brotherhood Journal came out in favour of their cause. 'For Brotherhood men and women', it said, 'there can only be one response to their appeal. For Brotherhood is not only between man and man, but between nation and nation, and race and race'.[24] Unencumbered by any past experience in colonial matters that might have led them to hesitate in making so forthright a declaration, the leaders of the Brotherhood Movement had clearly been impressed by the well-educated and very articulate members of the Congress deputation, and they responded accordingly. Over the next few years Plaatje developed close relationships with several individuals in the movement, and addressed over 130 meetings under its auspices.[25] The Brotherhood Movement thus provided Plaatje with a countrywide platform from which to present his cause, and an association with a body of sympathetic men and women whose ideas and beliefs he was to become increasingly attracted to.

---

22. Quoted by Plaatje in Native Life, 223.
23. Native Life, 225.
24. Brotherhood Journal, August 1914; quoted in Native Life, 225-6.
25. Those that Plaatje had addressed until mid-1915 are listed in Native Life, 232-3.

Important as it was in Plaatje's mind to address as many meetings as possible, he saw as his first priority the completion and publication of his book. With this he believed he could reach a far wider audience and bring to their attention in fully documented form the grievances of his people against the Natives' Land Act. Native Life in South Africa did not appear, however, until May 1916, some two years after he had started writing it. There were several reasons for this delay. One of these was the war. This had an important bearing on the nature of both the book and Plaatje's campaign of lectures and addresses. Its immediate effect was to overshadow everything, making it more difficult to interest the British public in what were bound to be considered as the parochial problems of a section of the population in a distant dominion of the empire. The war came, as Plaatje wrote, 'just in time to upset everything, and to divert people's attention, just as we were catching the ear of the British public'.[26] If Plaatje was guilty here of somewhat wishful thinking, he remained determined to make the best of the situation. His strategy was to link the two issues of the war and the Natives' Land Act and to write a book that was both longer and different in form to what he had originally intended.

This became evident when Native Life was published. The war provided Plaatje with an audience conditioned to respond to the kind of emotional appeal to patriotic feeling and Christian principle upon which propaganda and recruiting campaigns were based, and in his book Plaatje played upon this in a quite deliberate way, linking the wider struggle in which Britain and the empire was now engaged with that of his people in South Africa, loyal subjects of the same King and empire. 'Trans-

---

26. Booker T. Washington Papers (Library of Congress, Washington), Con.13, Plaatje to Emmett J. Scott, 27 August 1914.

lations of the Tipperary Chorus into some of the languages which are spoken by the white and black inhabitants of South Africa have been used here and there', he explained, 'as mottoes; and as this book is a plea in the main for help against "the South African war of extermination", it is hoped that admirers of Tommy Atkins will sympathise with the coloured sufferers, who also sing Tommy Atkins' war songs'.[27] Throughout the book, Plaatje emphasises and documents the contribution of black South Africans in the service of the British Empire in both past and present conflicts. He sought to contrast African loyalty and service not only with the treatment of his people by the South African authorities, but also with the attitude of a section of the Boer population. The Boer Rebellion, which Plaatje deals with at length in the latter part of Native Life, thus could not have come at a better time from the point of view of his aim in contrasting African and Afrikaner attitudes towards the war and towards the cause of the imperial government: to have failed to have covered the rebellion, Plaatje wrote, would have left his account of life in South Africa 'a story half told'.[28]

The war thus had a very important effect upon the shape of Plaatje's book, and he was kept busy with it - incorporating current developments that were relevant to his theme - throughout the remaining months of 1914 and into the beginning of 1915. He received a considerable amount of assistance from Alice Werner, a lecturer in African languages at Cambridge, and later, London University, with whom he had made contact shortly after his arrival in England.[29] By February 1915 the

---

27. Native Life, 15.
28. Native Life, 14.
29. For details of Alice Werner's career, see obituary in The Times, 11 June 1935; for her assistance to Plaatje, see correspondence in late 1915 with the APS in S19 D2/7 and D2/16; and with Harriette Colenso in Colenso Collection, Box 63; Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da 42, Plaatje to Molema, 15 July 1915.

completion of Native Life seemed to be in sight: 'I am working hard at my book which I hope to place in the printer's hands this very quarter', he wrote on 20 February 1915. Other friends and sympathisers offered their encouragement. 'Each one', Plaatje wrote, '(and I must say they are competent to judge as they have themselves written books), each who has seen a chapter of the book I am writing raises hopes in me: they say if the rest of the book is like that they have seen, it must sell well. Let us hope so, for the sake of the cause'.[30] Not everybody was as complimentary. A couple of months later Sir Harry Johnstone was sent - at Alice Werner's suggestion - a copy of the completed draft of Native Life with a request that he should write an introduction for it. Sir Harry declined. He felt that 'the mass of the book is interesting and remarkably well written', and he sympathised with the cause being presented, but felt that, as it stood, the book 'was not one which I could recommend to the public'. He told Plaatje that if he wanted him to write an introduction he must make a number of changes and remove 'the serious blemishes' that he thought it contained. In particular, he recommended that Plaatje should 'ruthlessly cut out every single poetical and scriptural quotation' and concentrate its argument much more concisely'.[31]

Plaatje and Alice Werner decided to do without Sir Harry's introduction.[32] By the middle of 1915 the proofs had been made and corrected. The problem remained, however, of finding the funds to pay the printer, P.S. King and Co., to take things a stage further.

---

30. Colenso Collection, Box 55, Plaatje to Mrs.Colenso, 26 February 1915.
31. Colenso Collection, Box 55, Sir H. Johnstone to Alice Werner, 4 June 1915; see also Johnstone to Plaatje, 4 June 1915 and A. Werner to H. Colenso, 18 June 1915.
32. Colenso Collection, Box 55, A.Werner to H.Colenso, 18 June 1915.

Plaatje had sought to raise the money that was required from various sources, but was hopeful that the Rolong chief, Lekoko - to whom he had written in November 1914, with a request for the £87 that was needed to cover the cost of a first edition of 1,000 copies - would oblige.[33] Lekoko seems to have agreed to provide the money, but delayed sending it off, and then died. When news of his death arrived, Alice Werner decided to take the initiative in raising money, and in September 1915 she sent out a circular letter to possible sympathisers and donors, outlining the circumstances that made the appeal necessary and emphasising the importance of having the book published as soon as possible.[34]

The circular was to have unfortunate consequences, arising largely from the way in which Alice Werner rounded off her appeal: 'It is of greatest importance', she wrote, 'that Botha should be supported in the just and generous native policy to which I believe him to be personally inclined, though many of his supporters make his position difficult in this respect, I understand'. There can be little doubt that this gave a false impression of the content of _Native Life_, and it was immediately seized upon by the APS - who had been sent copies of the circular by people wondering whether they should contribute or not - as evidence that Plaatje had deliberately misled Alice Werner, and that this therefore constituted an attempt to raise money under false pretences.[35] Sir Albert Spicer, who had participated in the Commons debate on the Natives' Land Act in 1914, and who had indicated a willingness to contribute, was amongst those now persuaded by the APS not to do so.[36]

---

33. Plaatje/Molema Papers (UNISA), Plaatje to Chief Lekoko, 6 November 1914.
34. S19 D2/7, A.Werner to Sir A.Spicer (copy), 18 September 1915.
35. S22 G203, APS to Dr.Haigh, 12 January 1917.
36. S19 D2/16, APS to Sir Albert Spicer, 21 January 1917.

Over the next few months the APS took several other steps which, to some at least, amounted to a deliberate attempt to suppress the book. Certainly this was how Mrs. Georgiana Solomon, another of Plaatje's supporters, perceived it, and Plaatje himself - writing a few years later - referred to his '11 months fighting Harris who was battling to suppress Native Life in the press'.[37] Harris also devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to blackening Plaatje's name and reputation when the opportunity presented itself, on one occasion putting it about - without justification - that Plaatje had actually been spending money which had supposedly been collected for the printing of Native Life.[38] Early in 1916 one of Plaatje's sympathisers was expressing the fear - justified as it turned out - that if Harris were 'to get on the track of the printer' it would considerably complicate matters.[39] In February Harris did indeed get in touch with the printer over the matter, and was able to announce afterwards that he 'did not think it likely that the book will be published at present'.[40] And the APS itself was certainly not going to assist with paying the remaining money that was required by the printer.

To the problems caused by the war and by Plaatje's own precarious financial state was added, then, the active opposition of one of Britain's leading humanitarian organisations and the personal animosity of its Organising Secretary. There were several reasons for his

---

37. Colenso Collection, Box 63, A.Werner to H.Colenso, 10 May 1916 and 15 September 1916; Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da 62, Plaatje to Molema, 11 July 1920.
38. Colenso Collection, Box 63, A.Werner to H.Colenso, 18 February 1916.
39. Ibid.
40. S19 D2/16, APS to Mrs. Solomon, 8 February 1916.

attitude. Fundamentally Harris was in sympathy with the principles and stated objectives of the Natives' Land Act. His experience in other parts of Africa - in particular the Congo - had led him to believe that only the possession of guaranteed and inalienable areas of land by Africans could protect them from the evils of economic exploitation, dispossession and the demoralisation that accompanied this. Ideas such as these formed part of a wider radical critique of economic imperialism in the early part of the twentieth century, and they were represented also in segregationist philosophies that were devêloping in South Africa in the same period. Contact with thinkers of this school - and in particular Maurice Evans - in 1915 and 1916 had the effect of further reinforcing Harris's predisposition in favour of segregatory policies and the aims of the Natives' Land Act.[41]

The APS was also opposed to Plaatje's campaign because it did not wish to be in any way associated with any policy or activity likely to give offence to either the South African or Imperial governments. This had been evident in the Society's treatment of the Congress deputation in 1914, and it remained an important factor thereafter in determining its attitude towards Plaatje throughout the period that he remained in England. The APS - and above all J.H. Harris - was especially anxious that nothing should be done to jeopardise its campaign against the Rhodesian Chartered Company, far

---

41. For Harris's career and ideas, see R. Whitehead, 'John Harris and the Chartered Company, 1910-23', in Collected Seminar Papers, University of York Centre for Southern African Studies, Vol.2; and R. Whitehead, 'The Aborigines' Protection Society and the Safeguarding of African interests in Rhodesia, 1889-1930' (PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1975); B.P. Willan, 'The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society and the South African Natives' Land Act of 1913', JAH, 20, 1 (1979).

and away its highest priority during this period.[42] As Harris attached a great deal of importance to securing the co-operation of the two governments (and in particular of the High Commissioner, Lord Buxton, who had replaced Lord Gladstone in 1914), Plaatje's decision to stay on in England was, in Harris's view, most unwelcome. Because of the APS's association with the deputation in 1914 Harris was well aware that the Society would be held responsible - in part, at least - for Plaatje's activities. Harris's personal attacks upon Plaatje were very much a product of this realisation, an attempt to dissociate the Society as far as possible from what Plaatje was doing.

This was the background, then, to Harris's desire to prevent Native Life in South Africa from being published. It was, nevertheless, a somewhat strange situation: a society supposedly devoted to the interests of the 'native races' of the empire pursuing a vicious campaign against a leading representative of South Africa's black population. To say that Plaatje's task in his campaign against the Native's Land Act was made no easier would be an understatement.

In May 1916, however, Plaatje achieved his main objective when Native Life in South Africa finally appeared. It made an immediate impact, sold out its first edition of 1,000 copies and went into a second edition.[43] The book was formulated as a direct and unashamedly emotional appeal to the British public, arguing that the loyalty shown by his people to the imperial cause entitled them to justice and fair treatment. The core of the book was Plaatje's account of his travels

---

42. S19 D3/12, Harris to C. May, 13 October 1914.
43. Colenso Collection, Box 63, A. Werner to H. Colenso, 15 September 1916.

around South Africa while investigating the effects of the Land Act in 1913 and 1914. He characterised the Act as 'a tyrannical enactment' that represented the triumph of 'Boer principles' over British notions of 'fair play and justice'.[44] Part of the book's strength was that it consciously sought to explain the background and effects of the Land Act in terms that had meaning to an English audience largely unfamilar with South Africa. He was very conscious of the kind of images that he had to combat if he were to present his case with any effect. 'This appeal', he wrote, 'is not on behalf of the naked hordes of cannibals who are represented in fantastic pictures displayed in the shop windows in Europe, most of them imaginary; but it is on behalf of five million loyal British subjects who shoulder "the black man's burden" every day, doing so without looking forward to any decoration or thanks'.[45] Plaatje's extensive use of quotations - retained despite Sir Harry Johnstone's objections - was addressed to a similar problem, and demanded, in effect, that the book should be taken seriously.

Plaatje did not concern himself directly in Native Life with the merits or otherwise of policies or philosophies of segregation. 'The point before the country', he argued, 'is not segregation, but the Natives' Land Act of 1913 which is now scattering the Natives about the country', whilst its provisions, he went on, 'euphemistically described as the first step towards the segregation of black and white... might more truthfully be described as the first step towards the extermination of the blacks'.[46] It was strong language which several

---

44. Native Life, 22 and 211.
45. Ibid., 15.
46. Ibid., 206.

of the reviews, whilst generally supporting Plaatje's claim for a fair hearing and just treatment for his people, took some exception to.[47]

Predictably, by far the most hostile response came from J.H. Harris and the APS. Harris responded to the publication of Native Life with a stream of articles in periodicals and in the daily press, supporting the policies of the South African government in enthusiastic terms and fiercely denouncing Native Life for its 'grotesque misrepresentations' and 'almost deliberate untruths'. His article in the influential Journal of the African Society was typical of several that he wrote.[48] In the first part of this he described in admiring terms the objectives of General Botha's 'native' and land policies, indicating that the first steps in implementing policies of segregation were being taken in the Natives' Land Act. The second part of the article was devoted almost exclusively to an attack upon Native Life. 'By far the most formidable difficulty in relation to General Botha's native policies', Harris argued, 'is the attitude adopted at the moment by the natives'. Such attitudes, he went on, had 'just received most unfortunate emphasis by the publication of a book which shows that even now there is an intelligent, well-educated native who either cannot, or will not grasp plain facts'. Native Life in South Africa was, in Harris's view, 'not merely full of the most unfortunate inaccuracies, but upon capital issues the distortions and misrepresentations are of such a nature that they can only do serious harm to the

47. For example, review of Native Life, by 'Delta' in African World, (London), 3 June 1916.
48. J.H. Harris, 'General Botha's Native Policy', Journal of the African Society, XVI, October 1916, 8-15.

cause of the native races'. Yet Harris acknowledged that it was not just Plaatje that was the problem: 'It cannot be overlooked', he said, 'that at the present time the natives as a whole are against General Botha's policy'. Harris felt, nevertheless, that it should be firmly supported.

The publication of the Beaumont Commission's Report shortly after Native Life in South Africa intensified the public dispute between Plaatje and the APS.[49] Each took the Report to vindicate the positions they had taken and the arguments that they had been putting forward, Plaatje arguing that its failure to find any further land for immediate purchase and occupation for Africans confirmed what he had been saying all along, that it was impossible to implement policies of segregation on anything like equitable lines. Plaatje's views on the Commission's Report were expressed in strong terms in an analysis that appeared as a postscript to second and subsequent editions of Native Life. The Report and the evidence presented to it, Plaatje considered, 'bear out the statement set forth in this book, namely that the main object in view is not segregation, but the reduction of all the black subjects of the King from their former state of semi-independence to one of complete serfdom'.[50] For Harris, on the other hand, the Report only confirmed his favourable opinion of the Natives' Land Act because it provided for extensions to the so-called 'Scheduled Areas' in the (unspecified) future.

---

49. Report of the Natives' Land Commission, UG 25, 1916. The Commission was originally scheduled to report within two years of the passage of the Natives' Land Act in 1913, but an extension was secured on the grounds of the difficulties caused by the war.
50. Native Life (second edition), 356.

In August 1916 the APS formally committed itself in support of General Botha's policies when its executive committee passed a resolution saying that 'in view of the publication of the report of the Natives' Land Commission, the committee of the APS expresses general approval of the fundamental principle of a separation of such areas as set forth in Section (1) of the 'suspensory' Act of 1913'; and that it resolved to 'do its best to obtain such amendments in its details as may remove the apprehensions of natives and mitigate the hardships which some of them have suffered'.[51] Privately, Harris was even less restrained in his expression of support for General Botha. 'I am glad to say', he told Lord Harcourt (now no longer at the Colonial Office), 'that our committee has felt it right to support General Botha in this policy, even though, as you know, the natives are against it. My articles in the "Fortnightly Review", the African Society's journal, and other works, are designed with the objective of supporting General Botha - I am sure he is right'.[52]

Native Life in South Africa was by no means the only product of Plaatje's presence in England between 1914 and 1917 to cause embarrassment and difficulty to the APS. With the aid of two allies on the executive committee of the Society, Plaatje was able to bring his campaign right into the heart of the Society itself and to challenge from within formulation of its policies and activities over the Natives' Land Act. Plaatje's allies were two remarkable women, Jane Cobden Unwin and Georgiana Solomon, both of whom he had met shortly after arriving in England in 1914. They had assisted in raising support for the

---

51. Anti-Slavery Reporter and Aborigines' Friend, Series V, Vol.6, No.4, January 1917, 84.
52. S22 G203, Harris to Sir L. Harcourt, 25 October 1916.

deputation's cause, and when Plaatje had stayed on in England after the others had departed they kept in close touch with him, retained a close interest in the progress of his book, and provided both moral and material support. Hearing from Plaatje his story about Harris's treatment of the delegates, both had attempted to reopen the matter - and the general issue of their Society's position over the Natives' Land Act - at the end of 1915.[53]

For several months Harris managed to put them off, but by the beginning of 1916 they were becoming increasingly vocal in their criticisms of the APS's position over the Natives' Land Act, rising to Plaatje's defence when Harris called his personal reputation into question. Provided by Plaatje with detailed information about the Land Act and its effects they became extremely effective spokesmen for his cause within the Society's executive committee.[54] Linked by a common commitment to older liberal traditions, the trio were strongly opposed to the newer segregationist orthodoxies espoused by Harris and much of the humanitarian establishment in both England and South Africa. Both Mrs. Unwin and Mrs. Solomon (accurately described, perhaps, as unreconstructed liberals) possessed impeccable credentials. They were representatives of a classical laissez-faire individualism that pre-dated the rise of the social -Darwinist thought that had had so important an influence on 'native policies' in the empire in the early part of the twentieth century, and both were ready to invoke the memory

---

53. Colenso Collection, Box 63, A.Werner to H.Colenso, 21 January 1916, S22 D4/7 and D4/8, correspondence between Mrs. G.M. Solomon and J.H. Harris, January-February 1916.
54. Notably, for example, at the APS executive meeting in February 1916. For the background and results of this, see S19 D3/16, Harris to Sir Victor Buxton, 11 January 1916 and subsequent correspondence between Mrs. Solomon and APS in S19 D4/7 and S19 D3/13.

and principles of father and husband respectively in support of their various activities. With Plaatje there was a natural personal sympathy and ideological affinity; he, too, was very much a product of the Cape liberal tradition, having grown up in a social and ideological milieu that provided him with many of the Christian and liberal ideas that they shared.

Harris was forced to resort to an increasingly devious set of manoeuvres to meet the challenge of Mrs. Solomon and Mrs. Unwin within the APS. Although the rest of the executive committee was largely ignorant of South African matters and not disposed anyway to question the activities of the Society's two secretaries, the impassioned speeches that the two women made about the Natives' Land Act - echoing those of Plaatje in the country at large - were not without some effect. They also gained some sympathy in the face of Harris's aggressive and unconstitutional tactics to try and silence them. When one of the other executive committee members - at Harris's instigation - called for a vote on the question of their continued presence on the committee, the motion was decisively rejected.[55] Both women found an ideal platform to express their views at a conference organised by Harris in October 1916. This took place shortly after the executive committee had formally declared itself in favour of segregation in South Africa, its purpose being to suggest a list of detailed proposals for ways in which the legislation of 1913 could be improved. It was also very in the nature of a public relations exercise, Harris being rather anxious at this point (Native Life having been published some months previously) to vindicate and publicise the Society's position over the Natives'

54. Cobden Unwin Papers, APS File, 'Notes of an Unusual Episode'.

Land Act before the various 'experts' and 'friends of the natives' who had been invited along.[56]

Mrs. Unwin attempted to obtain an invitation for Plaatje to the Conference. When this failed, she devised another method to try and get him in, but again Harris managed - at the last minute - to prevent this.[57] Both Mrs. Unwin and Mrs. Solomon nevertheless made extremely strong speeches against the Natives' Land Act before the assembled body of 'experts'. Even in his absence Plaatje clearly had extremely able advocates of his cause.[58] Harris talked afterwards of the 'deplorable proceedings' for which he held Mrs. Unwin and Mrs. Solomon responsible, and was shocked to be accused by Mrs. Unwin - when tea was being taken - of pretending to be 'a friend of the natives...while all the time he was secretly working against them'.[59] It was hardly an accusation that the secretary of a society supposedly devoted to upholding the interests of the 'natives' could regard with equanimity, and thereafter he redoubled his efforts to get rid of them.

Mrs. Unwin and Mrs. Solomon were finally removed from the executive committee of the APS in April 1917, shortly after Plaatje himself had returned to South Africa. The vote was a close one. Alice Werner, who was also at the meeting, summed up what she had witnessed as 'something of a scene'.[60] Mrs. Unwin went out on a defiant note: 'This Land Act is, as it has been all along' she said,

---

56. S22 G202, file headed 'Natives' Land Conference'.
57. S19 D1/17, T. Buxton to Mrs. Unwin, 24 October 1916; S22 G203, Buxton to Mrs.Unwin, 24 October 1916.
58. Cobden Unwin Papers, APS File, report on Mrs. Unwin's speech.
59. Cobden Unwin Papers, APS File, Harris to Mrs.Unwin, 25 October 1916.
60. Colenso Collection, Box 63, W. Werner to H. Colenso, 27 April 1917.

'a tyrannous law: and a Society like ours can only bring misfortune down upon our great cause by supporting in any way so un-British a return to oppression in South Africa'.[61] The ejection of Mrs. Unwin and Mrs. Solomon did not mean, however, an end to opposition to the Natives' Land Act. Both women were involved in a committee that was formed on the occasion of a farewell reception held for Plaatje in a Fleet Street hotel on 10 January 1917. Plaatje himself had a hand in the formation of this committee, and it was seen as a means of continuing his campaign of the last two-and-a-half years after he had gone.[62] 'Since Mr. Plaatje...has returned to Africa', Alice Werner (who became the committee's secretary) indicated in a circular appealing for support, 'it has occurred to a few friends of the natives that it might be well to form a small Committee to keep in touch with their affairs, and especially to watch the working of the Lands Act'. The APS, she said, 'seem to have their attention occupied in other directions; moreover, they did not seem to take quite the same view as to the gravity of the situation created by the Land Act'.[63]

The committee was an appropriate legacy for Plaatje to leave behind in England, and tribute also to the success of his untiring campaign against the Natives' Land Act in his writings and lecturing tours. When he left England Native Life was going into its third edition and

---

61. Cobden Unwin Papers, APS File, 'Statement' by Mrs. Unwin, February 1917.
62. DFA, 28 March 1917.
63. S22 G203. The circular from Alice Werner was dated 20 February 1917. Representatives of the committee were unsuccessful in their attempt to see General Smuts during his visit to England; see also S22 G203, APS to Rev. H. Wickstead, 17 March 1917; and APS to General Smuts, 5 July 1917.

had made a considerable impact in both England and South Africa. Even General Botha, though he could hardly be expected to agree with what the book said, acknowledged - in a letter to Mrs. Solomon, who had sent him a copy - that the book 'may be of value in giving publicity to views, possibly held by a section of the Native community, which may perhaps be in conflict with those held by other sections of the Union's inhabitants', and that 'where differences of opinion exist full and free discussion is most desirable'.[64] Plaatje had addressed over 300 meetings in England, Scotland and Wales, and had almost invariably impressed everybody present with his ability as a public speaker and with the justice of his cause. And the Brotherhood Federation - with a membership of 600,000 - had formally committed itself to his support. 'We shall not forget your able advocacy of your people's cause', they said in an illuminated address presented to Plaatje at his farewell meeting, promising that 'at the close of the war we shall do all we can to help you regain that freedom and justice to which as loyal British subjects your people are entitled'.[65]

---

64. Solomon Family Papers, Box 4, General Botha to Mrs. Solomon, 31 August 1916; Olive Schreiner, however, though she had not read the book, was inclined to disapprove of it on the basis of what she had heard: 'You know I am a pacifist', she wrote to Mrs. Solomon, 'and from what I hear he [Plaatje] advocates the natives coming over here to help kill. I think it the greatest mistake'. (Olive Schreiner to Mrs. Solomon, 5 October 1916, Olive Schreiner Papers, File 3, South African Library).
65. 'Reception to Mr. Sol T. Plaatje', DFA, 28 March 1917.

CHAPTER 6

SECHUANA PROVERBS AND A SECHUANA READER

Plaatje's political campaign against the Natives' Land Act was his main reason for remaining in England, and his major preoccupation throughout. Yet the time that he spent in England - and the contacts that he made there - also provided opportunities in several other directions. It was almost certainly his contact with Alice Werner, for example, that led to his contribution to Professor I. Gollancz's Tercentenary Book of Homage to Shakespeare, for Alice Werner was a colleague of the Professor at King's College, London. Published in 1916 as part of the celebrations surrounding the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, the purpose of the book - in the somewhat cynical view of the New Statesman - was to 'show posterity how Shakespeare, in 1916, was revered by us, our Allies, and neutral states'. The same journal also thought that Plaatje's essay was 'the most touching of the 166 contributions'. In it, he amusingly recounted how he had encountered Shakespeare's plays in Kimberley in the 1890s, and told of his subsequent fascination with Shakespeare's writings as a whole, which demonstrated, he wrote, 'that nobility and valour, like depravity and cowardice, are not the monopoly of any colour'. He also expressed the hope that 'with the maturity of African literature, now in its infancy, writers and translators will consider the matter of giving to Africans some at least of Shakespeare's works'.[1]

---

1. I. Gollancz (ed.), Tercentary Book of Homage to Shakespeare (London, 1916), 336-9; New Statesman, 13 May 1916.

Plaatje also found time - in between the meetings that he addressed at a rate of one every two or three days - to work on two books in his native tongue, Tswana, both of which were published in 1916. The first of these was entitled Sechuana Proverbs with Literal Translations and their European Equivalents;[2] the second, A Sechuana Reader, a phonetic analysis of Tswana language, with reading texts, was written in collaboration with Daniel Jones, a lecturer in the Phonetics Department at University College, London.[3] At one level both books were very different from Native Life in South Africa, an overtly political work that aimed to arouse public opinion against the treatment of black South Africans by their government in general, and against the Natives' Land Act in particular; the Sechuana Proverbs and Sechuana Reader, by contrast, can be seen as the product of Plaatje's cultural identity as a Tswana rather than his political identity as a black South African. Yet this contrast should not be drawn too sharply, for all three books in a sense sprang from a common commitment on Plaatje's part to the preservation of a way of life that was being threatened on several different fronts. For Plaatje, the political rights and the cultural integrity of his people were complementary aspects of a wider whole.

Tswana was the first language that Plaatje had learnt, and he seems to have developed a fascination with it at an early age. His knowledge of the language, and his awareness of its qualities and capabilities, had increased immeasurably as a result of his work as a

---

2. S.T. Plaatje, Sechuana Proverbs with Literal Translations and their European Equivalents (London, 1916).
3. D. Jones and S.T. Plaatje, A Sechuana Reader in International Orthography (with English Translations) (London, 1916).

court interpreter. As editor of Koranta ea Becoana, and later of Tsala ea Becoana and Tsala ea Batho, he had demonstrated more effectively than anybody else the viability of Tswana as a living, written language, an effective means of communication that could represent fluently and coherently the different Tswana dialects. Arguably, it was this that constituted the greatest achievement of these newspapers. Yet Plaatje had always been much too busy with the day-to-day running of his newspapers, and with political affairs in general, to be able to devote much of his time to the development of Tswana as a written form in any more permanent form than the columns of his newspapers. At first sight it might seem strange that Plaatje was to make two major contributions in this direction when he was in England and far removed from the cultural milieu in which they originated. In reality it is not so surprising: it was only in England that Plaatje found the time, and the encouragement, to devote himself to a subject in which he had been deeply interested for a long time.

Plaatje's first book in Tswana was his Sechuana Proverbs. His object in writing it, he wrote in the Introduction, 'is to save from oblivion, as far as this still can be done, the proverbial expressions of the Bechuana people, who inhabit the Bechuanaland Protectorate, Southern Rhodesia, the Northern Division of Cape Colony, including Griqualand West, the whole of the Orange Free State and the Western half of the Transvaal'.[4] Plaatje conceived of his compilation as an act of preservation, an urgent and important matter. It was his belief, Plaatje said,

4. Sechuana Proverbs, Introduction, 1.

> that had these aphorisms been collected thirty years ago, this book could have been enlarged to nearly three times its size. With the spread of European speech and thought in South Africa, these primitive saws are fast being forgotten, and in order to arrest this process the author appeals to all students of Sechuana to:-
> a) communicate to him any Sechuana proverbs known to them which are not included in this book.
> b) point out errors (if any) in the translation, or wrong readings in the original; and
> c) draw his attention to any European proverbs which would be better equivalents to the corresponding Sechuana proverbs in this book.[5]

The compilation of over 700 proverbs was in itself a remarkable achievement, especially in view of the fact that work for the book was done in England. The very fact that Plaatje was able to record so many proverbs indicates that it was a subject in which he must have taken a keen interest over a period of years, and it may be that he took with him to England notes that he had made at various times, in the hope that the opportunity to publish them over there would arise. Even if he did not do this, his wife (who kept him supplied with South African newspaper material when he was in England) may well have sent him such notes as he may already have made. On the other hand, Plaatje possessed a prodigious memory, and this may well have been sufficient store in itself to enable him to compile the book.

Most of the proverbs, as Plaatje himself notes in his Introduction to the book, 'originated on the pastures or the hunting field', and 'the wealth of the Sechuana vocabulary lies in the same direction'.[6] The proverbs embody the experience of a people dependent for their livelihood upon hunting and the keeping of cattle. Proverbs relating to wild animals demonstrate the immense specialised knowledge of their habitat and characteristics that was needed if they were to be hunted

---

5. Proverbs, Preface, ix.
6. Proverbs, Introduction, 8.

successfully, an accumulated body of knowledge from which wider lessons for the conduct of human affairs in general were often drawn. Similarly, the human qualities necessary for hunting game (for example, caution, patience, courage) are expressed as generalisations desirable for the social life of that society as a whole.[7] The quality of courage, to take just one example, comes out again and again in relation to the hunting of the lion, the fiercest and most dangerous of the wild animals that the Tswana had traditionally to contend with, and the subject (amongst the proverbs that involve wild animals) of the greatest number of proverbs.[8] On the pastoral side it is not surprising to find more proverbs about cattle than any other single subject, and from the experience and expertise of the Tswana in the keeping of cattle emerges an enormous range of proverbial expression.[9]

A great number of the proverbs comment upon the social institutions of Tswana society - on the nature of chieftainship and authority, for example, or upon men's perception of the position of women in that society, and vice versa. Many of the proverbs - originating in a similar social experience to that of other Southern African societies - have a great deal in common with, for example, Zulu or Xhosa proverbial expressions. Plaatje was obliged to admit in his Introduction, though, that the paucity of proverbs relating to war did seem to support the view that the Tswana, as a whole, 'are by nature far from being bellicose'.[10] It was an admission, however, that he made with some reluctance and with several qualifications because he

---

7. For a comprehensive discussion of the place of proverbs in African oral literature, see R. Finnegan, Oral Literature in Africa (London, 1970), 399-424.
8. Proverbs, Introduction, 1-3.
9. Proverbs, Introduction, 8.
10. Proverbs, Introduction 2-3.

had long been conscious that the derogatory stereotype of the Tswana 'as a peace-loving and timid section of the Bantu' was a prevalent one in the European literature, the other side of the coin, as it were, of the stereotype of the Zulu as a 'warlike' people. Both here, and subsequently, Plaatje is concerned to point to the fact that the history of his people by no means wholly supported such a viewpoint:

> Historians describe the Bechuana as the most peace-loving and timid section of Bantu. Their statements, however, do not seem to be quite in accord with the facts; for, fighting their way south, from the Central African lakes, some of the Bechuana tribes became known as 'The People of the Sharp Spear'.[11]

And Plaatje goes on to provide several other historical examples which he used to counter such assertions of 'timidity'.

One of the achievements of Plaatje's complilation was that he was able to find European equivalents (mostly English, but also French, German, and several other European languages) to almost all of the Tswana proverbs. In a few cases, admittedly, the European equivalents chosen were not wholly appropriate and appear rather strained, a fact pointed out by several of the book's reviewers.[12] Overall, though, there can be little argument that Plaatje succeeded in demonstrating what were to him several extremely important points that relate to his determination to assert the viability, the integrity, and the worth of his own culture. One of the most important of these was that Tswana, although he was prepared to acknowledge its limitations in the expression of abstract ideas, was nevertheless 'fully equipped for the expression of thought', and showed that it included 'proverbial sayings that find close parallels even in European folk lore'.[13]

---

11. Ibid.
12. For example, Journal of the African Society, 16, 1917-18; Christian Express, 1 May 1917.

Such a perception Plaatje attributed to the fundamental similarities between pastoral societies in general. In particular he was struck by the similarities between the Tswana and another people about whom he had acquired an intimate knowledge (by virtue of a mission education), the Jews of the Old Testament:

> The similarity between all pastoral nations is such that some passages in the history of the Jews read uncommonly like a description of the Bechuana during the nineteenth century. In the Psalms the similarity is so emphasised that it seems difficult at times to persuade oneself that the writer was not a Mochuana, e.g. Psalms 144, 11-14, and numerous other passages. The same thing may be said of the stories of the Patriarch contained in the Pentateuch.[14]

This similarity between pastoral societies generally was a theme to which Plaatje was to return again and again in his writings. In making the point here, and in the way that he does, Plaatje was also conscious of making a polemical point that was in a way comparable to what he says in Native Life in South Africa. Native Life was concerned to vindicate the political rights of black South Africans in general, but in the Proverbs Plaatje is making a strong plea for the recognition of his own culture by stressing its universality. To appreciate why he found this necessary, one needs to appreciate something of the intellectual climate of the day. In South Africa in particular the growth of segregationist policies had been accompanied, and to an extent depended on, a set of ideas, images and stereotypes about African societies which emphasised their 'backwardness' and tended to associate this with racial, rather than comparative or historical explanations of cultural phenomena. One does not find, for example, comparisons in any of Dudley Kidd's pseudo-anthropological works, or in the more recent writings of Maurice Evans, between African societies and the

---

14. Proverbs, Introduction 11.

Jews of the Old Testament, and their experience - by virtue of the subsequent history of Christianity - was not described as 'primitive'.[15] In his Sechuana Proverbs Plaatje is thus making a wider statement about the universality of cultural phenomena, emphasising the worth and value of Tswana culture in particular and of African societies in general. His Sechuana Proverbs can thus be seen as something that complements Native Life in South Africa, not a form of antiquarian escapism, wholly removed from Plaatje's 'political' concerns.

In the final section of his Introduction to the Sechuana Proverbs Plaatje touched upon another question that was of great importance to him - that or orthography, the method of reducing formerly unwritten languages to writing. The problem, as Plaatje wrote, was that there existed no agreement as to how the sounds and words of the Tswana language should be represented in written form:

> One difficult point in regard to this language is presented by its different systems of orthography. These are five. We have firstly an Anglican spelling of Sechuana; secondly, a Congregational; thirdly, a Lutheran, and fourthly a Wesleyan, besides the fifth spelling of Sechuana used by the Natives in their own newspapers. The Natives cannot understand why the missionaries who have perfected the orthography of the Zulu, Xhosa, Suto, and Pedi - other Bantu languages in the same sub-continent - cannot agree upon the orthography of this particular case. They all seem unanimous on one point only, that it should be written with twenty letters of the alphabet, using some of these twenty letters to represent more than one sound.[16]

---

15. See in particular, D. Kidd, Kafir Socialism (London, 1908); M. Evans, Black and White in South East Africa (London, 1910).
16. Proverbs, Introduction, 15-16.

In Plaatje's view, the effects of such confusion and disagreement were extremely serious, constituting a great obstacle to unity and the future survival of Tswana as a living, written language. He attributed much of the confusion to the failure of missionaries working amongst the Tswana - unlike their counterparts elsewhere in Southern Africa - to consult with Africans themselves in arriving at a common orthography:

> It is comforting to know that this anomaly is confined to Sechuana and that Zulu, Xhosa, and Basuto worshippers have no worry. That beautiful and elastic South African language - the Xhosa - is the result of a blending together of various dialects. The work was carried out by missionary writers with native assistance. Sesuto literature owes its present state of perfection to native co-operation with the missionary bodies working in Basutoland.[17]

Plaatje himself - as editor of Koranta and Tsala - had arrived at an orthography which he considered best reflected and expressed the Tswana language, but met with no success in persuading other missionary bodies to his way of thinking. Instead, they ignored him and his newspapers, again a stark contrast, as he saw it, to the situation in Basutoland, Natal, and the Eastern Cape where African language newspapers 'are not only encouraged, but also found helpful'.[18]

A prime example of the way in which educated Tswana like Plaatje were ignored in discussions of their own language had occurred in 1910. In February of that year - under the auspices of the British and Foreign Bible Society - representatives of the London Missionary Society, and Hermansburg, Wesleyan, Berlin and Anglican missionaries, met to try and reach agreement on the orthography question.[19] Some

---

17. Proverbs, Introduction, 15.
18. Proverbs, Introduction, 14.
19. I. Makgothi, 'Sechuana Orthography', Tsala, 14 January 1911.

considerable measure of agreement was reached by those who were there, but only one African (Rev. J. Monyatsi, a Wesleyan clergyman) was present, and many of the European missionaries who made up the remainder had only the scantiest knowledge of Tswana. Plaatje himself received an invitation to the Conference, but this was subsequently rescinded, on instructions - so he believed - from the British and Foreign Bible Society in London. Plaatje and a number of his colleagues were not surprisingly very resentful of their exclusion from a conference on the future form of their native tongue, and they were critical of the conclusions that the Conference arrived at. Isaiah Makgothi, one of the directors of Tsala, pointed out that the chairman of the Conference, Rev. George Lowe, was a man 'who knows absolutely less than nothing about Sechuana', and that Tswana was not 'amongst the linguistic accomplishments' of the Secretary, Rev. Gottschling. Makgothi considered that only four or five of those who did attend the Conference could be called 'Sechuana scholars', and went on to speculate that 'one or more of the four or five presumably acted as Interpreter for the benefit of the majority, who sat to lay down a standard orthography for a language they did not know'.[20]

To an extent the complaints of Plaatje, Makgothi and others from Thaba Nchu were the complaints of Rolong who saw the Seleka and Hurutse dialects being made the basis of a wider Tswana language. Disagreement over the extent of sacrifice of each dialect for the achievement of a common orthography for Tswana as a whole (and all were agreed that this was necessary) was probably inevitable, but this only added to their strong feelings over the matter. Makgothi

20. Ibid.

pointed to the many anomalies in the Conference's conclusions, and was particularly critical of the decision to leave out the letter J entirely from the new system, and have its function performed by the letter Y, which also served as a P. 'The effect of this omission', Makgothi wrote, 'is to give the symbols found only in the Sechuana counterpart of Billingsgate'.[21] Plaatje, writing five years later in his Introduction to the Sechuana Reader, commented further upon the effect that this failure on the part of the missionaries to consult with Africans was having:

> This ignoring of intelligent Natives in a discussion with their language is responsible for the fact that the Sechuana language is systematically 'murdered' in those day schools where the vernacular is taught. The head teacher is usually the white missionary, who, even if a good linguist, must, except in rare cases, have the accent and use the idiom of a foreigner, and the pupils invariably drop their mother's accent and speak the language 'as teacher speakes it'. In the course of time, when it is decided to impart the language through native tutors, the latter will all be speaking a kind of 'School Sechuana' with accents varying according to their tuition, but all equally alien to native speech.[22]

In discussing the orthography in the Proverbs (as an explanation and justification of his decision to use his own orthography) Plaatje was thus raising what had for some time been an extremely important matter to him, and taking the opportunity to state his position over the issue in the hope of influencing a debate which - for all the 1910 Conference's aspirations towards finality and uniformity - continued.

A knowledge of the background to this whole orthographic debate is also essential to an understanding of the significance of Plaatje's

---

21. Ibid.
22. Proverbs, Introduction, 15-16.

second major contribution to the Tswana language, his Sechuana Reader, also published in 1916. This originated in Plaatje's meeting with Daniel Jones at the beginning of 1915, something which Plaatje described in his Preface to the book:

> I had but vague acquaintance with phonetics until early in 1915, when Miss Mary Werner took me one day to the Phonetics Department of University College, London, where Mr. Daniel Jones was conducting a class. After some exercises I gave the students a few Sechuana sentences which Mr. Jones wrote phonetically on the blackboard. The result was to me astonishing. I saw some English ladies, who knew nothing of Sechuana, look at the blackboard and read these phrases aloud without the least trace of European accent. The sentences included the familiar question, 'leiṅe ja xaxȯ?' ('What is your name?'), and it was as if I heard the question put by Bahurutse women on the banks of the Marico River.[23]

Plaatje was struck at once by the possibilities of the science of phonetics. It appeared to offer a means for the exact and precise recording not only of the sounds of the Tswana language, but also the tones which played such a vital part in its structure but which had gone almost wholly unrecognised in the existing orthographies, varied as these were. Plaatje's thoughts turned to the potential value of phonetics for missionaries and their Tswana congregations:

> I felt at once what a blessing it would be if missionaries were acquainted with phonetics. They would then be able to reproduce not only the sounds of the language, but also the tones, with accuracy. Their congregations would be spared the infliction, only too frequent at the present time, of listening to wrong words, some of them obscene, proceeding from the mouth of the preacher in place of those which he had in mind (which have conventional spellings but different tones).[24]

23. Sechuana Reader, Preface (Plaatje), viii.
24. Ibid.

Even the best European speakers of Tswana, Plaatje went on (and he considered that no more than half a dozen missionaries could really speak the language fluently) frequently confused words that sounded alike but had very different meanings. In the study of phonetics Plaatje perceived a means of preventing his native tongue from being 'massacred' by well-meaning but ignorant Europeans. 'If phonetics were studied by everyone who wished to learn the language', he said, 'we should hear no more of such errors', adding that 'authors of books [he was referring here to J.T. Brown, author of the standard Tswana dictionary] would no longer be constrained to make such statements as "the difference in sound in this word can be distinguished by a native, but not written"'.[25]

Europeans, or foreigners, were not the only people, Plaatje believed, who could benefit from a study of the phonetics of Tswana. Under the influence of Europeans with an imperfect command of the language, Africans themselves were departing from their former mode of pronunciation. 'The younger generation of Bechuana are to some extent losing the original Sechuana tones', he wrote, something that he considered to be 'particularly the case in the south of Bechuanaland', where the European influence was strongest.[26] It was with such thoughts in mind then, that Plaatje responded enthusiastically to Daniel Jones's suggestion that they should together 'make an analysis of his native language on modern phonetic lines'.[27]

Daniel Jones, for his part, perceived the opportunity of making a phonetic study of what was to him an unusual and largely unexplored language. Already established as one of the leading phoneticians

25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Sechuana Reader, Preface (Jones), v.

of his day, Daniel Jones had come to his subject via a degree in mathematics at King's College, Cambridge, in 1903; a legal training that led to his being called to the Bar (though he never practised) in 1907; and a training in phonetics in Paris under the eminent and influential French phonetician, Paul Passy. Obtaining an appointment as lecturer at University College London, Jones set up the Phonetics Department and became Reader in 1914, quickly establishing himself as a leading figure in what was, in England, a relatively underdeveloped and neglected academic discipline. His early years at University College were extremely productive in writing and research. His first major publication was his Phonetic Transcriptions of English Prose in 1907, and this was followed by an English translation of Passy's Les Sons du Francais (1907), Intonation Curves (1909), The Pronunciation of English (1909), and Phonetic Readings in English (1912).[28]

Two other publications of Daniel Jones's from this period are of especial interest in relation to his subsequent work on Tswana. One was a slim sixteen-page pamphlet entitled The Pronunciation and Orthography of the Chindau Language, published by the University of London Press in 1911. Its object, Jones stated in its Introduction, was 'to record and outline the pronunciation of the native African language known as Chindau [spoken in parts of Zimbabwe and Mozambique], and incidentally to show how readily the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association may be used as a current system of writing languages which have hitherto never been written down, or which have at present no fixed orthography'.[29] The pamphlet - based on the pronunciation of Mr. Simbini Nkomo, who spent a few days in London en

28. Biographic and bibliographic details on Jones's career are from A.J. Bronstein et al. (eds.), A Biographical Dictionary of the Phonetic Sciences (New York, 1977).

29. D. Jones, The Pronunciation of the Chindau Language (London, 1911), ii.

route to the USA - was one of the very first attempts to apply the phonetic alphabet to any language, and a forerunner that Daniel Jones had very much in mind when he began his collaboration with Plaatje.

Daniel Jones had also become the editor of a series known as the London Phonetic Readers, longer phonetic studies - with reading texts - of different languages, also published by the University of London Press. It was as a contribution to this series that Jones envisaged his work with Plaatje. Here as well there had been a precedent for collaboration of this kind, for in an earlier book in the series - the Cantonese Phonetic Reader (1912) - Daniel Jones had collaborated with Kwing Tong Woo, a Chinese student living in London.[30] This book was of relevance to Jones's subsequent collaboration with Plaatje in another respect. Whilst on the face of it Cantonese and Tswana appeared to be very different languages, in both of them tones played a peculiarly important role in both meaning and grammatical structure, and several of the methods and lessons that Jones had learnt and developed for the phonetic representation of Cantonese (for example, his technique of marking the pronunciation of tones by means of a musical scale) were later applied to the analysis of Tswana.

After their first meeting, Plaatje and Jones got down to work in May 1915, and for more than a year - until September 1916 - they had 'constant meetings', totalling, as Jones estimated it, between 100 and 120 hours. They seem to have made a good combination from the start. Jones found Tswana 'an extraordinarily interesting language', and Plaatje to be possessed of 'unusual linguistic ability'. Plaatje, for

30. D. Jones and Kwing Tong Woo, A Cantonese Reader (London, 1912), especially Introduction, iv.

his part, was impressed by Jones's ability to read aloud 'long and difficult phonetic passages, of which he did not know the meaning, with a purity of sound and tone more perfect than I have ever heard from Englishmen in Africa who did know the meaning of the words they were uttering'.[31] Some fascinating glimpses of the sessions they had together - and of the thinking that underlay Jones's work - is to be found in the text of a lecture that Daniel Jones gave at University College on 30 October 1916, entitled 'How to use Phonetics in Connexion with Little Known Languages'. In the lecture, Jones uses his work with Plaatje as an example of what can be achieved with an ideal 'native teacher'. 'My work on Sechuana', he said, 'was done under favourable conditions, namely with an intelligent and observant native, Mr. Plaatje, who is a good linguist and (most important of all) soon understood what I was driving at and was soon able to help very materially in the investigation' - something of an understatement, given Jones's complete dependence upon Plaatje for his knowledge of Tswana.[32]

A Sechuana Reader in International Phonetic Orthography (with English Translations), the product of these lengthy sessions, came out at the end of 1916. It followed the broad pattern that had been laid down by its predecessors in German, Italian, Cantonese and French, and contained a lengthy Introduction which defined the book's object as threefold:

31. Sechuana Reader, Preface (Plaatje), v and ix.
32. SOAS Archives, Jones Papers, 'How to use phonetics with little known languages', lecture delivered by D. Jones at University College London, 30 October 1916.

(1) as a collection of reading matter suitable either for native Bechuanas or for foreign learners of the Sechuana language.
(2) as a guide to the pronunciation of the language, and
(3) to demonstrate the feasibility of writing African languages on the 'one sound one letter basis'.[33]

The Introduction also contained what amounted to a joint statement on the question of orthography from Jones and Plaatje, an interesting indication of the measure of agreement that the two had arrived at, albeit from rather different perspectives. 'In our opinion', they said,

> no system of writing can be considered adequate which allows two words which are pronounced differently to be written the same. In other words, we hold that all 'significant' distinctions should be indicated. In all previous systems of writing the Sechuana language the principle of indicating all significant distinctions has not been followed. Thus the tones have never before been marked, though numberless words may be distinguished by tones; and in more than one of the existing orthographies essential distinctions of articulated sound are ignored.[34]

The solution that they proposed was to supplement the Roman alphabet by 'a few new letters', drawn from the International Phonetic Alphabet, thereby making it possible to write the language on the 'one sound one letter' principle.[35] There then followed an analysis and description of the grammatical structure of the Tswana language. Of this, the most important and original section was that concerned with the description and representation of the tones, which they identified as six in number. As in his Cantonese Phonetic Reader, Jones's method

---

33. Sechuana Reader, Preface (Plaatje), xi.
34. Sechuana Reader, Introduction, xi-xii.
35. Ibid., xii.

was to treat them as musical phenomena and to reproduce them by means of musical notes. This was, as Jones acknowledged, a fairly complex business, and something that he and Plaatje had taken a good deal of time over to work out in their sessions together at University College. Jones admitted in his lecture that he himself 'had to do something like 10 sheets of music before I began to get the hang of the tones (which necessarily takes an immense time, but it's the only way of doing it)'. One aspect of the tonal system, indeed, had not come to light until they had had 'well over 50 sittings', and 'it was a very long time before we really got the thing straight'.[36]

In terms of its contribution to the study of the Tswana language and to linguistics and phonetics in general, the treatment of tones was undoubtedly the most significant achievement of the book. Yet several qualifications should be made. The first is that the authors somewhat overstate their claim to originality. It is not quite true, as the Introduction says, that 'the tones have never before been marked' by any previous writers. As Alice Werner pointed out in the most authoritative review of the book, several German writers were well aware of their importance and had written on the subject.[37] The second point is that the Sechuana Reader, although recognising the existence of the problem, did not succeed in discovering a set of rules that governed the determination of tones by their position in sentences, and in relation to the other tones that preceded and succeeded them.[38]

---

36. 'How to use phonetics...', 29.
37. Sechuana Reader, Introduction, xii; A. Werner, review in Man, XVII, 1917.
38. A point made by A. Sandilands in his Introduction to Tswana (LMS, Tigerkloof, 1953), 19.

If the Sechuana Reader was not wholly able to come to terms with the complex tonal structure of the Tswana language, it was nevertheless an important pioneering work. Alice Werner, in her review in Man, thought that it 'marked a new departure of a very interesting kind', one of the most comprehensive studies yet made in the phonetic transliteration of any African language.[39] Daniel Jones did well out of the book. His work with Plaatje provided him with an opportunity to demonstrate the universality of phonetics and its applicability to even the most obscure languages, and he afterwards published several more articles on the subject. It is also interesting to note that it was in a lecture on 'The Sechuana Language' in 1917 that he first used the concept of the phoneme, later the subject of one of his most important books - The Phoneme: its Nature and Use.[40]

Yet in many ways the most important characteristic of the Sechuana Reader was the reading texts - for which Plaatje alone was responsible - which constitute more than half of the book. There were fifteen different texts, varying in length from 50 to 500 words. Each text came in three versions: the original, rendered phonetically in Tswana; a literal English translation, and a fluent English translation. Of the fifteen, one (No.XIII, 'The South Wind and the Sun') was a translation that Plaatje had made from an English fable; another was an invented dialogue on the subject of learning the Tswana language, adapted by Plaatje from an English original, and similar to texts that had appeared in earlier Readers in the series; and another was Plaatje's translation of the Lord's Prayer. The remaining twelve, however, described in the Introduction as 'native fables and stories

39. A. Werner, review, Man, xvii, 1917.
40. D. Jones, The Phoneme: its Nature and Use (Cambridge, 1950), esp. 264 and 154-8.

of adventure that had been specially written for the book by Mr. Plaatje', are of considerable interest, worthy of consideration in themselves for reasons other than merely as raw material for prospective students of the language.[41]

The tales, or stories, are a fascinating mixture. The first, 'The Lizard and Chameleon', illustrates, as Plaatje says, the way in which 'the primitive Bechuana people had their own way of explaining how death began', a kind of converse to the more familiar creation myth. The second, third, sixth and seventh of the tales are concerned specifically with explaining the origin of the proverbs, 'Take care that you don't mourn for the hartebeest and the hide', 'The ratel is suspicious about the honeycomb', 'Bulging cheeks are a characteristic of the cat family', and 'Alone I am not a man: I am only a man by the help of others'. All of these proverbs appear in Plaatje's published compilation, so the stories provide an explanation, or commentary, upon them, recognition on Plaatje's part of the importance of the social context from which the proverbs arose for a full understanding of them.

The fifth text, 'The blind man and the cripple', tells of the dependence of a blind man and a cripple upon one another after a 'Bechuana village was attacked by an army, which chased the people from their homes',[42] and contains a clear moral that may well have been influenced by similar Christian parables. These tales Plaatje almost certainly reproduced from memory, having acquired them either from his parents or family when growing up, or subsequently during his

41. Sechuana Reader, Introduction, xi.
42. Ibid., 8-9.

his travels and contact with Tswana people elsewhere. One of the texts, however, 'The King's Judgment', appears in the collection as an explanation of the proverb, 'The mother of the child is she who grasps the knife by the blade', and as a further demonstration of Plaatje's belief in the universality of human experience and wisdom. For this 'Bechuana story' is almost identical to the biblical story of the judgment of Solomon (in which Plaatje had particular reason to be interested by virtue of his Christian name), although, as he points out, 'the pioneer missionaries say that they found it to be known among the Bechuanas before the Bible was ever written in the Sechuana language'.[43]

Animals feature prominently in many of the stories, in some cases with human attributes and characteristics. Thus No.IX, 'The Elephants', revolves around the elephant's intelligence, an attribute which, interestingly, does not seem to characterise other African elephant stories. Perhaps most interesting of all - in view of Plaatje's utilisation of the theme in his later writings - is the lion story that forms the first part of No.X, 'Hunters and Beasts of Prey', the point of which, he adds, is to 'show that there used to be brave people and cowards in Bechuanaland', just as there were elsewhere.[44]

A further point that needs to be made about Plaatje's collection of Tswana tales is that he clearly regards them as part of a living culture which constantly moulds and adapts its cultural forms, not as something from an ancient culture, of picturesque or antiquarian interest but little more. The point is emphasised in the second part of 'Hunters and Beasts of Prey', a tale set 'in the region of the

43. <u>Ibid.</u>, 14.
44. <u>Ibid.</u>, 20.

Molopo river after the introduction of firearms',[45] and in the story of 'Gokatweng and the Buffaloes', the tale of a living (1916) chief whose experiences in accompanying members of his tribe on the journey from Rhodesia (where they had been working in the mines) form the subject of the story. In including the chief's account of his experiences, Plaatje is seeking to add variety and interest to the reading texts. In doing so he is also emphasising - whether deliberately or not - the variety and adaptability of the cultural forms that existed amongst his own people, and utilising the opportunity presented to him in the *Sechuana Reader* to commit these to written form. The *Sechuana Reader* thus deserves to be considered as a contribution to a wider Tswana literature, as well as being a valuable contribution to the phonetics of the language.

---

45. *Ibid.*, 22.

CHAPTER 7

SOUTH AFRICA, 1917-19

Plaatje returned home to South Africa early in 1917. He received a warm reception from his people, and attended a number of receptions organised in his honour. Probably the best attended of these was the 'variety concert and social gathering' held in Kimberley, under the auspices of the Diamond Fields branches of the SANNC, at the end of March 1917. Several speakers expressed their appreciation of the work that Plaatje had been doing in England. The Rev. P.E. Kuze, for example, told of how he had met Plaatje in London in 1916 and 'saw some of the hard work he had put in, by speaking and writing, to enlighten the English people as to the condition of the natives of this country'. On that occasion he had urged Plaatje to come back home, but had found him 'still at it' when he passed through London again on his way back from the United States. The Rev. C.B. Liphuko, similarly, thought that Plaatje had 'proved himself a hero' during the time he was in England. Plaatje, in reply, made a long speech, elaborating upon his experiences in England and offering his impressions of the political situation in South Africa to which he returned.[1]

Amongst those who had hoped to be at the reception was the Rev. J.L. Dube, President of the South African Native National Congress. He had sent a telegram 'regretting his inability to leave Cape Town, as he was watching the Native Affairs Administration Bill now before Parliament'.[2] The bill was a matter of great concern to the Congress leaders, and Plaatje himself had spent nearly two weeks in Cape Town in

---

1. *DFA*, 28 March 1917.
2. *Ibid.*

connection with it before returning to Kimberley. 'On landing at Cape Town', he wrote, 'I found, besides other difficulties, that a horrible Bill was before Parliament to confirm all the horrors of the Land Act. This meant hard work from the moment of landing'.[3] The Native Affairs Administration Bill - introduced into the House of Assembly early in 1917 - was intended to convert the 'temporary' Act of 1913 into a permanent piece of legislation, and to set up a new structure of segregated administrative and political institutions within the areas of land now set aside for African occupation. The bill proposed that the 'Native Areas' would be governed separately, by proclamation but with the advice of a permanent Native Affairs Commission. Within the 'Native Areas' themselves, 'Native Councils' on the Glen Grey model were to be set up, and the courts of justice were to be largely separated from the judicial system of the country as a whole. Although it was not at this point proposed that the Cape franchise be abolished, it was nevertheless hoped that African political aspirations - in the Cape as well as in other parts of South Africa - would be confined and satisfied within these separate areas.[4]

Plaatje was deeply opposed to the proposed legislation. 'Both the Bill before the House and the tyrannical operation of Act No.27 of 1913 are a triumph of Dutch ideals over English institutions...', he wrote in April 1917. He was particularly concerned with the provisions which threatened access for Africans to the Supreme Court. Plaatje had always regarded the judiciary as the crucial bulwark in the defence of

3. Cobden Unwin Papers, APS File, Plaatje to Mrs. Unwin, 18 May 1917.
4. For the provisions and constitutional progress of the Native Affairs Administration Bill, see C.M. Tatz, Shadow and Substance in South Africa, 29-37.

African rights. White people had very little idea, he wrote at this time, 'of the extent to which they are indebted to the Supreme Court judges for the loyalty of the natives. The judges, by unchangeably upholding the impartial administration of justice, have resolutely prevented the King's writ from sinking into disrepute with the shocking degeneracy into which the South African native administration has sunk during the past five years'. And he drew attention also to 'the systematic manner in which the judges are always quashing magisterial sentences upon innocent natives throughout the Union', regretting that 'the effect produced by these judgments among the natives in the territories is very seldom reported in the Press'.[5]

Thus for Plaatje the Native Affairs Administration Bill threatened to remove what he considered to be the most effective instrument in the defence of African rights, and to him perhaps the most cherished institution of the fabric of a common South African society. Although it was Plaatje who emphasised this aspect of the bill more than any of the other African leaders, the SANNC as a whole made its opposition very clear. From 1914 to 1916 the organisation had largely refrained from any criticism of the South African government as a demonstration of their loyalty to King and Empire in the war against Germany. In the same spirit, W.B. Rubusana had offered - after his return from England in 1914 - to raise 5,000 black troops and accompany them to German South West Africa. The offer was refused by General Smuts on the grounds that the war was one between white men only, but Congress nevertheless assisted the Native Affairs Department in recruiting 24,000 Africans as labourers for this campaign. Later they assisted in

5. Letter to Cape Times, 27 April 1917.

recruiting for the South African Native Labour Contingent in France. At the end of 1916, however, Congress had ended its self-imposed abstention from criticism of the government when it came out strongly against the Report of the Beaumont Commission. At its meeting in Pietermartizburg in October 1916, Congress reiterated its opposition to the Natives' Land Act in the strongest terms, requesting Parliament to repeal the legislation. Any faint hopes that some may have had that the Beaumont Commission might find sufficient amounts of land to make a policy of territorial separation workable seemed now to be firmly dispelled.

Congress's first reaction to the Native Affairs Administration Bill had been to call an extraordinary general meeting. This met in Pretoria on February 16th 1917, and passed a resolution requesting the South African government to postpone the bill 'until one year after the declaration of peace', and meanwhile to repeal the Natives' Land Act of 1913. John Dube - as President - spoke out strongly against the bill. He thought it was 'monstrously unfair'; although it 'affects the person and rights of every native dwelling in the Union...no single Native has been consulted in the matter with which it deals'. The bill, he said, aimed at 'curtailing our freedom to a most intolerable degree', whilst the provisions of the bill that restricted Africans to 'the so-called Native areas' in effect condemned 'our whole race...to remain for all time wallowing in barbarism and ignorance'. He pleaded for some form of effective representation in the affairs of state so as to prevent the formulation and passage of legislation to which they were so deeply opposed.[7]

---

6. Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa, 52-6.
7. The South African Native National Congress, resolutions and address by J.L. Dube at meeting of SANNC, Pretoria, 16 February 1917.

Plaatje arrived back in South Africa shortly after this meeting had taken place, and immediately launched himself into the campaign against the bill. His particular contribution seems to have been an attempt to lobby the English-speaking members of Parliament in Cape Town against the legislation. His appeals fell on particularly fertile ground in the case of the Natal members. Many of them were opposed to the bill not on questions of principle, but because it would confirm the territorial recommendations of the Beaumont Commission which, they felt, set aside too much land for African occupation in comparison with the land allocated in other provinces. In the debates in the House that followed, their opposition to the bill tended to be expressed in rather more idealistic terms in which a concern for the rights of the African population figured prominently. That Plaatje had some influence on the tone of the debate if not over the underlying motives of some of those that participated in it is suggested by the frequency with which his name - and in particular, his book, Native Life in South Africa - were invoked.

Possibly it went beyond this. Plaatje's identification of the legislation of 1913 and 1917 as representing 'the triumph of Dutch ideals over English institutions' was not as naive as it might appear. Deprived of any alternative means of making African political opinion count as an autonomous factor in its own right, Plaatje sought quite deliberately to encourage antagonism between English and Afrikaner - both inside and outside Parliament - in the hope that this would prevent, or at least hinder, agreement on a common solution to the 'native problem' which could only leave the African population worse off than before. Again, it would not perhaps be unreasonable to credit Plaatje with a measure of success here. He recounted with glee the heated

arguments that took place within the House of Assembly over Native Life in South Africa. 'Last month', he wrote in May 1917, 'a Boer member - Colonel Mentz, Minister of Lands - referred to it as a "scurrilous attack on the Boers". A chorus of English members promptly defended it so vehemently that even in the subsequent days when the book was quoted by English members during the debates not one had the nerve to attack it again'.[8] On another occasion, indirect tribute to Plaatje's influence and effectiveness politically came from one of the English-speaking supporters of the Native Affairs Administration Bill: 'Sol Plaatje and other natives, he said, were already endeavouring to spread the belief that the Boer was the oppressor of the natives. The tendency of such divisions would be to encourage that belief, but he claimed that it was wholly unfounded in fact...'[9] When it came to securing agreement between Briton and Boer over a uniform 'native policy' Plaatje was clearly regarded as an unfortunate influence.

Discussion of the Native Affairs Administration Bill was the main item on the agenda of the SANNC's annual meeting at Bloemfontein at the end of May. Plaatje again earned the attention of the South African House of Assembly, this time with some highly critical remarks about General Smuts's famous 'Savoy Hotel' speech in London which had been made some ten days earlier.[10] The Rand Daily Mail also carried a long and hostile report on Plaatje's speech, 'a vicious attack on the Government', so it was described, which 'practically sounded the tocsin of a black v. white propaganda':

---

8. Cobden Unwin Papers, APS File, Plaatje to Mrs.Unwin, 18 May 1917.
9. Cape Times, 5 April 1917.
10. Speech by Fichardt in South African House of Assembly, 28 June 1917, reported in DFA, 29 June 1917; see also the Friend, 2 June 1917. Smuts's speech is reproduced in Plans for a Better World (London, 1942), 15-31.

> In a most amazing speech on the Natives' Land Bill, which was very loudly cheered, Sol Plaatje said: 'They talk of segregation. It is a segregation where the blacks with a population of nearly 6,000,000 souls are forced to be content with 12,000,000 morgen, while the whites have 120,000,000 morgen'. He alleged that the whole object of the Bill was to erect huge reservoirs of servile labour for the Boers. The natives would have to come out of their little segregation plots or starve there. Economic conditions would force them to come out, and their labour would be sold at a cheap rate. They would be semi-slaves. The speaker said that his father and grandfather had helped to tame the Free State. 'I am of this Province', he continued, 'and are we going to allow a Dutchman from Worcester to dictate to us where we shall live and how we shall exist'. Just at the moment when the Empire wanted the absolute, united support of all its peoples, the Government of the Union had introduced the most contentious measure ever placed before a South African Parliament.[11]

Exactly what action Congress decided upon is not clear. According to one report, it was decided to try and 'raise two million half-crowns as a special fund, and means were devised to inaugurate a big campaign of agitation'.[12]

Congress's annual meeting was notable also for the fact that Plaatje was offered - but turned down - the presidency of the organisation. The circumstances that gave rise to this reflected clearly many of the difficulties that Congress had had both in responding to the legislation of 1913 and 1917 and in preserving its unity in the face of such serious assaults upon the political and economic status of its membership. John Dube, the president, and Richard Selope Thema, the Secretary, were forced to resign on the grounds that they had committed Congress to approving the principle of territorial separation in their correspondence with the Aborigines'

---

11. Rand Daily Mail, 2 June 1917.
12. DFA, 5 June 1917.

Protection Society and thereby provided J.H. Harris, the APS's Organising Secretary, with the opportunity of obscuring the fact of Congress's clearly expressed resolution against the actual terms of the Natives' Land Act and the Report of the Beaumont Commission.[13]

Although there were differences within the SANNC leadership as to the acceptability or otherwise of the principle of territorial separation, by 1916 and 1917 all were united in their opposition to both the Natives' Land Act and the Native Affairs Administration Bill. In fact, the whole affair seems to have been engineered by two other prominent Congress men - Seme and Msane - who saw in the issue a good pretext for getting rid of Dube to whom they were opposed for reasons that had more to do with personal rivalries and jealousies than genuine differences over ideology or the conduct of Congress's affairs. When correspondence with the APS was read out it 'created an outburst of indignation', and - despite Plaatje's own protestations that 'the Secretary of the Congress made the same mistake as I did, that is, mistaking Harris for a friend [he] thus became less guarded in his expression and relied on the sympathy of a real sympathiser with the Boer policy' - both Dube and Selope Thema were forced to resign. Plaatje was then offered the presidency, but declined. For three weeks the organisation had, as Plaatje put it, 'neither Head nor Scribe', until S.M. Makgotho - for many years active politically in Johannesburg and Pretoria - was appointed President on June 23rd.[14]

---

13. Rise of African Nationalism, 59-60.
14. Cobden Unwin Papers, APS File, Plaatje to Mrs. Unwin, 10 July 1917; Ilanga, 15 June 1917.

The reason that Plaatje gave at the time for his decision to decline the presidency was that 'the deterioration of my business during my enforced absence made the idea utterly impossible'.[15] Plaatje's personal circumstances - and in particular his financial state - were indeed precarious, and stood in sharp contrast to his political reputation which had never been higher. He had left England with debts amounting to something in the region of £500.[16] During his absence his wife and children had been supported by his brother-in-law, Isaiah Bud-M'belle, but his newspaper, Tsala ea Batho, had not appeared since the end of 1915. When he first returned home to Kimberley he found, as he told Mrs. Unwin, that his wife had 'shoved the machinery on one side, and is doing ironing on my counter in the office', a state of affairs which would only last, he hoped, 'until I can make a start with the paper'.[17] Sadley, Tsala never appeared again: a 700 per cent rise in the cost of newsprint due to the war was only one of the obstacles that stood in the way of its resuscitation.[18]

Looking back on his decision to turn down the presidency of Congress some twelve years later, Plaatje wrote that since 'there are only sixteen working hours a day...I could not possibly find the time to earn my own living while trying to lead unwieldy masses' as well.[19]

---

15. Ibid.
16. Pretoria Central Archives, Dept.of Justice, F3/527/17, CID Report on meeting of SANNC at Kroonstadt, OFS, 6 October 1919. The OFS branch of Congress apparently paid Plaatje's debts of £492.
17. Cobden Unwin Papers, APS File, Plaatje to Mrs.Unwin, 18 May 1917.
18. DuBois Papers, Plaatje to Dubois, 19 May 1919. 'I hope to restart Tsala next year', Plaatje wrote; see also Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da52, Plaatje to Molema, 20 December 1918.
19. Umteteli, 9 November 1929; see also Umteteli, 18 February 1928.

Believing that the leadership of Congress was - or should be - a full-time occupation, and with no ambition for leadership for its own sake ('I have never in my life harboured any ambition to lead anyone', he wrote) he felt he had to refuse. Possibly also the circumstances in which the presidency was offered to him inclined him in the same direction. Since he knew, better than anybody, of the tactics and methods that J.H. Harris of the APS adopted in the pursuit of his aims, he must have seen clearly that the issue was essentially a pretext rather than a real reason for ousting Dube and Selope Thema. By accepting the presidency he would - in the eyes of many - have been associated with those behind this, and - as a man of firm moral principle - he would certainly have regarded acceptance of the presidency in these circumstances as dishonest.

Plaatje did, however, agree to become the senior vice-president, and it was in this capacity that he played a prominent role in the campaign against the Native Affairs Administration Bill and the Natives' Land Act for the rest of 1917 and into 1918. 'I have taken it upon myself', he wrote in September 1917, 'as far as humanly possible in this wide country, to enlighten the natives, who know absolutely nothing about the prohibitions and restrictions in the new bill'.[20] Travelling extensively in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, he sought to mobilise African opinion against the bill. In June he was arrested in Johannesburg and charged, as he wrote, 'with infringing half a dozen

---

20. 'Through Native Eyes: Native Affairs Administration Bill', DFA, 5 September 1917; see also The Imperialist, 14 and 21 September 1917.

of the multifarious regulations by which Natives are surrounded in this country'. He described what followed:

> I deposited a £5 bail; asked for a postponement till the 5th instant [July] and prepared an elaborate defence that was likely to bring before the courts these official outrages upon Natives. The Authorities presumably discovered the publicity in store for their numerous pinprick rules and regulations, for when I appeared on July 5th to answer the peccadilloes, they failed to put in an appearance and the case was dismissed. I am now proceeding against them for wrongful arrest.[21]

Plaatje knew better than anyone how to use the legal system for political purposes. Exactly what it was that he was arrested for is not clear, but the authorities had good reason to be wary of providing him with such an opportunity to air the grievances of his people. During his travels Plaatje was also methodically collecting information on the operation of the Natives' Land Act which he intended to incorporate into a sequel - a 'companion volume' as he put it - to <u>Native Life in South Africa</u>.[22] Although this book was never published, some of the fruits of his investigations were reflected in several of his letters written to the press at this time. He spoke with bitterness and passion of the Natives' Land Act. '37 families in the Pretoria district will be evicted this month', he wrote in July 1917, '21 families in Potchefstroom district, and more around Heidelberg. I am only referring to those I have met. Of course some of them will become servants, others give up country life and flock to the cities where this law is not in force while others will leave the Union altogether; but nobody cares for them'.[23] Elsewhere, he told of the

---

21. Cobden Unwin Papers, APS File, Plaatje to Mrs.Unwin, 10 July 1917.
22. CO 417/629, 34975, Plaatje to Administrator of Southern Rhodesia, 6 April 1919.
23. Cobden Unwin Papers, APS File, Plaatje to Mrs.Unwin, 10 July 1917.

deserted churches and farms he had come across in the Free State, and of the reduction of once prosperous African farmers to little more than labourers. After two months travelling around 'that part of the Orange Free State where the barbarities of this Act operate with draconian severity', he wrote:

> I have seen men who prior to 1913 rented land or ploughed on shares and gained from 500 to 1,600 bags of grain each year. Under the tender mercies of 'the gift bestowed upon them by their friend Mr. Sauer' they have been reduced to servants and limited to the production of only a dozen (sometimes less) bags for themselves and the remainder for the land owner and, in addition, they have to render unpaid labour to the land owner for the right to stay on part of the land they formerly occupied by ploughing on shares.
> Taking advantage of the same law other landowners have likewise changed the status of their former Native tenants who used to pay 33 per cent of the produce in lieu of wages. They are now permitted to cultivate small patches on condition that they plough for the master during four or five days in the week before ploughing one or two days (in some instances only half a day) in the week for themselves. The Natives have besides to render unpaid labour with their families and oxen all the year round for the privilege of grazing a few cows.[24]

This process of destruction of an African peasantry was at times accompanied by overt violence, and instances of this provided Plaatje with a further subject of investigation in 1918. Recalling Plaatje's work in this direction, S.M. Makgotho, President of the SANNC, told of how he had sent Plaatje to the Free State to investigate, and how,

---

24. Imvo, 12 February 1918; Cape Times, 27 April 1917; see also Plaatje's letter to Cape Argus, 20 November 1919: '...I remember spending part of 1917 in the backveld of the O.F.S. and Eastern Transvaal, where, in three months I saw more horrors than Mr. Tengo Jabavu ever heard of in thirty years at Kingwilliamstown'.

'with the able help of Mr. Fenyang, our good President of the O.F.S. Native Congress, he manages to get at the Boers in his own way each time the Courts failed us'. The result, he went on, 'is that there is apparently a stoppage to these outrages in the Free State - no shooting has been reported in the Free State since eight months ago, when he settled with the last Boer'.[25]

Until the end of 1917 Plaatje combined these tasks of investigation with that of assisting in recruitment for the Native Labour Contingent. Along with other African leaders, Plaatje was motivated by a very real sense of loyalty to the cause of the British Empire, but hoped at the same time that their contribution to the war effort would greatly strengthen their claim to just treatment politically. At a recruiting meeting at which Plaatje spoke in Kimberley in June 1917, he related how, 'when he was in Cape Town on his return from England, General Botha asked him to use his influence in obtaining recruits, and said that this would help the native people better than any propaganda work in which he [Plaatje] could engage'.[26] In fact Plaatje combined the two things. In addition to the moral pressure that a display of loyalty was felt to exert upon the authorities, Plaatje argued that recruitment in the Native Labour Contingent would bring the war to a swifter conclusion and thus make it possible to attend to their grievances. Aware also that General Botha's decision to send the Native Labour

---

25. 'Presidential Address' by S.M. Makgotho, SANNC, 6 May 1919; reproduced in T. Karis and G. Carter (eds.), From Protest to Challenge, Vol.1, 110. For further details of Plaatje's investigations and reports on the OFS shootings, see African World (Supplement), 20 July 1918; Pretoria Central Archives, Johannesburg Municipal Council Archives, 823, 18/37, evidence of I.Bud-M'belle to Native Strike Enquiry. I am most grateful to Philip Bonner for this last reference.
26. DFA, 28 June 1917; see also DFA, 22 August 1917.

Contingent to France was strongly opposed by nearly all the Afrikaner members of Parliament, Plaatje seems to have seen the issue as a further means of keeping English/Afrikaner differences alive. Early in 1918, however, the South African government decided to recall and disband the Native Labour Contingent. The government claimed that their decision was prompted by 'reasons of a purely military nature', but few Africans were convinced. Recruitment had in any case not been going well: there was widespread resentment at the recent 'native policies' of the government, and not everyone shared Plaatje's view that enlisting was the best means of combating these. As Plaatje acknowledged, 'the Union's method of administering native affairs' had a lot to do with the poor response,[27] and General Smuts, he told Congress's annual meeting in 1917, had in his 'Savoy Hotel' speech 'done more harm for the recruiting for the Native labour battalion... than it was possible to realize'.[28]

****

Travelling, recruiting and the investigation of grievances in the rural parts of the Orange Free State and Transvaal occupied only part of Plaatje's time during these two years in South Africa. He resumed also a prominent local rule in his home town of Kimberley. When his brother-in-law, Isaiah Bud-M'belle, left Kimberley in July

---

27. For the background and history of the South African Native Labour Contingent, see B.P. Willan, 'The South African Native Labour Contigent, 1916-18', JAH, XIX, 1 (1978), 61-86.
28. Rand Daily Mail, 2 June 1917.

1917 to go and live in Johannesburg, Plaatje agreed - despite his many other commitments - to become the Acting Hon. Secretary of the Lyndhurst Road Native School from which - during his absence in England - his son had won a scholarship to Lovedale.[29] From the beginning of 1918, however, the main focus of Plaatje's activities in Kimberley was his work in securing from De Beers an old tram shed for use as an Assembly Hall for the local African population, and its conversion and transformation into the 'Lyndhurst Road Native Institute'.

The building in question was the Alexandersfontein Tram Shed which was owned - like much of the rest of Kimberley - by De Beers. In January 1918, Plaatje - returning to Kimberley from a trip round the Transvaal - noticed that De Beers had begun to demolish this shed as it had recently become redundant.[30] This observation moved him to direct action: 'Knowing that this shed would be of inestimable value to our people', he recounted, 'I immediately approached the General Manager, and also some of the directors, of the De Beers company, with a fervent request to grant the tram station in Lyndhurst Road to the Natives to be used as a meeting and entertaining hall'.[31] In his letters to the General Manager and to the two directors with whom he was on closest terms, Plaatje pointed out that 'at present the Natives have no place of meeting', and that if the company would be so good as to accede to his request the building could become 'the property of all Natives, of any Church, or of no Church - and only the drunken and rowdy will be barred'.[32]

---

29. DFA, 17 December 1917.
30. DFA, 25 June 1918.
31. Ibid.
32. De Beers Company Archives (Kimberley), Estate Department, Lyndhurst Road Native Institute File, Plaatje to A. Williams, 22 March 1918, and to Sir E. Oppenheimer, 15 March 1918.

Plaatje had actually been in touch with De Beers with a similar request for a meeting place in 1914, but before this could be taken any further war had broken out, diamond operations ceased, and Plaatje himself was away in England.[33] But now, he pointed out, the fact that such a building had become available gave the company an ideal opportunity to meet their needs. These were at present more urgent than ever: just recently, three charity concerts involving African performers had had to be cancelled because they lacked a suitable place in which to perform. Not only was the tram shed in an ideal geographical position to serve the African population, Plaatje pointed out, but 'its construction is so singularly suitable for the purpose that a donation of its kind would go much further than any big sum with which the company might assist to build another after the war'. It thus provided De Beers, so Plaatje did not hesitate to point out, with a cut price opportunity to 'enhance their [the Africans'] loyalty to De Beers as a generous employer of labour'.[34]

After further discussions with Plaatje, De Beers decided - at their board meeting on 2 April 1918 - to accede to Plaatje's request, offering the lease to him 'at a nominal rent of 1/- per annum during the Company's pleasure, provided it is used for the purpose mentioned'.[35]

---

33. In fact Plaatje attempted to raise money for such a hall when he was away; see Booker T. Washington Papers, Container 13, Plaatje to Emmet J. Scott, 27 August 1914.
34. Lyndhurst Road Native Institute file, Plaatje to A. Williams, 22 March 1918.
35. Lyndhurst Road Native Institute file, 'Extract from Minutes of Board Meeting, 2 April 1918'.

This was a reference to the Brotherhood Movement, the organisation that had given Plaatje so much support and encouragement during his time in England between 1914 and 1917. It had become Plaatje's intention to spread the work of the Brotherhood Movement among the African people of Kimberley, and then beyond. The idea of extending the movement amongst black South Africans had first been mooted at the meeting between the SANNC delegation and the British Brotherhood Federation in London in 1914. At the time the delegates had told the Federation's officials that they didn't think this could be done, but Plaatje - as he grew closer to the movement over the next two-and-a-half years - had changed his attitude. Encouraged by a promise made to him by two of the leading individuals in the movement in England that they would try and provide him with a few Y.M.C.A. huts as meeting places, Plaatje had returned to South Africa in 1917 with the hope of being able to start up the movement in his own country.[36]

Plaatje perceived the gift from De Beers as the ideal opportunity to start up the movement on a secure footing. Attracted to its ideals, he saw it also as providing him with an organisational platform - and the funds - for his activities in the social, educational, and political life of his people. In June 1918 he addressed a series of meetings in the Kimberley 'locations', telling local Africans of his plans, and about the nature and objectives of the Brotherhood Movement. On 23 June he announced that the newly-formed 'Building Committee' had already passed a resolution that 'a Native Brotherhood be formed, upon the lines of the PSA Brotherhoods of England, and the Fraternite Societies of France and Belgium, and that the hall be used for weekly and other

---

36. B. Matthews (ed.), World Brotherhood. 92.

meetings of the brotherhood', and further, that 'the officeholders of the Building Committee were to be the office bearers of the Brotherhood for the time being, and that they should immediately take steps to renovate the premises and arrange for the maintenance of same'.[37]

Plaatje's projected scheme of things did not go completely unchallenged. There were, he said, 'one or two friends who think that the hall should be under the control of certain individuals amongst us, and kept separate from any organisation'. Plaatje disagreed: 'our object', he said, 'is a modern institution with a large assembly hall in front, a lecture hall at the back, also vestries and antecedents on the premises. A place of such pretensions', he argued, 'could not be maintained by a number of individual, non-organised native working men'. Rather, he offered the example of the Brotherhood Movement, whose constitution, he told his audience, 'was the Bible, but which made no distinction between men of different creeds'.[38]

Such opposition as Plaatje met with, however, was overcome, and in August 1918, the foundation stone of the new 'Lyndhurst Road Native Institute' was laid by none other than the Governor-General of South Africa, Lord Buxton. The ceremony that took place, Plaatje wrote, 'was attended by a large crowd of white people, who listened to the encouraging speech of His Excellency and collected £64 for our building scheme'. This was not as much as Plaatje had hoped for, but 'our community', he said, 'could never have hoped to collect so many shillings themselves'.[39] By the beginning of 1919 work on the building had progressed sufficiently to enable the first Brotherhood meetings to

---

37. DFA, 25 June 1918.
38. World Brotherhood, 94; see also Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da 47, Plaatje to Molema, 3 August 1918.
39. World Brotherhood, 93.

take place. Speaking on the subject of 'Samples of Practical Brotherhood', Plaatje talked of the contribution and sacrifices of British missionaries to the lives of Africans in southern Africa, and of the liberality of De Beers in placing the old tram shed at their disposal: 'It was not necessary to go outside the four corners of that hall for concrete instances of good Samaritanism in action', he said; De Beers' action was 'a practical interpretation of the word "friend"'.[40] Thereafter weekly meetings took place on Sundays, and within a few months Plaatje felt able to claim that the Brotherhood had become 'a living reality among the natives'.[41] On April 3 1919, a further ceremony took place at which 'the Rt. Rev. W. Gore-Brown (Bishop of Kimberley and Kuruman) formally dedicated the Lecture Hall of the Native Brotherhood Institute'.[42]

Plaatje regarded his acquisition of the old Lyndhurst Road tram shed from De Beers as a great achievement, and his view was shared by many other prominent African leaders from well beyond Kimberley. The fact that this 'gift of the century'[43] - for thus Plaatje described it - enabled Plaatje to start up the Brotherhood Movement in Kimberley was only part of the reason for this. Behind both the private negotiations that took place between Plaatje and De Beers and the public celebrations surrounding the event was an acute awareness on Plaatje's part of the threat to his position of leadership both locally and nationally. For this was no longer unchallenged. During his absence overseas, a rapidly increasing rate of industrialisation and urbanisation on the Rand - the product in part of wartime conditions - had brought into

40. DFA, 17 January 1919.
41. DFA, 3 April 1919.
42. Ibid.
43. A phrase used by Plaatje in his letter to the General Manager, De Beers, 22 March 1918 (Lyndhurst Road Native Institute file).

existence a much larger urban African population than had ever existed before. As inflation eroded their wage levels and standard of living, discontent grew, posing a serious threat not only to the South African authorities but also to the older generation of Congress leaders who were neither able nor inclined to assume the leadership of a militant African working class. Caught between a government that had refused to accede to their demands over the Natives' Land Act and the Natives' Affairs Administration Bill, and a new form of pressure from below, the leaders of the South African Native National Congress found themselves in an increasingly dangerous position.

In Kimberley this situation was not quite as serious for Plaatje as it was for his colleagues on the Rand, amongst whom now was numbered his brother-in-law, Isaiah Bud-M'belle. But even in Kimberley there were signs that things had changed. 'At the risk of being too personal', Plaatje wrote to the General Secretary of De Beers in March 1918, 'there is a belief among some of the native population here that I am in the pay of De Beers - employed to keep them quiet'. This 'erroneous impression', Plaatje contended, had originated in the fact that in the past he had, on several occasions, refused to head deputations appealing to the company for funds for various causes because he considered them too insignificant, and had advised that De Beers should not be troubled 'until we had a national object in view'.[44]

Both Plaatje and De Beers were aware that there was rather more to it than that, and an indication of Plaatje's perception of the seriousness of the situation is suggested by the fact that he had initially written (before changing it) that this belief was one that 'existed among the

---

44. Ibid.

native population' rather than 'existed among some of the native population'.[45] It was Plaatje's hope - and one that he did not hesitate to make clear in his letters to De Beers - that a favourable decision on the part of the company in response to his application for the Lyndhurst Road tram shed would contribute to the restoration of his position of influence and leadership both locally and nationally. De Beers were sympathetic. An old tram shed worth £573.6s was a small price to pay if it would assist in keeping Kimberley free from the industrial discontent and strike action which was already - at the beginning of 1918 - assuming serious proportions on the Rand.[46] It was essentially this that Sir David Harris - one of the De Beers directors - had in mind when he advised the company, after he had received a request for the shed from Plaatje, that it would be 'good policy to help the natives in the direction suggested by Plaatje'.[47]

De Beers must have been similarly impressed - as they discussed matters with Plaatje after his initial application - with the Brotherhood Movement, for here was a movement which, if successful, promised much in the way of diverting the aspirations of their workforce away from confrontation and strike action and substituting instead an ideology that effectively distracted attention from the contradictions of capital and labour.

---

45. Ibid.
46. This was the value of the corrugated iron on the building, the only part of it that was worth anything; Lyndhurst Road Native Institute file, 'Extract from Minutes'.
47. Lyndhurst Road Native Institute file, Sir David Harris to the Assistant Secretary, De Beers, 20 March 1918.

Having persuaded De Beers to give him the old tram shed, Plaatje was anxious to derive the maximum amount of benefit from the company's decision. To him it was vindication of his belief in the possibilities inherent in co-operation between African leaders and liberal white capital, and he was anxious that the news should be spread as widely as possible. This, essentially, was what lay behind the well-managed ceremony that took place at the beginning of August.[48] Interestingly, this seems to have been very much the product of Plaatje's initiative as well. He subsequently claimed that the Governor-General's presence in Kimberley was the product of a request that he had addressed to General Botha, the prime minister, who was evidently keenly aware of the significance of the whole issue.[49] So too, incidentally, was the Secretary for Native Affairs, who had conveyed his appreciation to the company in the following terms:

> Apart from the money value of such a gift the action is of value as indicative of just that spirit of sympathy between Europeans and Natives in this country which is so important to promote. It has created a most favourable impression.[50]

The significance of Plaatje's role in securing the old tram shed from De Beers was no more evident, however, than in a letter that he wrote to De Beers at the beginning of August, shortly before the foundation stone laying ceremony:

---

48. Reported in full in DFA, 8 and 9 August 1918; see also B.P. Willan, 'Sol Plaatje, De Beers and an old tram shed: Class Relations and Social Control in a South African Town', JSAS, Vol.4, No.2, April 1978.
49. S.T. Plaatje, 'Through Native Eyes: the late General Louis Botha', African World, 6 September 1919.
50. De Beers General Secretary's files (microfilm reel 50A), E. Dower (Secretary for Native Affairs) to the Chairman, De Beers, 16 July 1918.

> ...I beg to explain the cause of my delay in answering your letter of the 1st inst. I had to attend the Native Congress at Bloemfontein to prevent the spread among our people of the Johannesburg Socialist propaganda. I think you are aware of our difficulties in this connection since Mr. Pickering, writing to me on an entirely different matter, a few days ago, ended his letter thus. 'For God's sake keep them (natives) off the labour agitators.' The ten Transvaal delegates came to the Congress with a concord and determination that was perfectly astounding to our customary native demeanour at conferences. They spoke almost in unison, in short sentences, nearly all of which began and ended with the word 'strike'. It was not difficult to understand the source of their backing, for they even preceded the Congress and endeavoured to poison the minds of delegates from other parts. It was only late in the second day that we succeeded in satisfying the delegates to report, on getting to their homes, that the Socialist method of pitting up black against white will land our people in serious disaster, while the most that could happen to the whiteman would be but a temporary inconvenience. When they took the train for Johannesburg, at Bloemfontein station, I am told that one of them remarked that they would have 'converted Congress had not De Beers given Plaatje a hall'. This seems intensely reassuring as indicating that Kimberley will be about the last place that these black Bolsheviks of Johannesburg will pay attention to, thus leaving us free to combat their activities in other parts of the Union. Only those who saw the tension at the Congress can realise that the building discussion of this hall came just at the opportune time for South Africa.[51]

Arguably, the claim that Plaatje's achievement in securing the Lyndhurst Road tram shed from De Beers had been the critical factor in preventing the radical Transvaal delegates of the Congress from assuming control of the organisation was an exaggerated one, although Plaatje no doubt liked to think this was the case. Yet by providing a symbolic rallying point for the moderates - who dominated the other provincial branches of Congress - it undoubtedly helped, and it

---

51. Lyndhurst Road Native Institute file, Plaatje to the Secretary of De Beers, 3 August 1918.

undoubtedly also contributed to Plaatje's own political survival. Others in comparable positions on the Rand were less fortunate. Isaiah Bud-M'belle and Saul Msane, a co-delegate of Plaatje's on the deputation of 1914, found themselves - in May and June 1918 - under increasing pressure to commit Congress to strike action in support of a 1/- a day demand. Neither favoured such a campaign, but other radical African leaders in the Transvaal Native Congress - including those who controlled the influential newspaper, Abantu Batho - did. Bud-M'belle responded by calling in other Congress leaders, Plaatje included, to try and 'calm the natives'.[52] In the short term he seems to have had some measure of success, but in the long term it resulted only in the discrediting of his colleagues and himself in the eyes of the mass of the African population on the Rand.

Saul Msane, however, seems to have borne the brunt of their opprobrium. Widely regarded as having sold out African interests by collaborating with the authorities in undermining the strike campaign, he lost all political credibility and died shortly afterwards. In his account of Msane's fate there is an implicit realisation, I think, of what could well have happened to Plaatje himself had his constituency been the Rand rather than the Diamond Fields:

> During the past year or so Mr. Msane became very unpopular among the younger native workers on the Reef. The cause was rather extraordinary. A small band of white men, the International Workers of the world, boldly and openly sympathised with the natives in the long hours they have to work and on the niggardly pay as well as the bad housing conditions on the Witswatersrand. Naturally, their programme

---

52. Johannesburg Municipal Archive, 823, 18/37, evidence of I. Bud-M'Belle to Native Strike Enquiry, quoting a letter from Executive Committee of SANNC to Minister of Justice, 13 June 1918. The other African leaders that Bud-M'belle brought in to 'calm the natives' were Makgotho, Msane and Letanka.

> appealed to the native labourers. But, rightly or wrongly, Mr. Msane held that it would be suicidal for the helpless natives to ally themselves with an insignificant body of white extremists who are in the bad books of the Government and very unpopular with Boers and British alike: and each time there was a clash Mr. Msane threw the whole weight of his influence on the side of the authorities, and earned thereby the name among the labourers of 'Isita-sa Bantu' ('Enemy of the Natives').[53]

****

1917 and 1918 were difficult years for Plaatje. The government remained largely unmoved by the protests of his Congress colleagues and himself as it moved further in implementing policies of segregation, whilst their position of leadership was coming under increasing threat from more radical pressures from below. Plaatje fared better than many of his colleagues. Shielded in Kimberley from the worst of South Africa's industrial crisis and by his own unrivalled political reputation and stature, Plaatje was at least able to preserve his position as Vice-President of the South African Native National Congress. From a more personal point of view as well, these years had not been easy. In the midst of his preparations for the visit of Lord Buxton to Kimberley to lay the foundation stone for the Native Institute, Plaatje received a telegram from Lovedale saying that his son, St. Leger, had been involved in a riot that had taken place there and was in danger of being expelled.[54] St. Leger's achievement in winning a scholarship

---

53. S.T. Plaatje, 'Mr. Saul Msane: death of a Rand Native Leader', African World, 25 October 1919.
54. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da47, Plaatje to Molema, 3 August 1918.

to Lovedale in 1916 - along with his class mate, Z.K. Matthews - had been a great source of pride and pleasure for his father.[55] News of St. Leger's alleged involvement in the riot came as a great shock: with events on the Rand and at the Bloemfontein meeting of the SANNC very much in his mind, it was yet another indication of the tensions that threatened the stability of the world he knew. It was a relief to hear that his son was subsequently cleared of any involvement in the affair.

****

The declaration of peace in November 1918, led the leadership of the SANNC to consider the question of sending a second deputation to England to appeal once more for some form of intervention on their behalf from the imperial government. The question was discussed at a Special Meeting called in Johannesburg the following month.[56] Plaatje was amongst those who spoke in favour of the idea, and it was accepted: although the decision was not unanimous, there was widespread optimism that a second deputation would meet with a more favourable response than its predecessor. In Europe, the sense that a more just and lasting peace had now to be created to avert a repetition of the catastrophe of 1914-18 gave Africans the hope that such principles could be made to influence the South African government. There was a strong sense, too, that the war had proved African loyalty to the empire, and that some reward could now be expected. Hopes had been raised, for example, by an address that the King had made to the

55. Z.K. Matthews, unpublished autobiography, 17; I am most grateful to Mrs. Frieda Matthews for permission to consult this.

56. Rise of African Nationalism, 61-2.

South African Native Labour Contingent in France.[57] Plaatje himself had sought to keep public opinion in Britain aware of the realities of the situation in South Africa. He was not alone in believing that it was essential to capitalise upon the impression that had been made by the deputation in 1914, and by himself over the next couple of years.

Probably Plaatje more than anybody else strengthened the general feeling that a second deputation was worthwhile. He had brought back with him to South Africa in 1917 some firm commitments from seemingly influential individuals and organisations that they would assist his people as soon as the war was ended. The Brotherhood Movement, it will be remembered, had committed itself - in a formal address of appreciation to Plaatje on the eve of his departure from England - to 'do all we can to help you regain that freedom and justice to which as loyal British subjects your people are entitled'.[58] Other Congress leaders had been greatly impressed by this memorial, particularly as it was signed by - amongst other people - Sir Richard Winfrey, President of the New England PSA in Norfolk. As Sir Richard was also, at the time he signed the Memorial, Minister of Agriculture in Lloyd George's government, the fact of his signature was taken to imply a degree of government approval, and to suggest that the British government would be more favourably disposed to their cause than before. S.M. Makgotho, President of the SANNC, for example, made a great deal of this in his address to the Queenstown conference of the SANNC at the beginning of May 1919. 'Only commonsense should guide us to send him [Plaatje] back' he said, 'now that the war is over, to ask these gentleman to

---

57. <u>Ibid.</u>; see also <u>Ilanga</u>, 28 March 1919.
58. <u>DFA</u>, 28 March 1917.

redeem their promise', adding that Plaatje had - since the war ended - 'received letters and one cable urging him to come'.[59]

The main problem, as ever, was money. Initially, at its meeting in December 1918, Congress decided to send a total of nine delegates, two from each province, and one extra. There was little hope that money could be found for such a large group, and in the end only five delegates went. Though elected as leader of the deputation, Plaatje himself had had reservations about going, mainly because of the debts that he had left behind in England. 'Unless they give ME only [sic] £1,000, I am going nowhere', he wrote to Silas Molema during the course of the Johannesburg Conference in December 1918.[60] He spent a good deal of time in the early months of 1919 trying to raise the necessary money.[61] Having successfully persuaded his friends at Thaba Nchu to pay both his old debts and to cover his expenses this second time around, Plaatje was finally able to get away - after a long delay which prevented him from attending W.E.B. DuBois' Pan-African Conference in Versailles as he had originally intended - at the beginning of June.[62]

---

59. 'Presidential Address', SANNC, 6 May 1919, in From Protest to Challenge, Vol.1, 139.
60. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da52, Plaatje to Molema, 20 December 1918.
61. Pretoria Central Archives, Department of Justice, F3/527/17, 108, CID Report of meeting at Boomplatz, nr. Lydenburg, Transvaal, 19 April 1919; Molema/Plaatje Papers (Wits), Da56, Plaatje to Molema, 10 May 1919.
62. DuBois Papers, Plaatje to Dubois, 19 May 1919.

CHAPTER 8

ENGLAND AND AMERICA, 1919-23

Plaatje arrived in England to find that Selope Thema and Mvabaza, the two members of the deputation who had preceded him, had made some progress in the presentation of the SANNC's case. They had taken with them a lengthy Memorial (addressed to the King), drawn up at Congress's meeting in Johannesburg in December 1918. This contained a detailed reminder of the loyalty of black South Africans to the imperial government during the war, and contrasted the principles that supposedly underlay British war aims with those that governed the lives of Africans in South Africa. The 'only solution', the Memorial said, 'is to have those principles applied in South Africa so that we may have a voice in the affairs of the country, and have full protection so as to check reactionary legislation and unpopular one sided laws'. His Majesty was therefore requested 'to cause a revision of the South African Constitution in such a manner as to grant enfranchisement of natives throughout the Union...'[1]

It can have come as no great surprise to Selope Thema and Mvabaza to find that His Majesty - or rather the representatives of his government - were prepared to do no such thing. With the assistance of W.P. Schreiner, the South African High Commissioner in London, Selope Thema and Mvabaza secured an interview with Colonel Amery, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, on 8 May. Selope Thema, the main spokesman, told him of their grievances and requested the intervention

---

1. 'Petition to King George V, from the SANNC, 16 December 1918', in From Protest to Challenge, 137-42.

of the imperial government. Amery acknowledged with thanks the expressions of loyalty that accompanied the request, but told Thema that he 'could not help regretting that the leader of the deputation had indicated that that loyalty might be diminished' unless steps were taken to redress these grievances. In accordance with the official Colonial Office view, he pointed out that the South Africa Act could not be altered, and that no interference was possible in the affairs of a self-governing dominion. He therefore 'urged that the educated native should work patiently within the limits of the constitution of the Union'.[2] Privately, Amery was rather more concerned about the whole matter than his bland rehearsal of the Colonial Office line seemed to suggest. Although he felt this was the only reply he could give, in his personal diary he noted that he saw trouble arising in the future, 'possibly very much sooner than we generally thought'.[3]

Expecting such a response, Selope Thema and Mvabaza sought to lay their case before the Versailles Peace Conference, and to see David Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister, who was taking part in its deliberations. Lloyd George was too busy to see them, but he did promise - after he had ensured that General Botha did not object - to see them after his return to London.[4] Having achieved this the two delegates returned to England to publicise their case further, and to draw up a supplementary memorial for presentation to Lord Milner, the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

---

2. CO 551/111/22003, Minute of Interview, 3 May 1919; for Schreiner's role, see CO 551/111/22003, Schreiner to Col.Amery, 6 May 1919.
3. Quoted in A.Young, 'British Policy and Attitudes towards the Treatment of Africans in South Africa, 1919-24', in University of York Centre for Southern African Studies, Collected Papers (1), 55.
4. CO 551/114/58532; the Colonial Office officials (and Blankenburg of the South African High Commission) were not keen on the idea of Lloyd George seeing the deputation: 'Our feeling here is that the less the P.M. says to this Deputation the better', minuted Major H. Thornton, one of these officials.

It was to this not entirely hopeless situation that Plaatje and Gumede arrived in the middle of June. Plaatje's first reactions and impressions were optimistic. The 'bold stand' made by sympathetic MP's in the House of Commons in July confirmed his view 'that the English people this time are more amenable to reason than they were the last time'.[5] The exchanges that took place during the vote in the House are of some interest and bear tribute to the success of the Congress delegates in gaining support for their cause. Although the vote went through, several speeches, highly critical of the South African government, were made. A Labour front-bencher spoke of the existence of 'a definite tendency to eliminate and destroy the rights of the natives'. Colonel Wedgwood, a well known radical spokesman on colonial matters, spoke out in similar terms, and even Lord Cavendish Bentinck, a Conservative back bencher who had served in the South African War, claimed that Africans in South Africa were 'most shamefully misgoverned'.[6]

Set against what Plaatje saw as the encouraging start to the deputation's campaign was their financial position. 'I am very unhappy on the score of finance', he wrote to Chief Fenyang on 2 August. 'It will cripple the whole movement and bring it nought.' On arrival he had felt obliged to repay a number of outstanding debts from his previous visit in order to secure, as he put it, 'freedom of movement'. The result was that he again found himself extremely hard up, 'standing now between two fires - the old debts and my present expenses'. To make matters worse, he had not received the sum of £100 which had been

---

5. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da59, Plaatje to W.Z. Fenyang, 2 August 1919.
6. A. Young, 'British Policy...', 55.

promised, and which he was depending upon. 'As soon as English people find out that I have no money', he went on, 'there will be a terrible set back because they consider me a d----- fool if after what I endured in 1914-17 I came back penniless again'. Matters were made worse for Plaatje by the higher cost of living, and by the attitude of the other delegates who were 'disgusted' that 'their so-called leader' brought no money for them, and were as a result beginning to lose heart in the campaign. All in all, Plaatje wrote, 'the position is really serious and I am beginning to tremble that the deputation will soon be disgraced - after which we WILL NEVER AGAIN manage the Boer - we have to strike, and now or never'. All these things, he concluded, 'made me feel very desperate and I tremble that the fight will be lost through lack of funds just when we are thinking of holding the reins'.[7]

By the end of August Selope Thema and Mvabaza, less convinced than Plaatje of the point of continuing the campaign and with no immediate source of funds available to enable them to do so, had had enough. On several occasions, indeed, they had been to the South African High Commission in London to try and get passages back to South Africa. Plaatje was more determined. On the strength of a private reference, he secured a further meeting for himself and Gumede with Colonel Amery. It was no more fruitful than the previous meeting. Plaatje invoked the threat of 'a rising against the whites accompanied by the killing of innocent people, etc.,' if the British government 'were not prepared to do something to help them'. The response from Amery was much the

7. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da 59, Plaatje to Fenyang, 2 August 1919.

same as before. 'I told him [Plaatje] very much as I had told the previous deputation', Amery reported, 'that we were not prepared to go back on Union and that that was our answer to Hertzog and that if Hertzog got his way and the Act of Union went, things would be much worse for the natives than they are to-day'.[8]

Plaatje returned once again to the task of raising support and interest in the deputation's case, addressing numerous meetings inside and outside London. To the support of the Brotherhood Movement was added - over the next few months - that of the Free Church Council, part of the suffragette movement, the Independent Labour Party, the Union of Democratic Control and the Church Socialist League. Further encouragement was received from London's increasingly vociferous and well-organised African community, possessed now of a newspaper called The African Telegraph which did much to publicise the deputation's activities. Several of the meetings that Plaatje and the other delegates addressed passed resolutions which were sent on to Parliament and the Colonial Office, expressing 'profound sympathy' with the cause of 'the natives of South Africa' and urging 'the Imperial Government to take such action as shall remedy the injustice'.[9]

On occasions Plaatje addressed as many as three meetings a day. On 9 October, his birthday, he addressed 'a drawing-room meeting in Kensington' in the morning; the National Liberal Club in the afternoon; and a meeting at St. Michael's Hall (Baptist) in Clapton in the evening.

---

8. This was a reference to the Afrikaner Nationalist deputation to the Versailles Peace Conference that sought republican status for South Africa.
9. For example, resolutions passed by meetings of the Church Socialist League, Westminster, and the Falkirk branch of the Independent Labour Party after being addressed by Plaatje (CO 551/122, MI 66990 and MI 71344, November and December 1919).

He was especially pleased with the reception he met with at the National Liberal Club. The meeting was reported in the Manchester Guardian and in the journal West Africa;[10] and it was described by Plaatje in an article he wrote for a South African periodical. He thought that the meeting had been 'the most exciting since we came here', and was delighted to have had the opportunity of demolishing 'a South African Jew who styled himself "bosom friend of General Smuts" and warned the English people against offering any sympathies to Kaffirs'. With the sympathy and support of the meeting Plaatje had little difficulty in demolishing this gentleman's hostile and ill-informed remarks. 'He fled', Plaatje recounted, 'when the meeting manifested its enjoyment of this rejoinder at the coward's expense, he did not stop to hear the end, but quietly took his hat and sneaked out of the place'.[11]

At the end of November Plaatje and the other delegates (who had not been able to return home as they had wished)[12] finally secured the interview with Lloyd George which he had promised, reward for their persistence in frequently reminding the Prime Minister's Private Secretary of the undertaking that had been made in France.[13] As the Colonial Office had feared, Plaatje and his colleagues made a strong impression upon the Prime Minister. Almost wholly ignorant of South African affairs, he was genuinely shocked by the grievances that were

10. West Africa, 16 October 1919; Manchester Guardian, 10 October 1919.
11. The Clarion, November/December 1919.
12. They were unable to secure a passage on a ship to South Africa; for details of the difficulties encountered, see Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism, 64.
13. Lloyd George had perhaps also been influenced by a strong letter written to him on behalf of the delegates by Mrs. Solomon on 15 October 1919 (CO 551/123, 60993).

laid before him by Plaatje and Mvabaza, the two main speakers. 'It is useless to go and tell our people that the home Government is absolutely powerless', Plaatje said, anticipating the likely reply. Whilst they didn't expect Lloyd George 'to go over there and catch General Smuts by the scruff of the neck and say, "You must relieve these people or I will knock you down", what his people did expect', Plaatje went on, 'was some form of intervention on more constitutional lines'. This had been done, he argued, in the case of the Belgian Congo over conditions there with great effect: 'You did that for natives under a foreign flag. It is rather hard lines on the millions of native people whose only crime is that they are not loyal to the local rulers of the country, but that they are loyal to the British flag which out there is called a foreign flag'.

Plaatje went on to give instances of the way in which his own family had suffered from South Africa's discriminatory laws, and ended on a note of emotional appeal:

> Our only request, in view of the fact that you have ameliorated the lot of Belgian natives under a foreign flag, and at the instance of Lord Harding you successfully intervened in favour of Indians who appealed against the operation of an Act passed by the Union Parliament in 1913, you should consider us in the land of our fathers. The native has no other place to go. Our one crime is not that we want to be the equals of the Dutch, but that we are loyal to a foreign flag, the Union Jack. If it offers us no protection then our case is indeed hopeless.[14]

Plaatje knew what he was doing in using phrases like 'land of our fathers' when addressing Lloyd George, and it is clear that the deputation as a whole made a great impression upon the Prime Minister.

14. CO 537/1197/3473 (secret), 'Minutes of Deputation of South African Natives to the Rt.Hon. D. Lloyd George, M.P. (Prime Minister) on the Colour Bar and other questions'.

He responded instinctively - in a way that the hard-headed officials of the Colonial Office would never do - to what he heard from them. 'I have listened with some distress to the story you have told me of the restrictions which are imposed upon you in your native land', he told them, adding that they had presented their case 'with great power'. Although he rehearsed the constitutional position, he nevertheless promised that he would 'communicate the pith and purport of what you have said to me' to General Smuts, and that he thought they had said enough 'to convince me that it is certainly a case which ought to be taken into the consideration of the South African Government'.

Lloyd George was as good as his word. To Smuts's irritation he wrote to him in January 1920, and again in March, requesting that he should see the delegates and do something about their grievances. 'The contrast between the case made by these black men, and by the Deputation headed by General Hertzog', Lloyd George stated, 'was very striking...they are evidently capable, not only of arousing their people, but of raising public feeling in other countries'. Lloyd George discoursed upon the threat of Bolshevism and Garveyism to 'not only the British Commonwealth, but the whole existing structure of society', and urged General Smuts 'to see these people and consider if anything can be done to redress any real grievances from which they may suffer, and satisfy any legitimate aspirations... If they do suffer under disabilities, and if they have no effective mode of expression it is obvious that sooner or later serious results must ensue'.[15]

---

15. CO 537/1197/1486, Lloyd George to Smuts, 7 January 1920.

Lloyd George's personal appeal - and it was followed by another letter in similar terms - met with predictable response from Smuts, who in effect denied all that the delegates had said. 'It seems to me', he replied, 'that the representations of the delegates are on the whole more specious than true, and largely amount to suggestio falsi'; and he went on to criticise the deputation's conduct in taking their grievances outside South Africa.[16] There the matter rested. Whether or not Lloyd George was satisfied that the legislation then being prepared in South Africa (the Native Affairs Administration Bill) constituted, as Smuts told him, effective machinery for 'voicing the needs and interests of the Natives' he did not pursue the matter. Plaatje and his colleagues had perhaps achieved more from Lloyd George than - in their hearts - they had expected, but this was as far as it went, and in reality the prospect of any form of intervention in the affairs of South Africa was as remote as ever. The position is well summed up by Martin Channock in his comments on the significance of Lloyd George's letter to General Smuts:

> Lloyd George's letters, a random outburst from an isolated and erratic radical, could not alter the fact that...Britain shared, by virtue of her colonial position, a common stance with South Africa...An uninformed sense of disquiet, even in a Prime Minister was negligible when weighed against the community of interest between the white rulers in Africa...The Prime Minister's letters counted for less than the expertise and continuity of the officials and men on the spot, who had long shared in the inspiration and the elaboration of the policies which the Congress had complained about.[17]

****

16. CO 537/1198, Smuts to Lloyd George, 12 May 1920.
17. M. Channock, Unconsummated Union (Manchester 1977), 132-4.

The sympathetic response from Lloyd George - and no doubt his reference to the deputation's success in arousing public opinion in England - encouraged Plaatje to intensify his campaign. Shortly after the interview took place he produced an eight-page pamphlet entitled Some of the Legal Disabilities suffered by the Native Population of the Union of South Africa and Imperial Responsibility. The pamphlet was notable for pointing to - and quoting - the Byles resolution of 1906, a noble statement of imperial responsibility for the interests and rights of 'native races' who were without representation in the legislative assemblies of the colonies in which they lived. Not surprisingly, it failed to move the Colonial Office. In December, Plaatje embarked upon a tour of Scotland, lecturing under the auspices of the Independent Labour Party. Interviews with him appeared in two I.L.P. newspapers. In one it was noted that Plaatje was 'probably the first black lecturer to appear on the Socialist platform in this country',[18] a fact of some irony in view of Plaatje's past experiences with men of similar political persuasion in South Africa. But he was pleased with the results of his Scottish tour:

> I had great times in Scotland. There is much to do there if it could be revisited. Great times among the Socialists, and U.D.C. members. Shared our Edinburgh meeting with Mrs. Helen Crawford, the Socialist speaker. We stayed in the same hotel and sat till LATE exchanging views. I have learned MUCH from her while she thinks I have taught her a lot.[19]

---

18. Forward (journal of the Scottish I.L.P.), 20 December 1920; see also report of Plaatje's interview with Fenner Brockway, Labour Leader, 1 December 1919. I am very grateful to Lord Brockway for his recollections - nearly sixty years on - of this interview (interview at the House of Lords, 26 September 1978).
19. Colenso Collection, Box 56, Plaatje to Mrs. Colenso, 29 December 1919.

Not that there was much chance of Plaatje being converted to socialist beliefs. Increasingly, though, it was in these political circles that he was able to raise interest and support. The communist Workers' Dreadnought, to take another example, contained a long piece on 'The Colour Bar' in South Africa in January 1920, and concluded as follows:

> The South African deputation has been well received by many sections of the labour movement. It will travel round the country addressing enthusiastic meetings, and finally it will return to South Africa, if it is wise, to build up the International Socialists, a solid organisation of black and white workers working together, without distinction of colour, race, or creed, to wrest the power from the capitalists and to establish the African Soviets.[20]

Plaatje had no intention of establishing 'African Soviets' upon his return to South Africa, and he was not enamoured either - despite some sympathetic references to them when being interviewed by Fenner Brockway for Forward - of the 'International Socialists'. Yet he could ill afford to be choosy about his friends, and it was one of the most important differences between the campaigns of the two Congress deputations that it was increasingly in labour and left-wing political circles that he was able to arouse interest and support. Having little alternative but to make the best of these new developments, Plaatje adapted his campaign accordingly, and continued to address meetings into the new year.

Plaatje remained in England until September 1920. His time was occupied in addressing meetings (under the auspices of the Brotherhood as well as the labour movement), and in writing two books. One of

20. Workers' Dreadnought (organ of Workers' Socialist Federation), 1 January 1920.

these was what was eventually to be published as Mhudi, and will be considered later. Writing to Dr. Modiri Molema, one of Silas Molema's sons on 25 August 1920, Plaatje explained that he had completed the book, and that he was trying to find a publisher for it. The second book - which he said he was just on the point of finishing - he described as 'a political work, something like Native Life which will bring the native troubles up to date'.[21] This book was never published and the manuscript has been lost. Encouraged by the success of Native Life, Plaatje had planned to write a successor to it after returning to South Africa in 1917, and he had accumulated a great deal of evidence as to the effects of the Natives' Land Act between 1917 and 1919 with this object in view. Probably the desire to complete and publish the book played a part in his decision to stay on in England in 1920, just as he had remained in England in 1914 to write and publish Native Life in South Africa. Apart from dealing with the effects of the Land Act, part of it was to be devoted to exposing the role of the Aborigines' Protection Society in undermining the work of the first Congress deputation in 1914, and his own work over the next two years. This, at least, is what is implied in a letter that Plaatje had written in April 1919 to the Secretary of the Administrator of Southern Rhodesia, expressing his enjoyment upon reading 'the sound thrashing administered to Mr. J.H. Harris by the logical pen of His Honour Sir Drummond Chaplin'. Plaatje wrote that he was 'preparing a companion volume in which some mention will be made of Mr. Harris's Society', and requested some information about conditions in Rhodesia.[22] He clearly wished to

---

21. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), Da 62, Plaatje to Molema, 25 August 1920.
22. CO 417/629/34975, Plaatje to Secretary to the Administrator of Southern Rhodesia, 6 April 1919.

contrast, for the purposes of his book, Harris's concern with Rhodesian affairs (which he considered misguided anyway) with what he (Plaatje) saw as the Society's neglect of, not to say hostility towards, African interests in South Africa.

****

For much of 1920 Plaatje was also preoccupied with trying to make arrangements for a visit to Canada and the United States. In part his intention was to extend the work of the Congress deputation in England: later he claimed that he had been instructed to do this by S.M. Makgotho, President of the SANNC.[23] Yet this was by no means the only factor involved. Plaatje in fact had several other reasons for wishing to visit North America. Like many South Africans, black and white, he had for a number of years been accustomed to look to the experience of the United States in the field of race relations as a source from which lessons could be learnt and applied in South Africa. For hundreds of black South Africans America had provided the educational facilities denied to them in South Africa. Plaatje himself, it will be remembered, had played a leading role in organising the festivities surrounding the departure of two young Africans from Kimberley, J.S. Moss and H. Msikinya, for Wilberforce in 1896. It had been in the 1890s too, that the ideas of Booker T. Washington began to make a big impact in South Africa, and Plaatje had been amongst the many

---

23. Interview with Plaatje in South Africa, 26 October 1923; Imvo, 28 October 1924.

who were attracted to them.[24] In the newspapers he edited between 1902 and 1914 he gave wide coverage to Washington's writings and ideas, and on one occasion claimed (inaccurately) that he had been the first African newspaper editor in South Africa to have done this. There was no doubting, though, Plaatje's perception of the relevance of Washington's ideas and example to South Africa. When Washington died in 1915, Plaatje took the trouble to write to his secretary, Emmett J. Scott, asking him to accept his message of condolence 'and the heartfelt sympathy of myself and a South African circle of deceased's admirers on whose behalf I write'.[25]

Booker T. Washington was by no means the only black American figure to whom Plaatje was drawn. By the time he wrote _Native Life in South Africa_ he was familiar also with the writings of W.E.B. DuBois (whom he quoted in the book), he had received regular exchange copies of a number of black American newspapers while editing _Koranta_ and _Tsala_, and he had corresponded regularly with at least one of their editors. That Plaatje had also developed a keen desire to travel to America if the opportunity presented itself became evident in 1914. 'My idea', Plaatje wrote to Emmett J. Scott shortly after the outbreak of War, 'was to get over to the States at the end of the deputation work but the war is turning everything upside-down... How I wished I

---

24. For the impact of Booker T. Washington's ideas amongst prominent black South Africans, see especially R. Hunt Davies, 'John L. Dube: A South African Exponent of Booker T. Washington', _Journal of African Studies_, 2, 4, 1975/6; and more generally K. King, _Pan-Africanism and Education: a study of Race Philanthropy and Education in the Southern States of America and East Africa_ (London, 1971).
25. Tuskegee Institute Archives, R.R. Moton Papers, Box GC5, Plaatje to E. Scott, 19 November 1915.

could tour the States and interest Afro-Americans (our relatives across the seas) in our oppressive land laws; and incidentally to get them to buy my book; but where is the time and the money?'[26] Unable to visit the USA because of the war (even if he had been able to raise the money to get there, highly unlikely given his financial state at that time), Plaatje had to settle for sending off a consignment of copies of Native Life in South Africa to DuBois with a request to sell and distribute them for him.[27]

In 1919 a visit to America was again in Plaatje's mind. A fortnight before sailing to England he wrote to DuBois saying that 'to broaden my outlook I wish to visit the United States before returning [to South Africa]', and asked him whether he thought 'a well-arranged tour would pay expenses'. 'I will rely on your advice', Plaatje told him.[28] What DuBois's advice was - if indeed Plaatje received a reply from him - is unknown, but Plaatje seems to have sailed for England with the hope and intention of going to the USA afterwards. His problem, as ever, was raising the money to enable him to do this. S.M. Makgotho may have requested Plaatje to proceed to the USA in the interests of the SANNC, but he didn't send any money. In fact, by the time Plaatje left for America he was a good deal more concerned with the interests of his own Brotherhood organisation than he was with the Congress,

---

26. Booker T. Washington Papers, Con.13, Plaatje to Scott, 27 August 1914.
27. Negro World, 23 April 1921. 'About three years ago', the paper said, 'a shipment of a few hundred copies of this book were sent to Dr. DuBois of the Crisis; but no honest effort has been made so far to get the book advertised and sold, and the copies sent have been largely left to gather age and dust. This is a great pity'.
28. DuBois Papers, Plaatje to DuBois, 19 May 1919.

although in part he saw both as representing the same wider cause. He had received much encouragement in his Brotherhood work through his attendance at the First World Brotherhood Congress in London in September 1919. As well as addressing the assembly, Plaatje was elected to its business committee and played a part in drafting its constitution. He was particularly encouraged by his contact with members of the large Canadian Federation. They promised to finance the publication of several African language translations of the Brotherhood's Fellowship Hymn Book which he had prepared, and they almost certainly contributed financially towards the cost of his trip.[29]

The problem of raising the necessary funds to get over to America was not the only thing that threatened Plaatje's plans. When he applied to the South African High Commission in London in March 1920, for a passport he was informed by the High Commissioner, Sir Edgar Walton, that this was not possible, so Plaatje later related, because 'the Union Government disapproved of his intention'.[30] Plaatje's attempts to get round this problem were probably one of the reasons for the delay in his departure. It may even have discouraged him more deeply than this. Certainly he gave no indication that he planned to visit America in the near future when writing to Modiri Molema in August 1920.

---

29. B. Matthews (ed.), World Brotherhood, 18; The Clarion, November 1919; Brotherhood Outlook, March and April 1920. 'Fling out the Banner', reproduced in the March issue of the Brotherhood Outlook, is the only surviving example of these translations, which were never published and have since been lost.
30. Pretoria Central Archives, Department of Justice, J269, 3/1064/18; see also CO 705/7, Register of Correspondence, 1920-1, entry for 31 March 1920 (H.Cr.16567) and 7 April 1920 (H.Cr.17458); DuBois papers, DuBois to L. Post, 6 December 1920.

On 22 October 1920, though, Plaatje left Liverpool on a ship bound for Quebec,[31] with broadly three objectives in mind: to mount a propaganda campaign to inform black Americans of the conditions in which Africans lived in South Africa; to raise funds for his Brotherhood work; and to learn for himself from the general experience of Americans in the field of education, social work and 'race relations' generally. His tour began well. The Canadian Brotherhood Federation were highly impressed by the lectures and sermons he gave in Toronto, and promised support for his Brotherhood work in South Africa, reaffirming their earlier promise (worth £7,000) to print his translations of the Fellowship Hymn Book. In addition, Plaatje wrote, 'the Brotherhood promise that if I would continue to speak for them they would make an allocation next February to the World's Brotherhood Conference in London and that when disbursements are made they would strongly recommend my South African work for liberal treatment'.[32] Even more encouraging, from Plaatje's point of view, was the reception he received at the hands of Toronto's small but active Afro-American community. The local branch of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association were highly impressed with Plaatje and the case he presented:

> You need to hear him [Plaatje] on the platform to understand that our western troubles are nothing compared to the suffering of the lot of of the persecuted South African Negroes. To hear Mr. Plaatje on that subject and the subject of his great work is to be convinced that man is not on his own but called by a higher power as well as by the votes of his people to be the Frederick Douglass of the oppressed South African slaves of today.[33]

---

31. UCT Archives, Molteno Family Papers, BC 330 A81.2.1, Plaatje to Miss Molteno, 16 December 1920.
32. Ibid.
33. Pose ea Becoana No.II, reproducing an account of the activities of the Toronto division of the UNIA in the Negro World, 5 February 1921. This gives an excellent account of th personal as well as the political impression that Plaatje made amongst the black community in Toronto.

Even after his travels around the United States, Plaatje never forgot the warmth of his reception in Toronto. The donation of $1,400 towards purchasing a pipe organ for his Brotherhood Hall in Kimberley by a community of little over 3,000 was an example that he held up for others to emulate. 'If 3,000 Negroes in a Canadian city can do so much', he wrote in Chicago a year later, 'what may not be expected from the quarter of a million Negroes of Illinois?'[34]

The time that Plaatje spent in Toronto was also important in giving him the opportunity to establish his reputation as a speaker and to make the contacts that could make his intended visit to the United States a success. One of the most significant of these was Marcus Garvey, the flamboyant leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, then at the height of his remarkable career. In a short space of time Garvey had built up a worldwide movement of blacks that was regarded with considerable concern by the ruling classes throughout the world. Lloyd George, it will be remembered, had told Smuts earlier in the year that he considered Garveyism (along with Bolshevism) as a potential threat to 'the whole existing structure of society', that of the British Empire in particular. Offering a message of hope and racial pride, Garveyism had found its greatest suport amongst blacks living in the North American cities, overcrowded as a result of the massive migration from the south that had taken place with the wartime boom. In such conditions the appeal of Garveyism fell on particularly fertile ground, and Garvey was a man with the ability and the imagination to capitalise upon the widespread sense of disillusion and despair that

34. S.T. Plaatje, 'South Africa in Grip of British Jim Crow Rule: editor tells how British kill Natives', Chicago Defender, 22 October 1921.

existed, and to give expression to it. Garvey offered a vision of the redemption of Africa, and built up the greatest mass movement amongst blacks in America that has been seen, before or since.[35]

For Plaatje the opportunity of meeting Garvey in Toronto (where they spoke together at a meeting of the local branch of the UNIA) was an ideal introduction that secured access for him to the far larger UNIA audiences in the USA, above all in New York, the headquarters and stronghold of the movement. But even in the smaller city of Buffalo, Plaatje's first port of call after leaving Canada (with a Canadian passport acquired through friends in the Canadian Brotherhood Federation),[36] the enthusiasm was apparent. His 'first American meeting', Plaatje later recalled, was so 'crowded that it was painful to see for the first time in my life people turned away by the hundreds, unable to hear me for lack of standing room. The Pastor told me that he never saw his Church so crowded since 1905 when Booker T. Washington spoke here'.[37] Plaatje appreciated the comparison, and was greatly encouraged by the success of his first American meeting. Instead of moving straight on to New York - as he had originally planned - he stayed in Buffalo several days longer and addressed two more meetings there. In New York, though, the UNIA provided Plaatje with probably the largest audiences he ever addressed. He found a keen enthusiasm to hear about conditions in his country, and he cannot have failed to have been impressed by Garvey's success in mobilising such sentiment

---

35. The best account of Garvey's career is still E. Cronon, Black Moses: the Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (Madison, Wisconsin, 1955).
36. Plaatje Papers (SOAS), 'Passport'; DuBois Papers, Plaatje to DuBois, 29 December 1920.
37. Plaatje/Molema Papers (Wits), 'Unpublished account' by Plaatje of his visit to Canada and the USA, 7.

so effectively. If he felt any doubts as to the realism of Garvey's plans he certainly did not express these on UNIA platforms, and he was careful to present his own Brotherhood work as something quite consistent with the UNIA's rather vague programme of redemption.[38]

In publicising the conditions in which his people lived in South Africa, Plaatje reached many more people than those who actually attended the meetings he addressed. His speeches were frequently reported in Afro-American newspapers, and articles written by him appeared in a number of these as he travelled around the country. The *Negro World* (the UNIA's weekly newspaper), for example, carried verbatim reports of two of his speeches at Liberty Hall (in February and March 1921) and must have been read in every part of the world in which the paper circulated, including South Africa.[39] Plaatje also sold a large number of his books and pamphlets, something which he relied upon, in fact, to support himself as he travelled around the country. A new edition of *Native Life in South Africa* was printed and distributed by W.E.B. DuBois's *The Crisis*, and he was successful, too, in selling some copies of his *Sechuana Proverbs*. His pamphlets -- *Some of the Legal Disabilities suffered by the Native Population of South Africa and Imperial Responsibility*, *The Awful Price of Native Labour*, and *The Mote and the Beam* - sold in rather larger numbers. *The Mote and the Beam* - a discourse on the hypocrisy of white South Africans on the question of sex across the colour bar - sold, according to Plaatje, over 18,000 copies and 'helped to pay my research journeys through several farms and cities of nineteen different

---

38. *Negro World*, 12 February 1921 and 2 April 1921.
39. *Ibid.*

States'.[40] Selling at 25¢ a copy, the income Plaatje derived from such sales - even allowing for printing and distributing costs - was thus by no means negligible. Invariably Plaatje would end meetings that he addressed by drawing attention to the books and pamphlets that he had written and which he now had for sale. Probably more than anybody before him, Plaatje brought home to those black Americans who cared to read or listen, the reality of the conditions under which their kinsmen lived in South Africa.

It was not only Garvey and the UNIA that provided Plaatje with receptive audiences. Having previously corresponded with W.E.B. DuBois, one of the leading figures in National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, and editor of its journal, The Crisis, Plaatje duly made contact with him in New York. It proved to be a fruitful association. As well as making possible a new edition of Native Life it enabled him to address the annual meeting of the NAACP (when President King of Liberia stood down at the last minute) in Detroit at the end of June 1921;[41] and it led to a somewhat curious episode that should also be considered as part of Plaatje's propaganda campaign in the United States - his address to the Pan-African Congress in Europe in September 1921. Unable to accept Dubois's invitation to attend the Congress because of his shortage of money,[42] Plaatje was nevertheless able to make a considerable impact upon its proceedings

---

40. S.T. Plaatje, Mhudi (Lovedale, 1930), Preface; see also Plaatje's response to a review of The Mote and the Beam in the Negro World, 18 June 1921.
41. The Crisis, August 1926, 163; Detroit News, 1 July 1921; Library of Congress, NAACP Collection, Series B, Con.4, 1921 Conference File, Plaatje to DuBois, 22 June 1921; Box C8, General Correspondence, 1-30 September 1921, Plaatje to J.W. Johnson, 12 September 1921.
42. DuBois Papers, DuBois to S.M. Makgotho, 6 April 1921. DuBois appealed to Makgotho for funds on Plaatje's behalf but without success.

by writing an address on South Africa which was read out to the assembled delegates by DuBois on his behalf.[43] The address created quite a stir at the conference, and it did not go unnoticed in South Africa. The Cape Times, for example, which reported the proceedings of the Congress in considerable detail, though not knowing the author of DuBois' presentation, considered that it 'showed that the ostentatious profession of benevolence and constitutionalism was but a thin cover after all', and that the discussion that followed showed that 'the delegates were not above rampant propagandism emanating from the least representative American quarters, and directed unmistakably against European governments'.[44] Lovedale's Christian Express (which had in the past published letters from Plaatje) was equally strong in its condemnation of the views of the anonymous 'South African Native Propagandist', condemning the document as something that 'dealt in agitators' stock phrases catchwords, and generalities, and sweeping denunciations ignoring the progress being made in South African native affairs...'[45]

While all this was going on, Plaatje was busy with his campaign on the other side of the Atlantic. He was rather less successful, though, in raising money for his Brotherhood work in South Africa. In his speeches, lectures, and newspaper articles Plaatje linked his Brotherhood work to the disabilities and exploitation suffered by his people, arguing that the solution he proposed constituted the best means

---

43. DuBois Papers, TS of Plaatje's address to Pan-African Congress; for the Congress as a whole, see I. Geiss, The Pan-African Movement, Chap.12.
44. Cape Times, 21 September 1921.
45. Christian Express, 1 October 1921.

of overcoming such disabilities; and he appealed for funds on the grounds that, on the wages his people received in South Africa, they could not afford to support such work entirely by themselves. Thus he appealed to black Americans' sense of racial solidarity. In particular, Plaatje stressed the need for money to build new meeting halls so that the Brotherhood Movement could be extended throughout South Africa. Before one of the packed UNIA audiences in New York Plaatje described his Brotherhood Hall in Kimberley as 'a sort of Liberty Hall' (one wonders what the directors of De Beers would have thought of that), and told his audience that 'it is my endeavour to try and raise money to enable me to get back and start another hall the same as at Kimberley, at Bloemfontein, and erect building after building, first in one town and then in another'.[46] Only with the spread of the Brotherhood Movement, Plaatje argued, could unity amongst the different tribes of South Africa be achieved. Elsewhere, Plaatje stressed other aspects of his Brotherhood Movement. In the columns of the anti-Garveyite <u>Chicago Defender</u>, for example, he presented what he was trying to do as follows:

> Fortunately, there are better and safer [than violent methods] means of overcoming such legislative enactments and administrative tyranny. We are doing it by the native brotherhood, whose forte is the power of combined action. We do it through community service and social work and night schools for adults. I started this work in Kimberley in 1918, and it has already proved such a blessing that other centres are calling us to help them likewise. It is for the extension of this work that I am appealing for assistance to build halls, not in Kimberley, where it is in full swing, but at Bloemfontein, Pretoria, etc.[47]

---

46. For a fuller treatment of this and other aspects of Plaatje's visit to the USA, see B.P. Willan, '"In aid of the most oppressed Negroes of the world": Sol.T. Plaatje's visit to North America, 1920-22', unpublished paper presented to Conference at Howard University, Washington, May 1979.
47. <u>Chicago Defender</u>, 22 October 1922.

In the end, though, Plaatje had to admit that he had 'not had much success financially' when it came to raising money for his Brotherhood work.[48] He used every argument conceivable to persuade Americans and Canadians to support his work, but promises had always been more forthcoming than hard cash. The fact that he was able to set up a local committee of his Brotherhood organisation in Chicago suggests that he perhaps found more interest in what he was doing here than he did in other American cities, but financially it probably made little difference.[49] Garveyism undoubtedly gave Plaatje audiences with a greater interest in hearing about Africa than would otherwise have been the case, but most members and supporters of the UNIA were inclined to contribute what little money most of them had to spare to their own organisation, not to Plaatje's. Even the oft-repeated promise of $7,000 from the Canadian Brotherhood Federation - an organisation very much in decline by the time Plaatje left North America in 1922 - never materialised, and the Fellowship Hymn Book translations remained unprinted.[50]

Plaatje did not judge the success or failure of his trip to Canada and America wholly - or even predominantly - in terms of fund-raising for his Brotherhood Movement. As he had written to DuBois in April 1919, he intended to visit America 'in order to broaden my outlook' and in this he seems to have been well satisfied with the results of his visit. 'The

---

48. Colenso Collection, Box 7, Plaatje to Mrs. Colenso, 31 March 1922.
49. Chicago Defender, 22 October 1922; see also Wits University Archives, Xuma Papers, Plaatje to A.B. Xuma, 19 July 1923.
50. For the demise of the Canadian Brotherhood Federation in the early 1920s, see R. Allen, The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928 (Toronto, 1971), Chap.14.

trip has been of very great educational value', he wrote to Mrs. Colenso in March 1922, 'and I have stored up an immense amount of knowledge', which, he added, 'ought to very beneficial to my work at home in South Africa'.[51] Plaatje was tremendously impressed by what he saw as he travelled around the USA and Canada, for here he saw a degree of opportunity afforded to Afro-Americans that contrasted strongly with its denial for his own people in South Africa. 'You will be amazed at the freedom of Negroes in this country', he wrote to another of his English friends. 'No achievement is impossible under the liberal constitution of the United States. How I envy their opportunities when I think of the draconian restrictions by which my own people in South Africa are fettered'.[52] For Plaatje, the American dream was no myth. He continued his letter to Mrs. Colenso as follows:

> It is dazzling to see the extent of freedom, industrial advantages, and costly educational facilities, provided for Negroes in this country by the Union government, the government of the several states, and by the municipalities and by wealthy philanthropists. Those who die and those who remain alive continually pour their millions towards the cause of Negro education; and it is touching to see the grasping manner in which Negroes reach out to take the fullest advantage of these several educational facilities.[53]

Constantly contrasting conditions in America with those in South Africa, much of Plaatje's enthusiasm derived from what he saw as the

---

51. Colenso Collection, Box 57, Plaatje to Mrs.F.Colenso, 31 March 1922.
52. Wits University Archives, Rheinallt Jones Papers, Box B53, File A, Plaatje to Mrs.J.Cobden Unwin (undated). I am grateful to Paul Rich for this reference.
53. Colenso Collection, Box 57, Plaatje to Mrs.Colenso, 31 March 1922.

lack of legal discrimination in the USA and the manner in which this was exploited by the Afro-American population. Even in the southern states (lynching notwithstanding), Plaatje professed to find conditions infinitely more favourable than in South Africa. Expecting nothing but racial exploitation, he was happily surprised by what he saw around him:

> The Southern States, famous throughout the world as a hot bed of racial prejudice, proved to me a wonderful revelation. The wealthiest negro farmers and bankers in the world are in the South. Some of them have shares in such companies as the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Bell Telephone Company, and, according to official returns, negroes have invested $23,000,000 in American war bonds. The whirligig life and higher wages of the North left me agape, but the kindness of some of the White people of Georgia and Virginia and the almost tribal life of the Southern negroes gripped me profoundly. It is true they have their colour prejudices, too; but whereas in South Africa opponents of natives have the law behind them (so that it is often a crime to treat natives well), in America the man who interferes with negroes breaks the United States' laws, and that makes all the difference. Southern relations between master and man or mistress and maid are almost ideal.[54]

Much of what Plaatje wrote and said about his experiences in the United States was in similar vein. In America he thought he had found the closest approximation yet to a society in which black and white lived together in prosperity and harmony, and assiduously studied its features and gathered information with the intention of applying the knowledge thus gained to his work in South Africa. Above all, Plaatje was impressed by the power of money to transform social conditions. This he pointed to again and again, as, for example, when interviewed for the journal South Africa shortly before leaving England for South Africa in 1923:

---

54. South Africa, 26 October 1923.

> The year before last the city of Chicago alone spent 31,000 dollars on negro welfare. Of this sum the coloured people had contributed only 3,000 dollars. Besides their magnificent churches, beautiful choirs, and gorgeous pipe organs, American negroes own a number of imposing Y.M. and Y.W.C.A. buildings and schools. Their Neighbourhood Houses and Community Centres are doing excellent work for the adolescents in the cities. They have in their high schools free evening classes and vocational courses for day labourers, all maintained by the generosity of American philanthropists. One Jewish merchant, named Julius Rosenwald, gives incredible sums to negro education and a definite 25,000 dollars towards every 'Y' institute they build. It is amazing how one man still in the prime of his life can manage to scatter so much money over such a huge country; but he is only one out of many Americans who spend their money in that way.[55]

Plaatje emphasised on several occasions that the legal disabilities - above all in relation to the acquisition of land - faced by his people in South Africa made it difficult to say 'to what extent I can make use of my experience in this country'. But still, he said, 'the information I have gathered during my tour as to the relations between black and white, and how they co-operate in every sphere, ought to prove very useful in the community work for native welfare, which I have very much at heart'.[56]

Of all the places that Plaatje visited in the United States the greatest impact was made by the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama which he visited in May 1922. His visit was made possible by the Phelps Stokes Fund, who contributed 'without being asked', Plaatje said, '$100 towards my trip South on condition that I visit Tuskegee, which was just what I was anxious to do'.[57] Plaatje was by no means the

55. *Ibid.*
56. *The Star*, 13 December 1923.
57. 'Unpublished account', 22.

first visitor to have been pointed in the direction of Tuskegee by the Phelps Stokes Fund,[58] and they would no doubt have been gratified by Plaatje's impressions. 'I have no words to adequately express my gratitude', Plaatje wrote to Mr. Holsey, the assistant to the Principal, R.R. Moton,

> for the kind reception accorded me by the Principal and everybody at Tuskegee with whom I came into contact. I never felt so sorry to leave a place as I did when I had to turn my back on your great institution yesterday.[59]

Hoping to convey to others the example and inspiration of educational self-help that he saw at Tuskegee, Plaatje took away with him some films which he intended to show to African audiences after his return to South Africa.[60]

Plaatje returned to England in August 1922. He hoped to be able to arrange for the publication of his hymn books, but again was unsuccessful. Nor were any publishers interested in his novel, Mhudi. As ever in financial difficulty, he took a job in London with a film/stage production, The Cradle of the World, arranging the music and playing the role of an African chief in a dramatic sketch.[61] It was an irony that Plaatje himself can have been only too aware of that he was

---

58. For the policies and ideas of the Phelps Stokes Fund, see K. King, Pan-Africanism and Education.
59. Moton Papers, GC 83, Plaatje to Holsey, 20 May 1922.
60. Moton Papers, GC 83, Plaatje to Holsey, 25 May 1922.
61. For Plaatje's role in The Cradle of the World, see South Africa, 24 August and 26 October 1923; African World, 25 August 1923; and correspondence of Plaatje's in Molteno Papers in 1923. Plaatje's various other activities in this period included electioneering on behalf of J.H. Harris, Secretary of the Aborigines' Protection Society, who was trying to enter parliament; dealings with a Swazi delegation which came to England to protest to the imperial government over the land issue; further addresses to Brotherhood meetings in various parts of the country; and further attempts to get his novel published.

now obliged to play the role of a stereotyped 'native', an image that he had devoted so much of his life to challenging. The show did not prove, in the event, to be a great success, and Plaatje was unable to make enough money to pay his passage home. In the end his old friend and ally, Mrs. Solomon, came to the rescue. A relative of the Chairman of the Union Castle line, she used her influence to enable Plaatje to defer payment until after arrival in South Africa, and to acquire for him a second-class passage for the price of a third-class one. In November 1923, Plaatje finally returned to South, never to leave the continent again.[62]

62. Colenso Papers, Box 11; Mrs. Solomon to Mrs. Colenso, ? December 1923.

CHAPTER 9

THE 1920s: A LEADER WITHOUT A PEOPLE?

As the leader of the South African Native National Congress deputation of 1919 Plaatje had left South Africa with the intention of presenting the case for the people he represented before the Imperial Government, the Versailles Peace Conference, and before the British public in the hope of securing some form of external intervention in the affairs of his country. Well before he finally arrived home in 1923, he had become reconciled to the idea that the future well-being of his people would have to be fought for within South Africa, and that new strategies would have to be devised to come to terms with the realities of the South African situation.

Yet the situation to which Plaatje returned was by no means a promising one. As ever, his financial position was desperate, and his wife and family had been forced to make great sacrifices during his long absence overseas. 'My children are living on next to nothing', he wrote to Mrs. Solomon soon after arriving back home, and added that 'most of our furniture was sold and my credit pledged up to the hilt with grocers, butchers, and cloth dealers...' The greatest blow of all, though, was the loss of the Tsala printing press which had to be sold to help his family make ends meet, making more remote than ever the hope of ever restarting his paper.[1]

The wider political situation to which Plaatje returned was much changed. What had happened during his absence, essentially, was that

1. Molteno Family Papers, BC314, SP/1.7, Plaatje to Mrs. Solomon, 21 December 1923; De Beers Archives, General Secretary's files, W. McLeod to De Beers, 31 August 1929.

South Africa's most powerful interests had made a number of important adjustments in response - largely - to the political and industrial crisis (for thus it was perceived in ruling circles) of the immediate post-war years. Plaatje had left South Africa in the midst of an upsurge of discontent and militant political and industrial action on the part of an increasingly assertive African working class. By the time he returned in 1923 the problem - at a number of levels - had been come to terms with. Part of the response was evident in the statute books, above all in the Native Affairs Act of 1920. The product of a line of thought that went back to the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903-05, the Act was at the same time intended very much as a means of defusing the current degree of political and industrial unrest. During the course of his speech introducing the legislation in the House of Assembly, indeed, General Smuts had referred to the SANNC's memorial to the King and the Versailles Peace Conference as 'an appalling document', and emphasised the importance of the legislation as a means of defusing what was widely believed to be one of the main causes of discontent, the lack of any recognised channel of communication between Africans and the government. The Act therefore created a permanent Native Affairs Commission (which did not include African members) which was supposed to represent African interests and advise the government on matters of policy; local district councils in which Africans were represented, albeit nominated by the local authorities; and provided for a regular 'Native Conference', composed of chiefs and other African leaders selected by the Government, to whom legislation

on 'native affairs' was to be submitted for discussion and recommendation.[2]

Although the Act met with strong criticism from African leaders in South Africa on the grounds that it did not go nearly far enough in providing adequate means of representation, many of them (including, for example, the leadership of the SANNC) were nevertheless prepared to co-operate and participate in the albeit limited institutional structure thus established, without accepting what was in the minds of many white politicians, namely that the form of representation and consultation created was to provide a substitute for direct representation in the House of Assembly and thus to pave the way for the abolition of the Cape franchise. For the older and more conservative generation of Congress leaders in particular the Act was welcomed because it established - for the first time outside the Cape - the principle of consultation between Africans and the government, thereby providing them with a platform and a degree of recognition and legitimacy that they had long been seeking. If the legislation was intended to separate the African political leadership from a volatile and increasingly coherent black working class, for many this was something that they were ready to welcome as well.

The government's response was not an isolated one. The same pressures brought forth a similar response from the Chamber of Mines, from 'friends of the natives', missionaries and churchmen, and from Africans themselves. Shortly after the African mine-workers strike of 1920 the Chamber of Mines-financed newspaper, Umteteli wa Bantu,

2. For the Native Affairs Act and African reactions to it, see Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism, 100-3; P. Kallaway, 'F.S. Malan, the Cape Liberal Tradition, and South African Politics', JAH, XV, 1, 1974.

began publication with the aim of providing a moderate alternative to the radical Abantu-Batho and discouraging Africans from strike action as a means of remedying either political or economic grievances.[3] In fact the initiative for starting the paper seems to have come from moderates among the Transvaal African political leadership who had approached the Chamber with a request for support for a rival to Abantu-Batho after control of this had passed from their hands.[4] Prominent amongst this group was Saul Msane, but it was evidently his untimely death late in 1919 which led to an invitation being extended to Plaatje (while he was away in England) to edit the proposed new paper. For several months Plaatje's name appeared on the front page of Umteteli as one of its two editors (the other was John Dube), a move which the proprietors hoped would establish its legitimacy in the eyes of its prospective readership. Plaatje soon parted company with Umteteli, however, when he heard of the unethical measures that were being taken to put Abantu-Batho out of business, and he never took an active role in editing the paper.[5]

The Chamber of Mines was also involved in providing financial backing for the moves in the direction of inter-racial co-operation and consultation which were finding increasing support in church and missionary circles, also deeply concerned about the

---

3. P. Bonner, 'The 1920 Black Mine-Workers' Strike: a Preliminary Account' (unpublished paper presented to South African social history workshop, CIAS, 1978); Umteteli, 15 May 1920 and 30 August 1924.
4. Umteteli, 30 August 1924; SOAS Archives, M. Benson Papers, Transcript of Interview with R.D. Mweli Skota, n.d.
5. Skota Interview; Colenso Collection, Box 63, A. Werner to H. and A. Colenso, 3 December 1920. Plaatje's name appeared as one of Umteteli's editors from Vol.1, No.1, May 1920 to Vol.1, No.18, 28 August 1920.

radicalisation of the black working class. The most important institution to arise out of this nexus was the so-called Joint Councils, established in 1921 and 1922, which sought to minimize racial friction through involving 'responsible' African leaders in consultation and discussion with sympathetic whites. The Joint Councils owed much to American ideas on racial co-operation introduced into South Africa by American missionaries on the Rand, and to the visit of the Phelps-Stokes Commission between March and June 1921. The message of racial co-operation that the members of the Commission preached - above all, J.E.K. Aggrey, the West African educationalist - fell upon fertile ground, and the Joint Councils, first set up in Johannesburg, soon spread to other towns in the Union.[6]

If these were developments to which Plaatje was prepared to extend a cautious welcome, wider political prospects looked rather less bright. In the wake of the Rand Rebellion (or white miners' strike) had come an electoral pact between Afrikaner Nationalist and Labour parties, the political expression of an alliance between the two sets of interests that Plaatje regarded as most inimical to the well-being of the African people. For Plaatje and many of his colleagues, the developments of 1919-21, if traumatic in their initial impact, seemed to hold out the promise of an alliance between white capital and African labour in which they could play a vital mediating role, the resulting state of affairs to be presided over by a sympathetic and responsive government which would incorporate them in its deliberations and extend to them their political and civic rights on the basis of the old slogan of

---

6. Rise of African Nationalism, 187-92; M. Legassick, 'The Rise of Modern South African Liberalism' (ICS seminar paper, 1972).

'equal rights for all civilised men'. Such a vision did not, however, accord with that envisaged either by white labour or Afrikaner nationalists. In response to 'liberalisation' and cost cutting on the part of the mineowners had come the 1922 white miners' strike, and both government and mining industry drew back; and out of the electoral alliance that resulted came agreement on how to deal with 'the native problem': a far more vigorous policy of segregation than that hitherto implemented by the Smuts government.

Such were the circumstances, then, in which Plaatje sought, as he wrote at the beginning of 1924, 'to pick up the ribbons where I dropped them nearly five years ago'.[7] Apart from the unfamiliar set of circumstances to which he returned after so long an absence, he was faced with the very basic problem of earning a living in a manner consistent with retaining an independent position and platform from which to re-assume a prominent role in the affairs of his people. The South African Native National Congress offered little prospect. A shadow of its former self, Plaatje in any case felt a strong sense of bitterness towards the organisation for its failure to support either himself or his family while he was overseas.[8] The Brotherhood Movement was not in a healthy state either, having more or less collapsed in his absence; and he met with little success in his attempts to build it into a national organisation in 1923 and 1924.[9] Plaatje did his best to restart Tsala ea Batho (despite having lost his printing press), but here, too, he was unsuccessful. He approached Sir Ernest Oppenheimer,

---

7. DFA, 19 January 1924.
8. I Bud-M'belle, 'Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje' (unpublished biography, Plaatje Papers, SOAS Archives), 3.
9. Umteteli, 22 December 1923; The Star, 1 January 1924.

the Chamber of Mines, and finally General Smuts, for financial support, but it wasn't forthcoming. The Chamber of Mines was hardly likely to support a rival to its own Umteteli over which it had no control, and General Smuts seems to have been unpersuaded by Plaatje's argument (he wrote to him early in 1925) that there were enough votes to be won for the South African Party in the Cape to lend his support to such a scheme.[10]

Instead, Plaatje returned to the political arena more as an individual spokesman, independent of any organisation and without a newspaper of his own, finding his forum in the lobby of the houses of Parliament, in the Native Councils that had been established in his absence, but above all in the daily and weekly press, African and European. Relying for such political leverage as Africans now possessed through the franchise in the Cape, Plaatje maintained and extended his reputation as an energetic and articulate spokesman for African interests.

Plaatje resumed his political career almost immediately, travelling to Cape Town at the end of January 1924, to be on hand for the deliberations of the 1924 parliamentary session which had before it a number of measures that affected African interests. Here he lobbied ministers and members of parliament, observed proceedings from the public gallery, and sought to influence public opinion through the columns of the daily press in both Cape Town and Johannesburg. He attacked the injustices of 'Mr. Nixon's Immorality Bill', the 'irrelevant and extraordinary views of Dr. Visser', M.P. for Vrededorp,

10. Smuts Papers (microfilm, Cambridge University Library), Vol.33, No.43, Plaatje to General Smuts, 19 January 1925.

on the extent of the African contribution to the Exchequer, and General Hertzog's comments upon Africans during discussion of the Woman's Franchise Bill.[11] One piece of legislation, though, Plaatje strongly supported. This was the Barolong Relief Bill, something about which he may well have played an important behind-the-scenes role in the discussions that lay behind its introduction. Although it did not become law until the following parliamentary session, the bill was notable as one of the few pieces of legislation affecting African interests since the Act of Union of which Plaatje approved: the only other one, the Native Affairs Act of 1920, had been passed while he was away overseas.[12]

This parliamentary session was to be the last in which General Smuts' South African Party was in a majority. Plaatje participated vigorously in the electioneering that followed Smuts' decision to call a general election in April 1924. He was in no doubt as to which party African and Coloured voters in the Cape should support. General Hertzog, leader of the Nationalist Party and the Pact electoral alliance, had made several overtures to both coloured and African political leaders (including, most notably, Clements Kadalie of the ICU), but Plaatje strongly denounced this, emphasising Hertzog's real intention to abolish the Cape franchise, the only means of direct political leverage that

---

11. Cape Argus, 29 April 1924; for Plaatje's campaign in the press, see also Cape Argus, 4 March 1924; The Star, 7 February and 11 March 1924; Imvo, 26 February and 1 April 1924.
12. The bill was eventually passed in the next parliamentary session by the new government. 'My people, the Barolong', Plaatje then wrote to General Hertzog, 'feel deeply grateful to you that...pressure from other work and political differences did not prevent you from passing Act 28 of 1924 (a Bill first introduced by your political and ministerial rival) which will solve many a deadlock and smooth many difficulties among the Barolong of Thaba Nchu'. (Hertzog Papers, Central Archives, Pretoria, A32, Box 35, Plaatje to General Hertzog, 7 October 1924. I am grateful to Paul Rich for this reference.)

Africans still possessed.[13] Plaatje was active both in the columns of the press and on the hustings. In his home town of Kimberley he sought to mobilise African voters for Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and Sir David Harris, South African Party candidates for Kimberley and Beaconsfield respectively. 'I feel certain we are going to win this election', Plaatje told a meeting of African voters in No.2 Location, Kimberley, when introducing Sir Ernest to them, 'and there is only one thing you want to do as a tribute to Sir Ernest, and that is to return him with a big majority. There is no doubt about his return, but we want the biggest majority in the Union'.[14]

Sir Ernest was duly returned, but the SAP was not, and nor - to Plaatje's disappointment - were several old Cape liberals, 'real advocates of native well-being', Henry Burton, F.S. Malan, and Adv. Will Stuart.[15] Plaatje's support for the SAP was based less on his belief that the party really had the interests of his people at heart (he did not hesitate, for example, to remind General Smuts in 1925 that the SAP's subsequent failure to find seats for Burton and Malan 'was not very sweet on Native palates')[16] more on his strong opposition to the segregatory ideas espoused by General Hertzog as a solution to 'the

---

13. For Plaatje's views on this, see 'Congress and the Pact', Umteteli, 14 June 1924; 'Natives and the Election: why they should vote S.A.P.', DFA, 16 June 1924.
14. DFA, 7 June 1924. Sir Ernest was in fine form as well, explaining to his potential electors the hollowness of Hertzog's plans for African representation and pointing out that even the proposed councils (the 'native parliament') were to be under European supervision. 'So you see', he said, 'even Mr. Sol Plaatje cannot be Prime Minister'.
15. For Plaatje's analysis of the outcome of the election, see 'Natives and the Elections: the Piper and the Tune', DFA, 27 June 1924.
16. Smuts Papers, Vol.33, No.43, Plaatje to Smuts, 19 January 1925.

native problem'. For Plaatje, politics were always the politics of the possible, and he simply had no alternative but to make the best of the situation that he was faced with.

During the 1924 election campaign Plaatje concentrated his energies in attempting to expose the hollowness of Hertzog's promises and in attacking his proposals for introducing measures of political and territorial segregation. It was some while before the new government actually began to do anything concrete about implementing these proposals. Instead, the Mines and Works Amendment Bill ('The Colour Bar Bill'), an attempt to reintroduce statutory segregation in mines and industry, became one of the first priorities of the new government. Plaatje was in Port Elizabeth when the bill was first gazetted at the end of 1924, and he responded in the press immediately.[17] He continued to speak out against it at its various stages through the South African legislature before it finally became law in 1926, reporting on the debates that took place over the issue, warning of its dire consequences from an African point of view, and professing himself full of admiration for General Smuts' speeches against the Bill, congratulating him on one occasion on his 'signal success as leader of His Majesty's Opposition both in Parliament and in the Country'.[18] In the press Plaatje highlighted the contradictions in the arguments that sought to justify the 'Colour Bar Bill' as part of a wider policy to introduce segregation. 'It seems significant', he wrote at the beginning of 1926,

---

17. 'National Bond and Colour Bar', letter by Plaatje, DFA, DFA, 28 March 1925.
18. S.T. Plaatje, 'Colour Bar Bill', DFA, 28 January 1926; 'The Colour Bar', DFA, 10 March 1925; 'Native Labour Conditions', The Outlook (British Empire Suplement), 6 November 1926.

> that after all the Ministerial assurances and specious talk about the need of being just to the natives and segregating them in order that they should develop their own organisation in their natural environments - separately, yet alongside the Europeans - one of the very first measures introduced in the present session should be the controversial Colour Bar Bill, the purport of which is to strike a blow at the natives' means of earning a livelihood.[19]

After considerable difficulty and opposition within parliament, the bill was eventually forced through in 1926 after a Joint Sitting of both Houses of Parliament in May 1926. Along with other African leaders and organisations, Plaatje played an active part in the wider campaign against the bill, travelling to Cape Town in 1926 to assist in the campaign that J.D. Rheinallt Jones - with financial support from the mining industry - was organising.[20] Their efforts, however, were defeated, and one of the most important electoral objectives of the Pact Government was thus achieved.

Hertzog's other major objective was to introduce territorial and political segregation. His approach - in contrast to that of the South African Party - was a comprehensive one, and it was a central article of his faith that the two main issues - land and the franchise - be dealt with at the same time. At the end of 1925 he began to prepare for the introduction of the legislation. In November he made his famous Smithfield speech, outlining in rather more detail than previously what he intended to do, emphasising the necessity of removing Africans from the Cape electoral roll and providing them with additional

---

19. DFA, 28 January 1926.
20. 'Colour Bar Bill Protest', Cape Argus, 7 May 1926; Joint Council file, Rheinallt Jones Papers (Wits University Archives), Plaatje to Rheinallt Jones, 23 April and 3 May 1926.

land and segregated political institutions as compensation. At the beginning of December, Hertzog elaborated further upon his proposals to the Native Conference, convened under the provisions of the Native Affairs Act of 1920, then sitting in Pretoria.[21]

Plaatje was amongst those who had been invited to the Conference. Along with the other delegates, he was extremely alarmed at the content of the Premier's address to them.[22] The most heated discussion took place not about these proposed 'Native Bills' but about another related piece of legislation, already drafted, which had been laid before them for discussion. This was the Native Administration Bill, another part of the wider programme to introduce segregation, and it met with strong criticism from Plaatje, both at the Conference and subsequently in the press. The Bill aimed to create a separate system of courts to administer African law and to extend to the other provinces of the Union Natal's system of recognising and incorporating the chiefs into 'native administration'. The bill struck at the fundamentals of Plaatje's beliefs, and he attacked it on the grounds that it constituted a reversion to tribalism, recognising the practice of _lobola_; that it abolished 'the Magna Charta right, the right of appeal to the law courts'; that it suppressed free speech; that it conferred unnecessarily wide powers on the Governor-General; and that it 'abrogated the Hofmeyr Act and other existing exemptions'.[23]

---

21. C.M. Tatz, _Shadow and Substance_, 49-52: Simons and Simons, _Class and Colour in South Africa_, 342-4.
22. The proceedings of the conference were reported in _DFA_, 4 December 1925; _Cape Times_, 4 and 5 December 1925.
23. S.T. Plaatje, 'Recent Native Conference', _DFA_, 15 December 1925.

Alone of his colleagues, Plaatje also took the trouble to write to the Clerk of the House of Assembly to express his regret that the Select Committee - subsequently appointed to look into the question - heard evidence only from Native Affairs Department officials, and not 'from the Native People whose lot it will be to enjoy or endure the effects of its operation'; and to request that his own observations on the bill should be laid before the Committee, which they duly were.[24]

The Government took no notice of the criticisms of Plaatje or anybody else about the bill, and proceeded regardless. They proceeded also with the long-awaited 'Native Bills' - embodying Hertzog's 'solution to the native question' - which were finally published in June 1926. There were four interdependent bills: the Coloured Persons' Rights Bill which proposed to remove Africans from the Cape common roll; the Representation of Natives in Parliament Bill which provided for seven European MP's (with reduced status and voting powers), elected by chiefs, headmen, and other prominent Africans nominated by the Governor-General; the Union Native Council Bill which was designed to formalise the existing Native Conference by establishing a Council of 50 members, 15 of whom were to be nominated by the Governor-General, the remainder to be elected in similar fashion to the above; and the Native Land (Amendment) Bill which provided for making available more land to Africans (basically that recommended by the Beaumont Commission of 1916) as quid pro quo for the loss of the franchise.[25]

---

24. Manuscript Annexures to the House of Assembly (Library of Parliament, Cape Town), Plaatje to Clerk of the House of Assembly, 6 May 1927. I am grateful to the Librarian of the South African House of Parliament for providing me with a copy of this; Report of the Select Committee on the Native Administration Bill, May 1927, SC 11'27, xxiv.

25. For details of these 'Native Bills', and African reactions to them, see Rise of African Nationalism, 111-4; Shadow and Substance, 46-52; Class and Colour in South Africa, 342-6.

The African reaction to the bills was immediate and hostile, and Plaatje was amongst the first to respond. In an article that was accompanied by approving editorial comment in The Cape Argus, he argued strongly against the removal of the Cape African franchise, stating that the proposals of the Representation of Natives in Parliament Bill gave in exchange 'a most inadequate and ineffective representation... whose voting powers shall be subject to the whim of the Prime Minister'.[26] He had no objection to the Native Union Council Bill, but thought that the Native Land (1913) Amendment Bill 'the most dangerous of the four' since it dealt 'entirely with rural matters that are least understood by the average journalist, whose studies of social conditions are confined mainly to urban life'. Plaatje returned to the subject repeatedly over the next few months in the national press.

He was also prominently involved in the discussions of the Bills at the Native Conference that was summoned to Pretoria in November 1926. The bills were presented and explained to the Conference by Tielman Roos, the Justice Minister, deputising for General Hertzog. From the delegates the response was uniformly hostile and they soon came to the crux of the issue - the interdependence of the four bills. On the second day, Charles Sakwe (Transkei), seconded by Professor D.D.T. Jabavu, moved that the clause of the bills that made them interdependent should be deleted, Professor Jabavu making a strong speech in condemnation of those aspects of the bills that 'were purely transient expedients to maintain white dominance'.[27] Tielman Roos replied that his Government

---

26. Cape Argus, 29 and 30 June 1926.
27. Cape Times, 3 November 1926; for detailed reports of the proceedings, see also Cape Times and Cape Argus, 4 and 5 November 1926.

could not accede to this, the feeling of the conference then being that it would be best to abandon the meeting. It was eventually agreed, however, following a strong plea against such a course of action by Senator Roberts, a member of the Native Affairs Commission, and the Conference reassembled. Plaatje's main contribution to the proceedings came in response to a speech by Major Herbst, the Secretary for Native Affairs, on the Native Land Bill. 'Some real oratory ensued', Professor Jabavu wrote afterwards, 'when the Bill (Land Act Amendment) was put on the table for discussion, and the principal orator was Mr. Sol. T. Plaatje, who probably commands greater authority than any other single native individual in this country, to speak on the subject'.[28] Plaatje demonstrated what the new Land Bill was actually likely to mean in practice, and illustrated his view of the nature and intent of the Bill with a widely quoted metaphor:

> When a Dutchman wants to trap a jackal, he gets a beautiful piece of mutton and puts poison in it, but the jackal usually walks round and round the meat and does not touch it.
> This gift of 7,000,000 morgen worked out at about one morgen per native, and if they accepted it they would prove to have less sense than a jackal. The speaker said that bad as were the awards in 1913, the awards in the Land Bill were infinitely worse.[29]

The Conference ended by adopting a resolution demanding either a repeal of the Land Act of 1913, or an adoption of a range of amendments that amounted to much the same thing. Both resolutions were rejected out of hand by the government.

---

28. D.D.T. Jabavu, 'The Government Native Conference', Cape Times, 19 November 1926.
29. Cape Times, 4 November 1926.

Plaatje returned to the 'Native Bills' on many occasions as Hertzog attempted - over the next few years - to get them through Parliament. For much of the time they were in the hands of Select Committees appointed to prepare drafts of the bills which would be acceptable to parliamentary opinion. Increasingly Plaatje's attention came to be devoted to the franchise issue, especially when it became clear that the machinery for consultation established by the Act of 1920 had degenerated into a farce and had become totally discredited. Plaatje explained just why he thought the franchise so important, and why his people were not prepared to compromise with General Hertzog, in several articles late in 1928. In one of these he explained the problem thus:

> At present we are directly represented by fifteen Cape members of Parliament who have several hundreds of Native voters in their constituencies. Again there are at least 25 more members who are always guarded in their expression lest they stampede the black electors of their friends. Further, one third of the Transvaal, and one half of Natal, members returned by lily white constituencies, are alive to the danger of embarrassing their Cape colleagues. Moreover, a majority of Senators, in sympathy with their friends in the Assembly, have shown by their action in the past (notably in the Colour Bar debates and the grim fight for the retention of the Hofmeyr Act) that the power of the ballot is a moral restraint holding the scales evenly and temperately as between black and white. Now a certain group, actuated by political exigencies, says to us: 'Go to General Hertzog and compromise your franchise because it hampers some members when they want to be unjust!' And friends of the Natives expect us to do it. By whose ready reckoner do they figure that we shall be better off with six members? How do they arrive at their calculation?[30]

---

30. S.T. Plaatje, 'The Cape Franchise', South African Outlook, 1 October 1928.

In the late 1920s - particularly in the year of the General Election and just before - Plaatje was active in the defence of the Cape franchise as a member, and then as Senior Vice-President, of the Cape Native Voters Association. Here his work was less to do with arguing the case in favour of the franchise, more a matter of the politics of registration and ensuring that as many African voters as possible were properly registered. This was by no means an easy task, and the Nationalist Party did its best to prevent this from happening. Plaatje wrote of the kind of problems he faced in an article in Umteteli at the end of 1928:

> Apparently impatient over the delay in the passage of General Hertzog's four bills (one of them providing for the disfranchisement of Natives in the Cape Province), the Nationalist Party has launched a big offensive against the Cape native vote. In the recent supplementary registration they have objected to the enrollment of 130 natives in the Kuruman area, 112 at Barkly West, 51 at Douglas, and so on. Their method of attack is to send round a prominent Nationalist who is a sworn appraiser to value the properties of all Native voters. Some of the poor fellows against whom the objections are lodged live from 50 to 70 miles away from the magistracy, their post is so uncertain that some of them hardly ever receive the notice of objection until the Revision Court has already sat and disfranchised them.
>
> This year the Native Voters Association in the Northern Districts undertook the formidable task of combating the Nationalist onslaught but are experiencing the difficulty that in every district they have to face a phalanx of prominent Nationalists, and this week has revealed that they have undertaken something that Native can hardly hope to accomplish singlehanded.[31]

****

31. S.T. Plaatje, 'The Native Franchise', Umeteteli, 8 December 1928.

Plaatje's renewed emphasis - in the late 1920s - upon the vital importance of the Cape franchise was a product also of his disillusionment with the Government's failure to take seriously the consultative machinery set up under the Native Affairs Act of 1920, or to provide Africans with any alternative means of influencing Government policy. Initially, after his return to South Africa in 1923, Plaatje was optimistic about this. Although not invited to the Native Conference in 1924, he nevertheless attended as an observer to report upon its proceedings, urging that other Africans should do likewise. 'They have a tremendous boon in the Government conference in which representative Natives meet the Minister every year at Government expense', he wrote in February 1925, reserving his criticism at this point not for the Government but for Africans who failed to take advantage of it and attend when invited.[32] The 1925 meeting Plaatje was invited to, and he attended as a delegate, and played a very active part in the proceedings. Thereafter, disillusionment set in. The Government ignored the representations that were made to them over the Native Administration Bill, taxation, and other issues, and proceeded with their legislative programme regardless. After the 1926 Conference rejected Hertzog's four segregatory bills it was not called again for another four years. It was quite clear that the Government only called the Conference to secure approval of measures it intended to put onto the statute books: they were under no statutory obligation to submit anything to the Conference, and under no statutory obligation even to call it.

---

32. S.T. Plaatje, 'Looking Forward', Umteteli, 7 February 1925.

Plaatje's disillusionment with the Government's attitude over the Native Affairs Conference was matched by his disappointment with the activities and membership of the Native Affairs Commission, another creation of the Act of 1920. 'For a year or two', Plaatje wrote, 'the Commission raised high hopes' but thereafter it turned into what he described as a 'political branch of the Native Affairs Department'. At the Native Conference, 'instead of supporting the native [it] interpreted to the Natives the Government's point of view and pressed for its adoption on such issues as the 'Colour Bar Bill', the poll tax and Hertzog's four 'Native Bills'.[33] In the face of all of this, Plaatje was more determined than ever not to compromise on the issue of the franchise, 'The 1920 Act created the Commission specifically to affirm the principle of consultation...In the face of such violations of statutory provisions, what guarantee is there that a loose compromise on the Franchise will bind Hertzog to anything in our favour?'[34]

Hertzog's 'Native Bills' were by no means the only political topic to gain Plaatje's attention in the columns of South Africa's daily and weekly press, or - until 1926 - in the meetings of the Native Conferences. Another topic about which he wrote and campaigned extensively was the question of taxation, and the related issue of education and the funds to support this. Many of Plaatje's other articles in the press took the form of travel writing, describing his impressions of the places he visited - the Lichtenburg diamond diggings in 1927, for example, or Bechuanaland in 1928.[35] Throughout almost

---

33. S.T. Plaatje, 'Natives and Taxation', DFA, 3 March 1931; see also S.T. Plaatje, 'The Cape Franchise', Umteteli, 29 September 1928.
34. S.T. Plaatje, 'The Cape Franchise', South African Outlook, 1 October 1928
35. S.T. Plaatje, 'Native Life at the Alluvial Diggings', Daily Dispatch (East London), 7 and 10 May 1927; 'In Bechuanaland Today', DFA, 17 April 1928.

all that Plaatje wrote and did in the 1920s one theme stands out very clearly, namely that he saw it as his role and duty, above all else, to represent the interests of Africans living in the rural areas of South Africa. He travelled extensively in the remoter parts of the Cape, the Orange Free State, and Bechuanaland, constantly investigating grievances and acting as a one-man advocate, defender, social worker. He frequently drew attention to the way in which biased rural juries were perverting the course of justice, secure in the knowledge that their actions were unlikely to be reported in the press; on occasion, he travelled around with the Circuit Courts to witness this for himself.[36] He aimed to bring to public attention the conditions that existed in South Africa's countryside, the starvation wages that were often paid to African farm labourers, the physical intimidation and violence that formed part of the everyday conduct of employer/employee relations in the countryside.

Again and again Plaatje pointed to the continued effects that the Natives' Land Act of 1913 was having. He contrasted also the attention given to the welfare of Africans living in the towns - where there were Joint Councils, Welfare Associations, and a press that was prepared to publicise their grievances - with what he found in the countryside. On occasion he even grew bitter about the lack of concern shown by Africans living in the towns about the conditions of others who lived in the countryside, accusing them of 'callous indifference to the plight of their own flesh and blood'.[37] It was on behalf of the

---

36. Cape Times, 3 November 1926.
37. S.T. Plaatje, 'Light and Shade on Native Questions', Umteteli, 11 October 1924.

'inarticulate rural Natives' that Plaatje claimed to speak, and it was essentially from their viewpoint that he observed, considered, and reported upon government legislation and other developments that affected their lives.

****

Plaatje's commitment to the interests of his people also found expression in his belief in the importance of fostering their social, educational, and economic progress as well as fighting for their political rights. He returned to South Africa in 1923 with the hope of making his own contribution in this direction under the umbrella of his Brotherhood Movement. But in this he did not achieve anything like the success that he had hoped for. He found that the organisation had more or less collapsed in Kimberley under the weight of accumulated debts (largely unpaid rates to the municipality) which had led to its committee being relieved of control of its greatest asset, the Lyndhurst Road Native Institute.[38] After his arrival back home, Plaatje sought to revive the Johannesburg branch of the movement, and to lay the foundations of a successful national organisation, but here, too, he met with little success.[39] White liberals and churchmen were now firmly in control of urban African affairs, and had no wish to encourage a movement that was independent of white control. Besides

---

38. De Beers Archives, Estate Department, Lyndhurst Road file, Plaatje to De Beers, 15 March 1932; General Secretary's file, Native Institute Secretary to De Beers, 1 and 15 June 1923.
39. Umteteli, 22 December 1922; The Star, 1 January 1924.

which, as one white churchman reported, the effect of Plaatje's movement was to encourage Christianity without the churches which he did not think was a very good idea either.[40]

If Plaatje's vision of a national Brotherhood organisation never materialised, he was rather more successful with another instrument for the social, educational, and economic enlightenment of his people - the bioscope. This apparatus - together with the films that Plaatje brought back from America with him - was his means of conveying to as wide an audience as possible the lessons he had learned during his travels in America. He conceived of the apparatus as 'a veritable moving school', his intention being to bring to black South Africans in the most effective way possible the lessons to be learned from the educational and economic progress of black Americans. Of especial importance were the films he had acquired from Robert Moton, the principal of the Tuskegee Institute when he had gone there in 1922.[41]

Throughout the 1920s Plaatje went on regular tours with his bioscope, combining this activity with his other work in the country. By 1930 he had shown his films, so he stated, in Kimberley, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and in 'numerous smaller towns throughout the Union, in Bechuanaland and Basutoland', at both 'public gatherings and in private homes'.[42] The reception he received seems to have varied considerably

---

40. Methodist Missionary Society Archives (SOAS), Transvaal Correspondence, 1921-4, 'Statement re Social Institute, Johannesburg', enclosure in J.W. Allcock to Amos Burnet, 8 January 1924. I am grateful to Mrs. D. Gaitskell for this reference.
41. R.R. Moton Papers, GC 109/810, Plaatje to Moton, 18 June 1925; GC 128/965, Plaatje to Moton, 29 June 1927.
42. Town Clerk's Files (Kimberley), Plaatje to Kimberley Town Council, 7 March 1930, requesting permission to show films in the new community hall in Kimberley. I am most grateful to Mrs.M. Macey, Kimberley Public Library, for copies of these documents.

from place to place, but it seems to have been the case that he attracted larger audiences in the more remote areas where films of any kind were very much of a novelty. Probably the show and the reception he received - described here in the Pretoria News - at the West Fort Leper Asylum late in 1924 was fairly typical:

> The programme started with the islands of the St. Lawrence (the great river by which Mr. Plaatje entered the American continent in October, 1920), and embracing America, it finished with an interesting display of the city and people of Havana, the capital of Cuba. None of the pictures, however, evoked so much enthusiasm as the work and drills of the students of the famous Tuskegee, Booker Washington's great institution in Alabama. At the close the visitors were loudly cheered, and asked to 'come again with their pictures'.[43]

In Johannesburg, by contrast, Plaatje was, on one occasion at least, rather less successful: 'barely a hundred people were in the spacious Ebenezer Hall' at a showing in May 1924, reported Umteteli wa Bantu.[44]

Plaatje's collection of films was augmented a year later with the help of funds provided by De Beers, enabling him to present - as he put it - 'a full and acceptable programme', his previous experience having been that the emphasis upon Negro America had led some audiences to find the programme 'rather too foreign'.[45] De Beers also gave Plaatje some money to purchase a portable generator. Submitting his request to the company, Plaatje explained that the great advantage of this would be that it would enable him to be independent of electricity supplies and thus more effectively able to reach, as he

---

43. Pretoria News (n.d.), enclosure in Plaatje to General Hertzog, 7 October 1924, Hertzog Papers A32, Box 35. Plaatje sent Hertzog the cutting as he felt certain it will 'interest the human side of your work in the Ministry of Native Affairs'.
44. Umteteli, 31 May 1924.
45. De Beers Archives, General Secretary's correspondence, Plaatje to De Beers, 31 May 1925.

said, 'the raw Kaffir, for whose benefit the outfit and pictures were given us'.[46]

Plaatje's concern with educational and social matters drew him into several other activities. One was a long campaign, involving, as he put it, 'deputations to the Native Affairs Department at Pretoria and expensive trips to Cape Town' to try and persuade the government to provide for the extension of primary to secondary education at the Lyndhurst Road Native School.[47] Another was his involvement in Temperance work in the Independent Order of True Templars. Founded in 1876, the IOTT was an offshoot of the International Order of Good Templars, and had sprung up in South Africa - initially in the Eastern Cape - in response to the failure of the IOGT to take in African and Coloured members.[48] Long concerned with the devastating effects of alcohol amongst his people, Plaatje's formal connexion with the organisation began in 1927 when he was appointed Special Deputy (or Special Missioner, as it was sometimes referred to) by J.W. Mushet, the head of the organisation. In this capacity, and supported with funds from the Schreiner Memorial Trust, Plaatje spent much of 1927 and 1928 travelling in the Orange Free State, the Western Transvaal, and the Northern Cape, establishing new branches of the IOTT and reviving old ones. Later, he visited the Eastern Cape with the same object,

---

46. Ibid.
47. De Beers Archives, General Secretary's correspondence, Plaatje to De Beers, 15 March 1932; for further details of Plaatje's involvement in this campaign, see DFA, 23 April 1925; 16 February 1928; 26 February 1931; 29 May 1931; 5 March 1932; Umteteli, 23 April 1928; Native Economic Commission Evidence (SAIRR Archives), 5308.
48. For the early history of the IOTT in South Africa, see W.G. Mills, 'The Role of African Clergy in the Re-orientation of Xhosa Society to the plural society of the Cape Colony, 1850-1915 (Phd, UCLA, 1975), 160-70; see also C. Van Onselen, 'Rand-lords and Rotgut: an essay in the development of European imperialism and southern African capitalism', History Workshop, 2, 1976.

addressing the students of Lovedale and Healdtown and setting up branches of the IOTT there as well; and finally, in 1931, he became editor of a new journal published under the auspices of the IOTT, Our Heritage - the last paper of any kind that Plaatje was to edit.[49]

The IOTT had much the same appeal to Plaatje as did the Brotherhood Movement. The first editorial in Our Heritage (almost certainly written by Plaatje) bears a marked resemblance, for example, to the kind of things that Plaatje said about the Brotherhood Movement in Native Life in South Africa and elsewhere:

> The Order to-day numbers a membership - Adult and Juvenile - of 90,000. It might well be noted as a cynosure of what South Africa should be. It has European members and Coloured members and Bantu members. It has men leaders and women leaders. It knows no race. It is Christian in its religious precepts, but it is tolerant and embracive in its sympathy and charity. It has the goodwill of Jew and Gentile, of rich and poor, and its efforts command the respect and admiration of well-nigh every religion represented in the Union.[50]

Inter-racial and undenominational, the IOTT also embodied an older and more congenial Cape liberal tradition that perhaps offered Plaatje some comfort in the harsher climate of the 1920s. The major figure in the organisation's history had been T.L. Schreiner, and the family tradition was continued into the 1920s in the person of J.W. Mushet, a wealthy Cape Town merchant who had married Schreiner's daughter.[51] For Plaatje, the IOTT promised to provide what his

---

49. Synopsis of Proceedings, IOTT Conference, Vrededorp, 6-8 January 1931; Umteteli, 23 April 1932; DFA, 18 August 1931; 8 January 1932; 3 August 1932.
50. Our Heritage, Vol.1, No.1, June 1931.
51. S.T. Plaatje, 'South Africans at the Ottawa Conference', Umteteli, 23 April 1932.

Brotherhood Movement, ultimately,had failed to do - a viable organisation that had white as well as black support, and which was prepared to allow Africans, himself particularly, to play a prominent role in its affairs. Like the Brotherhood Movement, the IOTT provided Plaatje with the organisational platform that he needed: with funds from the Schreiner Memorial Trust he was enabled to travel around the countryside, reporting, researching, and investigating as well as promoting the aims of the IOTT.

Plaatje's work on behalf of the IOTT was yet another of the many activities in which he was engaged in the 1920s and early 1930s that formed part of a wider attempt to address himself to the problems that his people faced in an increasingly complex, industrial society. When he returned to South Africa in 1923 he had found some reason to be hopeful about the future.[52] As time went on he became more pessimistic. In almost all that he wrote he blamed the Nationalist government for the fresh disabilities that the African people suffered, and he was perhaps at his best as a journalist when attacking their policies and leaders. But Plaatje also grew more and more critical of his own people for their failure to respond positively to the predicament in which they found themselves. Many of his attacks upon the Nationalists - at public meetings and in the press - were accompanied by a reminder to his audiences that Africans could not lay all the blame at the door of General Hertzog and his supporters; rather, they should look to their own failings before seeing them in others.

52. See, for example, Plaatje's series of three articles in DFA, 19, 22 and 23 January 1924.

Plaatje's frustrations and bitterness over this were plainly evident in many of the articles that he wrote for an African readership in the columns of Umteteli. What he had to say in an article on 'Leadership' (a frequently discussed and debated matter in Umteteli during this period) in February 1928, for example, was typical:

> It would be impossible for any one to lead a train that is disinclined to follow. Natives as a race recognise only one leader, namely, their hereditary prince: and there being so many chiefs, all independent of one another, individual leadership even by one of royal blood is impractical. A man may be a genius but the Native population will regard him very much as a clever actor on the stage - to be admired - not to be followed. This admiration - like the popularity of a new jazz tune - will last until its novelty has worn off, when the people look for fresh excitement in the shape of a different 'leader'. But, be he ever so faithful and self-sacrificing, they will desert him at the first sound of the call of the tribal chief, even if the latter implied nothing but a tribal chief and clannish tyranny.
>
> I have always forestalled this fickleness by declining any position offered me, such as the presidency of the Native Congress, preferring to serve - not lead - the sufferers of them, whose name is legion, and let the rest take care of themselves. The failure is not on the part of the leaders of whom we have several of outstanding ability; the fault lies with the Native masses who by nature object to follow one who is not their own tribal chief.[53]

In similar vein, Plaatje grew increasingly critical of what he saw as the moral failings of his people - the increasing incidence of alcoholism, for example, to which he devoted so much of his time of in his work for the IOTT; or the failure of other prominent individuals of his own race to live up to the high standards that he set for himself. He was very critical, for example, of the failure of the

53. Umteteli, 18 February 1928.

members of the Native Conference in 1924 to prepare their arguments properly, and to back them up with the necessary factual evidence;[54] or of the ANC's failure to follow closely the constitutional progress of Hertzog's 'Native Bills' and to issue a statement that betrayed their ignorance.[55] And along with criticism of this kind came a sense of bitterness towards people whom he considered not to have appreciated the sacrifices that he himself had made on their behalf.

In reality, Plaatje's frustrations were the product less of the moral and personal failings of those around him, more of the disappearance of that broad sense of political unity that had once characterized African political life in South Africa. New loyalties were emerging as South Africa developed into an industrialised society, and the 1920s was very much of a transitional period that saw the working out of the implications of the post-war crisis. Plaatje and most of his generation of mission-educated Africans who had been prominent in the political affairs of their people in the past were ill-equipped to come to terms with these new realities. Their aspirations rejected by the white rulers of South Africa, they were nevertheless unwilling to risk what they had by confronting the government and aligning themselves with an emerging African working class. Caught in such a dilemma, they possessed precious little room for manoeuvre. Some, like Plaatje, possessed the moral strength and sense of purpose to seek new ways of serving the interests of their people, or to find alternative outlets for the expression of their energy and ability. Others, like Richard

---

54. S.T. Plaatje, 'Light and Shade on Native Questions', Umteteli, 11 October 1924.
55. S.T. Plaatje, 'Under the Colour Bar', Umteteli, 19 June 1926.

Selope Thema, Plaatje's colleague on the deputation of 1919, or Dr. Seme, the founding father of the SANNC, sought refuge in drink. What made matters so much worse in the 1920s for all these people was the emergence of a new breed of 'friends of the natives' who effectively assumed for themselves such areas for the exercise of African political initiative as still remained, and who possessed the resources - denied to the Africans - with which to maintain their position. It was small wonder, in such circumstances, that 'leadership' should have been such a widely discussed issue, or that men like Plaatje should grow bitter at the way in which they were being progressively excluded from any meaningful role in the society in which they lived.

Generous recognition of Plaatje's contribution to the life of his people did come, however, in 1929, when a group of friends in Kimberley raised the money to purchase for him the house in which he lived. A fund had been set up the previous year when a committee representing all sections of Kimberley's non-European community had been formed to 'devise means of making him [Plaatje] a presentation which, besides representing a token of appreciation for his many years of active and unsalaried work, will also prove helpful to him in his further efforts for Native Welfare'. Appealing to De Beers for a contribution (the company gave £50), the committee explained that the gift of 32 Angel Street was particularly appropriate because it made up for the loss of his former house in Shannon Street as a result of his deputation work overseas; and because the 'quiet position of the house with hardly any traffic is, in the estimation of our Committee, eminently suited to his present efforts of writing Sechuana Books for

Native Schools...'[56] This was yet another matter with which Plaatje was - in the late 1920s - coming to be increasingly preoccupied. It is to a consideration of his work in this direction, and of his various other literary activities, that we must now turn.

56. De Beers Archives, General Secretary's Correspondence, W.T. McLeod to De Beers, 31 August 1929.

CHAPTER 10

'A PIONEER IN LITERATURE'

> The Bantu race of the future, long after his political efforts will have been forgotten, will place him in a position of high esteem as a pioneer in literature.
>
> Editorial review of Mhudi, Imvo, 26 May 1931.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s Plaatje came to apply himself much more systematically than hitherto to what could broadly be described as literary concerns. 1930 was a particularly important year, for this saw the publication of Mhudi, his English-language novel;[1] his Tswana translation of Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors, Diposho-posho;[2] and his two biographical essays on the nineteenth-century Rolong chiefs, Moroka and Montshiwa, which appears in T.D. Mweli Skota's African Who's Who.[3] In one sense these publications - which in any case represented only part of the writings that Plaatje had in hand - were not so much the product of a sudden burst of literary activity on Plaatje's part as the culmination of many years' interest and hard work. Both Mhudi and Diposho-posho, for example, had been started and substantially completed over ten years earlier, but had been unable, despite Plaatje's efforts, to find publishers. Nevertheless, it is clear that by the late 1920s - for reasons perhaps not unrelated to the depressing political situation - that Plaatje was

---

1. S.T. Plaatje, Mhudi: an Epic of South African Native Life a Hundred Years Ago (Lovedale, 1930).
2. S.T. Plaatje, Diposho-posho/Comedy of Errors (Morija, 1930).
3. T.D. Mweli Skota, The African Yearly Register (Johannesburg, 1930), 53-7 and 60-5.

becoming more conscious than ever before of the importance of publishing what he had already written, and accordingly devoted more of his time and energy to trying to arrange this; and secondly, that it was in this period that he embarked upon several new ventures. It therefore seems appropriate to consider Plaatje's work in the field of literature at this point.

A glance at the parlous state of Tswana language and literature at this time is almost sufficient in itself to indicate why Plaatje should have been so concerned over the question. The very survival of Tswana as a literary medium, indeed, was a matter of quite serious doubt, for unlike Sotho and Xhosa (and to a lesser extent, Zulu), Tswana had failed to develop anything that could really be described as a body of literature.[4] Virtually all the books that had been published in Tswana were translations of religious books of one kind or another, undertaken by missionaries, and Plaatje's own two books that had been published in 1916 - his Sechuana Proverbs and Sechuana Reader - were the only ones in Tswana written by an African. There were several reasons for the comparative poverty of Tswana. Geographically one of the most widely dispersed languages in Southern Africa, Tswana was spoken in a multiplicity of dialects, in many cases significantly different from one another in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammatical structure. The orthographic problem remained unresolved. For a while it had seemed as though the so-called '1910 orthography' - the product of the meeting called by the British and Foreign Bible Society which Plaatje had been so critical of in his Introduction to the Sechuana Proverbs - might provide the basis for a

---

4. For the development of Sotho and Xhosa literature, see especially A.S. Gerard, Four African Literatures (London, 1971).

uniform Tswana orthography, but such hopes proved to be short lived. Plaatje's own efforts to promote the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet in his Sechuana Reader had not been successful either, for its refusal to compromise accuracy for simplicity had severely limited its practical value: according to D.M. Ramoshoana, a close friend of Plaatje's, the Tswana always regarded it as 'a strange book in a strange spelling',[5] and it never became popular.

By the 1920s the effects of this lack of agreement on how to represent Tswana in writing were becoming more and more serious, and constituted a major deterrent to the emergence of Tswana as a literary medium. Partly related to this, Tswana also lacked the stimulus to literary development and creativity that was given to Sotho and Xhosa by the existence of a 'spiritual centre' like Morija or Lovedale which could publish books in these languages and foster literary creativity.[6] Amongst the Tswana, the closest approximation to these centres was the L.M.S. institution at Tigerkloof, but Tigerkloof - handicapped by lack of resources and committed to an orthography based uncompromisingly upon the Tlaping dialect - took many more years to emerge and play anything approaching this kind of role. There was no clearer indication of this unsatisfactory state of affairs than the fact that Plaatje had to take his Tswana translation of Comedy of Errors to Morija to get it published.

The publication of Thomas Mofolo's Chaka in 1925 - and the acclaim that it soon received - can only have emphasised for Plaatje the extent to which Tswana had fallen behind Sotho and the other vernacular

---

5. DFA, 28 June 1932.
6. For the role of Lovedale and Morija in Xhosa and Sotho literature respectively, see esp. Four African Literatures, 21-150.

literatures. This was made very explicit in a letter that he wrote in 1929. While 'the Lovedale Mission prints Xhosa books and the Paris Mission in Basutoland prints Sesuto books so that they have a considerable literature in the vernacular', Plaatje wrote, for Tswana 'there is hardly anything besides the Bible and Hymn Books of the different denominations'.[7] Despite the lack of an obvious publisher and the problem of what orthography to use, such a state of affairs was sufficiently serious in Plaatje's view to cause him to make a sustained effort to attempt to remedy the situation single-handed. A final stimulus was provided by the decision of the Education Departments of South Africa, Basutoland and Bechuanaland to insist - early in 1929 - upon mother tongue instruction (at least up to Standard 4) in the schools. The effect of this was to further emphasise the poverty of Tswana, for there simply did not exist the school books that could provide a basis for the teaching of Tswana in schools.[8]

With the support of his Brotherhood Movement in Kimberley, Plaatje undertook to meet this need. By the end of November 1929, he had five books in Tswana ready for publication - three Shakespearean translations, a new edition (possibly revised and expanded) of his Sechuana Proverbs, and a book with the title of 'Traditional Native Folk Tales and other Useful Knowledge'. Unable to find a publisher who would publish the books without prior payment, Plaatje obtained the cheapest quotations for his Shakespearean translations and the 'Traditional Native Folk Tales' from the Morija Mission Press; and for the new edition of the Sechuana Proverbs from Kegan, Paul and Co., the publishers of the

---

7. De Beers archives, General Secretary's files, Plaatje to De Beers, 19 November 1929.
8. Ibid.

first edition. As ever, there remained the problem of raising the money, a matter of well over £300. It was a large sum, and the Brotherhood Movement only succeeded in raising £41 towards it. In November Plaatje did what he had done so often before when in need of money for a good cause - he turned to De Beers to ask for a contribution. Presenting his case with his usual eloquence, he reminded the company of the contribution that he and his Brotherhood Movement had made in defeating 'the Pact Vendetta against Sir E. Oppenheimer' that had been 'launched by enemies of native welfare by sowing systematic dissension among natives'; and added that 'besides our regular work we have had our hands full combating and trying to keep the Communist movement outside Kimberley', particularly since 'Mr. Bunting came here last September and left his agents here to spread his communistic propaganda'. Plaatje went on to refer in glowing terms to the generosity and magnanimity of the company in the past, concluding his appeal for funds to enable the books to be published with the observation that they 'will be of continuous benefit for future generations here and elsewhere and so merit the abiding gratitude of all respectable Natives'.[9]

It was the kind of letter that Plaatje had written on many occasions before, and which had so often secured the desired results. On this occasion, however, his appeal to the 'generous sympathy that has always characterised the action of the De Beers Directors where native education is concerned' was unsuccessful. The amount of money that Plaatje sought was considerably in excess of anything that he had applied for previously, and all he received was a polite, but firm

9. Ibid.

notification that his letter had been placed before the Board of Directors, but that they had been 'unable to accede to your request for a contribution towards the cost of the printing of these books'.[10]

De Beers' refusal to provide Plaatje with the funds he required for the publication of his work in Tswana was a disappointment. Yet for a while it seemed only to be a temporary setback. In May 1930, he was able to write to Mrs. Solomon - with whom he was still in touch - to tell her that he had 'completed the translation of four works of Tsikinya-Chaka (Shakespeare)', that he was 'expecting the proofs of 'The Comedy of Errors' from the Morija Mission Press', and that 'The Merchant of Venice' and 'Julius Caesar' were now 'in the hands of Longman Green, Paternoster Row, who make a specialty of School Readers in various languages'. 'This simultaneous opening of printing houses in 1930', Plaatje went on to comment, 'after they had been blocked to me with ten years of hard writing on my hands - one after the other - made me wonder whether my days are not drawing to a close'.[11]

It is one of the tragedies of South African literature - for here we are dealing with no ordinary schoolbooks - that most of what Plaatje wrote in Tswana was never published, despite seemingly being on the verge of being so. Of the Shakespearean translations, only Diposho-posho (Comedy of Errors) was published in Plaatje's lifetime. His translation of Julius Caesar was edited by Professor G.P. Lestrade and and published by the University of the Witwatersrand Press in 1937,

---

10. De Beers Archives, General Secretary's files, Secretary to S.T. Plaatje, 26 November 1929.
11. Colenso Collection, Box 59, S.T. Plaatje to Mrs. Solomon (copy), 13 May 1930.

five years after Plaatje's death.[12] 'The Merchant of Venice', 'Othello', 'Much Ado about Nothing' and 'Romeo and Juliet', the other four translations that Plaatje had done in whole or in part, have been lost. The other two books mentioned by Plaatje in his letter to De Beers also failed to see the light of day. Part of the typescript of the revised and enlarged edition of his Sechuana Proverbs has survived, but of the 'Traditional Native Folk Tales and other Useful Knowledge' - later renamed by Plaatje as 'Bantu Folk-Tales and Poems - Traditional and Original' - all that has survived is a list of the praise poems that were included.[13] One further piece of evidence that we have about this last book is worth recording. At the end of 1930 Plaatje applied to the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in London, through the good offices of his old friend Daniel Jones (now a professor), for a grant to help enable the Morija Mission Press to acquire phonetic type to use in the printing of the book.[14] For Plaatje, the correct pronunciation of what he had written was every bit as important to him as it had been when he

---

12. S.T. Plaatje, Dintshontsho tsa Bo-Juliuse Kesara (ed. C.P. Lestrade, Bantu Treasury Series, Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 1937). In an interview with Plaatje in The Star (26 July 1930), it is stated 'Julius Caesar, The Merchant of Venice and Much Ado about Nothing are still in the press'. What exactly happened thereafter is unknown.
13. The list was made by Z.K. Matthews, who must have drawn it up during the course of his own anthropological research amongst the Rolong in the 1930s. I am most grateful to Mrs. Frieda Matthews for making a copy of this available to me.
14. Minutes of Business Committee, International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, 2 December 1930, 155-6 (records of International Africa Institute, London). The committee agreed to provide £10 subject to the approval of Professor Westermann, but there is no record of whether Plaatje got the grant or not.

had first discovered the potential of phonetics in London in 1915.

****

Plaatje's Shakespearean translations were the product of a life-long fascination with Shakespeare's plays. He had first encountered them whilst living on the Pniel mission station, but it was while working in Kimberley in the 1890s that the fascination began. Plaatje wrote of how this had begun in his contribution to I. Gollancz's Book of Homage to Shakespeare whilst he was in England during the First World War:

> I had but a vague idea of Shakespeare until about 1896 when, at the age of 18, I was attracted by the Press remarks in the Kimberley paper, and went to see Hamlet in the Kimberley Theatre. The performance made me curious to know more about Shakespeare and his works. Intelligence in Africa is still carried from mouth to mouth by means of conversation after working hours, and, reading a number of Shakespeare's works I always had a fresh story to tell.[15]

From that time onwards Plaatje's fascination with Shakespeare deepened. Always ready to see in the world around him parallels with what Shakespeare wrote about, Plaatje came to be struck by the similarities between the themes and concerns of Shakespeare's pre-industrial England and those that preoccupied the Tswana world which he knew so well from personal experience. Plaatje was attracted to Shakespeare because he considered that he had 'a keen grasp of human character' unrivalled by anybody who came after him; and because he

---

15. S.T. Plaatje, 'A South African's Homage', in I. Gollancz (ed.), A Book of Homage to Shakespeare (London, 1916), 336-9. The performance of Hamlet to which Plaatje refers was probably that reported in DFA, 20 December 1897.

found in Shakespeare a writer who wrote in an age before England had acquired an empire, before her writers and men of letters had come deal in the kind of racial stereotypes purveyed, for example, by Rider Haggard, John Buchan and other authors popular in Plaatje's lifetime. Against images of this kind (which had been emphasised for Plaatje by a film he had just seen in London which gave 'a highly coloured exaggeration of the depravity of the blacks'), he considered that 'Shakespeare's dramas, on the other hand, show that nobility and valour, like depravity and cowardice, are not the monopoly of any colour'.

Plaatje ended his contribution to the Book of Homage to Shakespeare by emphasising - on a note of self-prophecy - the importance, and the viability, of translating Shakespeare into African languages. 'It is to be hoped', he said, 'that with the maturity of African literature, now still in its infancy, writers and translators will consider the matter of giving to Africans the benefit of some at least of Shakespeare's works. That this could be done is suggested by the probability that some of the stories on which his dramas are based find equivalents in African folklore'.[16]

The first person to do anything more than 'consider' this matter was Plaatje himself. Probably the first play that he translated into Tswana was Julius Caesar, a task that he carried out on the ship that took him back to South Africa in 1917.[17] By 1921 - with several more voyages behind him - Plaatje had translated The Comedy of Errors and The Merchant of Venice.[18] By 1923 Othello, too, had been completed -

---

16. Ibid.
17. The Star, 26 July 1930.
18. DuBois Papers, Plaatje to DuBois, 19 December 1920.

partly on the journey from Southampton to the Cape a year later.[19] Romeo and Juliet and Much Ado about Nothing followed later. Always busy with political and other matters whilst on dry land - English, American or South African - it had been only board ship that Plaatje had found the time to indulge in his self-appointed task of translating Shakespeare into his native tongue.

Diposho-posho/Comedy of Errors (lit.trans: 'Mistake after Mistake') was eventually published in July 1930. Probably it was the first (for such was it intended to be) because it was the shortest of Shakespeare's plays, and therefore presumably the cheapest to print. Comedy of Errors was also one of Shakespeare's earliest works, so Plaatje may also have had the notion that it was fitting that this should be his first translation to be published as well. In length Diposho-posho is considerably shorter even than the Shakespearean original. Parts of it would be accurately described as a paraphrase: some passages are summarised, and so too are some of the exchanges of dialogue. Yet Diposho-posho was - in the opinion of the relatively few people in any sort of position to assess its merits - an outstanding piece of work, its great achievement being to combine a faithfulness to the spirit, the tone, and the meaning of Shakespeare with the idioms of the Tswana language. A further achievement was Plaatje's success in matching the colloquial sixteenth-century English of Shakespeare with colloquial forms of Tswana, utilising (and thus at the same time preserving) Tswana words that were already becoming archaic (or had become so) so as to convey the flavour and tone of the original English. Plaatje succeeded also in matching the puns and

---

19. The Star, 25 July 1930.

elaborate word play that is so characteristic of the original. On occasions - where this could be done on the equivalent words or phrases in both Tswana and English - Plaatje managed to carry this off directly. Elsewhere, where this could not be done, he introduced his own puns, indulging in the kind of word play - albeit with a rather greater degree of sophistication - that had been evident many years before in his Boer War Diary.[20]

The publication of Diposho-posho evoked a warm response, and a considerable amount of publicity. Even the London Times carried a brief report commending the appearance of the first translation of one of Shakespeare's plays into an African language.[21] Closer to home, the Diamond Fields Advertiser carried a generous editorial endorsing the importance of Plaatje's 'valuable services in saving from possible extinction some of the rich profusion of the Sechuana language', whilst the Johannesburg Star thought it an event sufficiently important to interview Plaatje about. To this paper Plaatje explained some of the problems he had faced in carrying out the work of translation. 'It is only natural', he said, 'that the translator must experience great difficulty in finding the equivalents of Shakespeare's phrases, in which case he has to rely on the general sense of the whole passage to render the author's meaning in the vernacular, and that has been my difficulty'. Plaatje emphasised that his experiences as a court interpreter and 'ten years as editor of a tri-lingual paper' had stood him in good stead, but that he had faced considerable difficulty over

20. This assessment is derived from A. Sandilands, Introduction to Tswana (LMS, Tigerkloof, 1953), where Diposho-posho is used as as reading text, and contains literal translations of several passages from Diposho-posho which I then compared with the Shakespearean original.

21. The Times, 7 May 1930.

some passages that needed to be rendered in Tswana words and phrases that were no longer in everyday use.[22]

One of the few assessments of Diposho-posho from one who was fully qualified to judge came from D.M. Ramoshoana, whoae assistance Plaatje in fact acknowledges in his Introduction in the book. In Ramoshoana's opinion, one of the most important aspects to the achievement of Diposho-posho was that it disproved what he saw as the widely held view amongst Europeans that Shakespeare could not be translated into an African language. 'Many Englishmen', Ramoshoana wrote,

> hold the belief that Shakespeare's language and ideals are far above the intellectual scope of Africans, and that they defy translation into any African language because, they argue, European and African tongues, notions, and outlook, differ so irreconcilably that Shakespeare's elevated ideas must remain to the African an impenetrable mystery, even to those who have secondary training. It will be well for such sceptics to see how successfully a self-educated man has translated Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors in Sechuana. On seeing Diposho-posho they will revise their conclusions and change their opinions.[23]

Ramoshoana thought Diposho-posho was 'a gratifying success'; that Plaatje had 'not only demonstrated his remarkable ability in English and complete mastery of the Sechuana language - a rare thing in these days - but that he has also shown a clear understanding of the author's aim'; and that he had 'rendered the entire story in a language which, to a Mochuana, is as entertaining and amusing to the original is to the Englishman'. In a reference to several books

---

22. DFA, 4 October 1930; The Star, 26 July 1930.
23. D.M. Ramoshoana, 'Shakespeare in Sechuana', Umteteli, 4 October 1930.

that had been translated into Tswana by European missionaries, Ramoshoana added that 'the book is not rendered into that disagreeable and grating mess which is characteristic of certain books presented in Sechuana garb which yet remain foreign: on the contrary, Shakespeare has inspired Mr. Plaatje to bring into bold relief the etymological beauties of his mother tongue'. And in a tribute that Plaatje would have greatly appreciated - for this is exactly what he had set out to do - Ramoshoana concluded as follows:

> When reading Diposho-posho one feels as if one were reading the language of a Mochuana who happened to live in England. The pleading, or defence of Aegeus before the Ephesian Court, the jokes, the treatment of servants and language in which they were ordered about are very similar to the ways of the Bechuana of the last century. This is one of the features which makes Mr. Plaatje's translation so pleasant and entertaining.[24]

****

The high quality of translation that Plaatje achieved in Diposho-posho serves only to emphasise the loss that Tswana, and South African literature has suffered in the disappearance of his other Shakespearean translations and his other writings in Tswana. A further irreplaceable loss occurred with the disappearance of virtually all of the work that Plaatje had embarked upon in preparing a new Tswana dictionary, another mammoth project upon which he was engaged at the time of his death.

Plaatje's work on this arose directly out of the needs of his translating work, and of the inadequacy of the existing Tswana

24. Ibid.; see also Ramoshoana's letter to DFA, 4 October 1930.

dictionary, based upon that first compiled by the Rev. J. Tom Brown in the 1870s. A second edition of this dictionary had been published in 1895, and a third edition - which had attempted to move away from the bias towards the Tlaping dialects which had been evident in its predecessors - followed in 1925. Yet many of the words and phrases that Plaatje needed for his translations were not to be found in this or any other dictionary. 'Not the least of my difficulties', Plaatje had told the Star, 'was the lack of a reliable Secuhana dictionary'. As a result, it was added, 'some of the doubtful passages had to stand over pending verification from some old natives'.[25] The publication of Diposho-posho only underlined this need for a new dictionary: 'Plaatje told me', Professor C.M. Doke recalled in 1932, 'that in this work [Diposho-posho] he was forced to use so many archaic and seldom-used words that publication has brought an insistent demand for a fuller Sechuana dictionary'.[26]

Plaatje was given some money by the University of the Witwatersrand (for which Doke himself must have been responsible) to enable him to devote some of his time to this task.[27] The only part of this that has survived is Plaatje's annotated copy of the 1925 edition of Brown's Secwana Dictionary, a copy of which he acquired (or thus it

---

25. The Star, 26 July 1930.
26. Umteteli, 25 June 1932.
27. C.M. Doke, 'A Preliminary Investigation into the state of the Native languages of South Africa with suggestions as to research and the development of literature', Bantu Studies, Vol.VII, 1933, 7; exactly when Plaatje started to receive funds from Wit University is unclear, but some clue is provided by C.M. Doke's letter to him on 20 December 1929. In response to a letter from Plaatje (which has not survived), Doke said that he would 'go into the matter of your a/c as soon as I can', and informed him that his application 'will be placed before the Committee at its next meeting - not before March, however, as the University is now in vacation'. I am most grateful to Prof.D. Cole, C.M. Doke's successor at Wits University, for making a copy of this letter available to me.

is dated) in 1928.[28] Plaatje's scribbled comments, crossings-out and word lists are, however, of considerable interest, indicating as they do something of the nature and degree of his dissatisfaction with the dictionary. His remarks in the frontispiece seem to sum up his impression of the dictionary as a whole: 'Object of this Dictionary appears to be Quantity, not Quality'; and a little further on, 'Hundreds of meaningless words, some of them wrongly translated, no end of duplicates...' Part of the Preface Plaatje has crossed out, and added in the margin: 'Very Misleading'. Perhaps most interesting of all, though, are the lines that Plaatje has written opposite the first page of the dictionary:

> The Se-Ruti is not only affecting Sechuana speech but [illegible] Sechuana outlook in every respect. For instance, since Missionaries first translated the names of the Native 'Moons', we find few old natives who know of the 13th month, and even these say the 13th name is interchangeable with one of the 12.

'Se-Ruti' was not an original dialect of Tswana, but the name given by Plaatje to Tswana as spoken by European missionaries, and as embodied in the Dictionary. For Plaatje it was thus of vital importance to compile a Tswana dictionary that could preserve the original vocabulary of his people in the same way as he had hoped that his phonetic transcriptions in his Sechuana Reader in 1916 would preserve the original pronunciation from similar European encroachment.

****

28. Plaatje's copy of the dictionary is now in the possession of Professor Cole, and I am most grateful to him for permission to quote from Plaatje's remarks.

In his work in translating Shakespeare, in compiling collections of proverbs, folk tales, praise songs, and a new dictionary, Plaatje's underlying concern was to demonstrate the viability and richness of the Tswana language as a living language, to preserve the integrity of Tswana culture in general from the threats posed to it by European encorachment in its various forms, and by sheer neglect of its potentialities by all save himself and a handful of other people. These same concerns also lay at the heart of Plaatje's involvement in the late 1920s and early 1930s in the at times vitriolic debate over the question of Tswana orthography. This issue, as we have seen, was not a new one, and for Plaatje personally it had been a matter of concern from at least the time that he became editor of <u>Koranta ea Becoana</u> in 1902.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, the debate over the issue intensified, and brought Plaatje into conflict not with the missionaries, whose ideas on Tswana orthography he had previously been so critical of, but with university academics and government officials who had in the meantime become closely interested in the whole orthographical question. The reasons for the involvement of these two groups - potentially far more formidable opponents for Plaatje than the missionaries alone - are complex, and have to do with the growing acceptance of broadly segregationist ideas and assumptions, and of an increased awareness - paralleled and influenced by the emergence of indirect rule philosophies in metropolitan Europe - of the contribution that the academic world (the anthropologists and linguists in particular) could make to the government of the 'native races'. Hence in South Africa the proliferation of academic chairs in 'Bantu languages' and 'Bantu studies' (and a journal of the same name), and in Britain the

foundation - in 1926 - of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (with its journal Africa from 1928), presided over by none other than Lord Lugard himself.

In both Britain and South Africa one of the major concerns in these circles was that of the orthography of African languages, and in both countries the movement towards standardisation was - in the mid-1920s - becoming an increasingly powerful one. The case was stated clearly in The Practical Orthography of African Languages, an influential pamphlet published by the IIALC in 1927, which evoked a ready response in South Africa.[29] Its effect was to hasten the movement in favour of a common standardised orthography, and to align South African academics and Native Affairs and Education Department officials more closely with the notion and possibility of a standardised orthography that had as its ultimate objective not merely the achievement of a common orthography for the Bantu languages, but for all the languages for Africa. The outcome was that in July 1928, steps were taken - via the Advisory Committee on Bantu Studies and Research - to consider the question of the orthographies of the South African language groups. The Committee duly appointed a sub-committee, the Central Orthography Committee, 'to take charge of the question of reform in the various orthographies'. This body then set up its own sub-committees for the various language groups.[30]

With Tswana there was - as one might expect from its existing orthographic state - confusion and disagreement from the start. On

---

29. International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, A Practical Orthography of African Languages (London, 1927). The orthographic question was also extremely prominent in the first issue of Africa in 1928.
30. 'A Practical Orthography for Tswana', Bantu Studies, XI, 1937, 137-8.

the initiative of the language experts of the Universities of Capetown and the Witwatersrand, Tswana was linked with Sotho and Pedi - the other two languages of the so-called Sotho group - and a Sotho-Tswana-Pedi sub-committee was appointed to try and evolve a uniform orthography for the entire Sotho group. Over the next couple of years numerous committee and sub-committee meetings took place in pursuit of this aim. Differences of opinion were evident from the outset, the unifying enthusiasm of the academics coming into sharp conflict with missionaries unwilling to give up their own orthographies, and at times with officials of the four provinces of the Union, and the two High Commission Territories, in which languages of the Sotho group were spoken, who were in many cases less convinced of the practicality or desirability of theoretical standardisation favoured by the architects of 'Native policy' and the university professors. The immediate outcome of these differences was a compromise, agreement eventually being secured on proposals to standardise not the Sotho-Pedi-Tswana group as first intended, but the more limited objective of unifying the Tswana dialects as a first step towards this. These proposals were published in July 1930.[31]

Plaatje was strongly opposed to these various steps taken in the direction of orthographic standardisation. His underlying belief was that the inevitable outcome of linking Tswana with Sotho, let alone achieving any further standardisation with other Bantu languages, would be the disappearance of Tswana as a language, and a culture, in its own

31. Ibid., 138; for a useful account of the whole issue, see D. Jones, 'A "Resultant" Tswana Orthography' (1962), available in Plaatje/Molema Papers (UNISA).

right. He was also very critical of the way in which he, the leading writer in Tswana, and colleagues like D.M. Ramoshoana, were excluded from any effective say in these committees. Plaatje seems to have attended several of the meetings that took place, but complained that his representations carried no weight in their deliberations. On one occasion, he said, he was 'permitted a look into the Sechuana Orthography Committee room at Pretoria', but the response to his proposal that certain phonetic symbols be introduced into Tswana (on the grounds that the 26 letters of the alphabet could not adequately represent its sounds) was met by 'a resolution to use combinations [of letters in the European alphabet] and diacritics [accents and circumflexes, etc.], rather than go outside the Roman alphabet for symbols'.[32]

Unable to influence the work of the Central Orthography and its various sub-committees from within, Plaatje launched a fierce campaign against their recommendations for Tswana in the press. On linguistic grounds he attacked their recommendations as being confusing, as inadequate to represent the variety of sounds in the Tswana language, as cumbersome and inelegant (with reference particularly to the decision

---

32. S.T. Plaatje, letter to the Editor, South African Outlook, 1 August 1931. The meeting to which Plaatje referred took place on 14 and 15 February 1929. Minutes of the meeting are available in the Lestrade Papers, University of Cape Town Library (BC255 A1.7), and show that Plaatje played a very prominent part in the proceedings. It was probably partly because of this - and in particular because of his strong views on the question of phonetic symbols - that he was excluded from the committee, and was not invited to attend further meetings. One of the other African members of the committee, P.J. Motiyane, twice questioned Plaatje's exclusion at the next meeting, but the minutes do not contain details of the discussion that took place (BC255, A1.11, Minutes of Meeting of the Cwana Sub-Committee...held at Pretoria, 1 and 2 October 1929). Plaatje himself had scathing remarks to make about the likely effect of the committee's recommendations in a letter to Dr. Molema (Plaatje/Molema Papers [Wits], Da 64, Plaatje to Molema, 20 February 1929).

in favour of diacritics which he detested), and for their failure to adopt letters from the International Phonetic Association which he thought the only possible basis for any orthographic standardisation. More broadly, Plaatje was critical as well of the way in which the whole scheme had been undertaken. The movement to unify Bantu languages, he wrote,

> started with the hall-mark of the South African ideals, according to which anything of the kind must be a lily-white affair, approved by educated white experts, while the blacks, whose languages are so radically affected, swallow it whole, or do without.[33]

Writing in the South African Outlook in May 1931, Plaatje contrasted the constitution and working of the Sechuana Committee with its Xhosa counterpart. The latter, he thought, was 'composed of experienced European and Bantu authors - masters of their language'. The constitution of the Sechuana committee, on the other hand, was its 'exact antithesis':

> Ten Europeans and two Natives met at Pretoria over a year ago; most of the former knew nothing of Sechuana, while the two Natives appear to have been selected by virtue of their two outstanding qualifications, viz., (a) neither of them ever wrote a Sechuana book or pamphlet; and (b) neither of them ever lived in Bechuanaland or in districts where the unadulterated Sechuana is spoken. Two Missionaries on the committee have done some work in the language and had translated its folklore for English and German magazines; but care seems to have been taken so as to constitute the committee that, should they and the two Natives stand together and contend for any given point (as indeed they did for more than once) the four of them would have to face a phalanx of eight Europeans whose sole purpose was to vote for the new spelling, whether or not they understood what they were voting upon.[34]

---

33. S.T. Plaatje, 'Spelling of African Languages', DFA, 15 October 1930; see also Plaatje's other writings on the matter in Umteteli, 15 November 1930; 6 February and 2 April 1932; The Star, 2 December 1931.
34. S.T. Plaatje, 'Suggested New Bantu Orthography', South African Outlook, 1 May 1931.

In Plaatje's view, the proposed changes were 'preposterous', and he disputed the right of 'all the professors and men of letters who compose the South African Orthography Committee' to decide the future form of his own native language:

> Personally I have nothing but the highest respect for the sound learning of University professors. I yield to no one in my admiration for their academic distinction and high scholarship. The only trouble with the professors is that they don't know my language, and with all due deference, how could a string of letters behind a man's name enable him to deal correctly with something that he does not understand: Only one man is still capable of determining the spelling of this language. That man is the Native...[35]

As matters turned out, the attempt of the 'professors and men of letters' to impose a new orthography did not - in Plaatje's lifetime - meet with success. They were defeated by a powerful combination of missionaries who were unwilling to give up the orthographies in which their books were written; of the Education Departments of the various provinces and High Commission Territories who were not prepared to countenance the disruption and opposition that any attempt to implement the proposals made would meet with; and by the strong opposition of African teachers and their associations, and not least by Plaatje himself, the most articulate spokesman for the opinion of this group.[36]

On one aspect of the whole orthographic debate Plaatje suffered defeat, for only one of his books in his own preferred orthography - _Diposho-posho_ - was published. Had he been prepared to compromise on

---

35. _Ibid._
36. For the opposition of Tswana teachers to the proposals, see _DFA_, 15 October 1930 and 2 February 1931; _Umteteli_, 15 November 1930.

his use of phonetic symbols he could probably have seen published in his own lifetime the remainder of what he had written. This he wasn't prepared to do. It would have been little consolation for him to have known that his translation of Julius Caesar was eventually published in 1937, for it was edited by one of the leading 'professors and men of letters' (Professor Lestrade), and published in an orthography that not only failed to incorporate phonetic symbols, but utilised the diacritics that he so detested. Perhaps it was as well, after all, that Professors Doke and Lestrade never managed to lay their hands on his other translations.

****

Orthographic considerations of this kind were not an issue in what is perhaps Plaatje's best-known work, Mhudi, for this was written in English. Sub-titled, 'An Epic of South African Native Life a Hundred Years ago', Mhudi was published in 1930, just a few months after Diposho-posho. The first novel written in English by a black South African, Mhudi's outstanding characteristic is its blending of African oral, and English written literary forms and traditions. It is important also as a statement of Plaatje's political philosophy, embodying many of the beliefs and attitudes upon which his many other activities in life were founded and based. In Mhudi Plaatje stands back, as it were, from the immediacy of the day-to-day political struggles that had so preoccupied him throughout his life, and in so doing made an outstanding contribution in yet another field.

Although published in 1930, Mhudi was actually written some ten years previously (in 1919 and 1920) when Plaatje was in England. Over the next few years he had sought in vain to find a publisher. In America he tried Macmillan, Harper Brothers, Scribner, and Harcourt. Interest in his MSS was expressed by another somewhat disreputable American publisher by the name of Neale, but he wanted $1,500 from Plaatje before he would handle the book. On the advice of W.E.B. DuBois Plaatje very wisely turned the 'offer' down.[37] He met with no more success when he was back in England in 1922 and 1923: 'these publishers', he wrote to Mrs. Colenso, 'are not of our way of reasoning'.[38] Probably his highest hopes rested with the publisher Stanley Unwin, the husband of his longstanding friend and political ally, Jane Cobden Unwin. But even he, as Plaatje wrote in August 1923, 'wants £75 if he is to handle it', and this he was unable to raise.[39] It was with these experiences in mind, then, that Plaatje wrote in the Preface to Mhudi that 'the book should have been published over ten years ago, but circumstances beyond the control of the writer delayed its appearance'.

Plaatje's eventual publisher was the Lovedale Institute Press, not by any means the leading English or American publishing house that could have given him a world-wide audience, but a publisher nevertheless. 'After ten years of disappointment', he wrote to Mrs. Solomon in May 1930, 'I have at length succeeded in printing my book. Lovedale is

---

37. DuBois Papers, Plaatje to DuBois, 1 February 1922; DuBois to Plaatje, 20 February 1922.
38. Colenso Collection, Box 11, Plaatje to Mrs. Colenso, 24 May 1923.
39. Molteno Family Papers, BC 330 A81.2.9, Plaatje to Mrs. Solomon, 2 August 1923.

publishing it. I am expecting the proofs any day this week'.[40] A few months earlier Plaatje had signed a contract with Lovedale, wherein they undertook to print a first edition of 2,000 copies at 5/6 per copy, with royalties at 10 per cent payable after the sale reached 700 copies, 'and then to start from the beginning'.[41] Lovedale's willingness to publish the book is attributable to the Rev. Robert Shepherd, Chaplain at Lovedale since 1927, and Director of Publications of the Lovedale Press. Lovedale had recently received a large grant from the Carnegie Corporation to improve its printing machinery, and under Shepherd's control and guidance the Lovedale Press displayed a keen interest in promoting African literature in both English and in the vernacular. Shepherd was the man who made the decision to publish Mhudi, a decision he never had cause to regret.[42]

Mhudi is an historical novel set in the early part of the nineteenth century, concerned with the experiences of the Rolong people in their contact with the Ndebele and Boers in the area of what is now the Transvaal and Orange Free State. The main characters in the book are Mhudi, the heroine of the story, and Ra-Thaga, both of them Rolong survivors of the Ndebele attack upon Kunana (vividly described in the beginning of the book), who meet after their escape and fall in love. Their subsequent experiences and adventures - culminating in their involvement in the defeat of the Ndebele under Mzilikazi in an army

---

40. Colenso Collection, Box 59, Plaatje to Mrs. Solomon (copy), 13 May 1930.
41. Contract between S.T. Plaatje and the Lovedale Institution Press, 19 March 1930. I am most grateful to Mr. D. Raven, Manager of the Lovedale Press, for showing this to me.
42. For Shepherd's role at Lovedale, see R.H.W. Shepherd, Lovedale, South Africa, 1924-1855, 122; Gerard, Four African Literatures, 391.

composed of Rolong, Boer and Griqua - then provide the main strand of the book's narrative. An outwardly conventional love theme characteristic of the Western novel thus develops within a context which was derived primarily from oral tradition, though undoubtedly supplemented by Plaatje's historical reading. The event that precipitates the main action of the novel, however, is not one that Plaatje could have found in any text - or history book. As he explains in the Preface:

> By merest accident, while collecting stray scraps of tribal history, later in life, the writer incidentally heard of 'the day Mzilikazi's tax collectors were killed'. Tracing this bit of information further back, he elicited from old people that the slaying of Bhoya and his companions, about the year 1830, constituted the casus belli which unleashed the war dogs and precipitated the Barolong nation headlong into the horrors described in these pages.

Much of Mhudi is a retelling, or a reworking, of Rolong oral tradition. Some of the information on which the book is based seems to have been handed down to Plaatje by his family ancestors, from whom, amongst other things, Plaatje must have learnt of the character of Mhudi herself. Although there is nothing in the book to indicate that Mhudi was a real (i.e. an historical) character, Plaatje wrote elsewhere that Mhudi was one of the wives of the Rolong chief Tau (the last chief of a united Rolong nation who ruled c.1770-90), from whom Plaatje himself was descended. 'My mother', Plaatje wrote in surviving account of his ancestry, 'is a direct descendant of a grandson of Tau by his youngest and dearest wife, Mhudi'.[43] It is highly likely that Plaatje heard of Mhudi and her descendants from his mother, his grandmother, and other members of his mother's side of the family.

43. Plaatje Papers (SOAS archives) 'Genealogy' (in Plaatje's hand).

'Complete information' about his ancestry, Plaatje also wrote, was 'first supplied by Grannie Mama-shoe-a-Motho (Au Magrette) [Plaatje's grandmother], and corrected for me by Ma Jakopo (Selogilwe's daughter-in-law) and Mr. Arthur Moshoni'.[44] In a very real sense Mhudi can thus be seen - in part at least - as a product of Plaatje's own family history, and of his intense interest and fascination with this. Grannie Mama-shoe-a-Motho, it should be added, would herself have lived through many of the events that Plaatje describes in the course of his book.

To be able to identify the likely sources upon which Plaatje draws is not to undermine the element of imaginative creativity that goes into Mhudi. Plaatje draws upon material available to him and reworks it to impressive dramatic effect. The element of creativity lies in the ability to retell what was to him familiar material, in the recognition of its literary and dramatic potential, and in the exploration of the richness of the cultural traditions upon which he draws. Thus like oral tradition itself, Mhudi contains pieces of poetry, praise songs, proverbs and abundant Tswana idiom translated into English; it contains long speeches and elaborate dialogues which are no more intended to be 'realistic' than their equivalents in Shakespeare, whose influence, as one might expect, is also strongly evident in Mhudi.

The recent coming to light of an earlier typescript of Mhudi, different in several respects from the published version, adds further weight to the notion of the novel as a product of Rolong and Tswana oral

44. Ibid.

tradition.[45] In this earlier draft, Plaatje had written in as the narrator of the story a man called 'Half-a-Crown, the hoary octogenarian', who - it is later revealed - is in fact the son of Mhudi and Ra-Thaga. In the published version, the character of Half-a-Crown is replaced by 'we', i.e. Plaatje, the author. The effect of this change is thus to obscure, as Gray and Couzens have argued, the extent to which 'Plaatje viewed himself not so much as a novelist but as a scribe, one whose role was to record the story told him by an intermediary - this missing link who knew the history of the 1830s at firsthand - who in his eighties was handing it on to Plaatje, the man who plays the role throughout the work of listener and documenter'.[46] Another important source to supplement 'Au Magrette' is also suggested: possibly 'Half-a-Crown', the 'hoary octogenarian' was Mr. Arthur Moshoni to whom Plaatje also refers in his genealogical account.

If one major characteristic of Mhudi is Plaatje's use of Tswana oral tradition, another is his skilful exploration of the creative possibilities that lay in the process of transmitting and expressing its elements in the language and literary forms of another culture. As was evident in his Sechuana Proverbs and Shakespearean translations, Plaatje's perceptions of the possibilities that existed arose out of his awareness of the extent to which English and Tswana shared common cultural traditions. English and Tswana had a fund of common literary

---

45. The typescript came to light in 1976 when archival material from Lovedale was transferred to the Cory Library, Rhodes University, where it is now preserved.

46. T. Couzens and S. Gray, 'Printers' and Other Devils: the texts of Sol. T. Plaatje's Mhudi', Research in African Literature, Vol.9, No.2, Fall 1978, 206.

and cultural symbols, and it is these that Plaatje sets out to explore in Mhudi. On the English side by far his most important source is Shakespeare, and one of the most important symbols that he explores is that of omen and prophecy, and their association with planetary movements. Plaatje was clearly struck by the similarities between what he read in Shakespeare and what he knew of the meaning and symbolism of these same phenomena amongst the Tswana. He thus develops the symbol of Halley's Comet (which appeared in 1835, foreshadowing the defeat of Mzilikazi) into one of the structural pivots of the novel, contributing at the same time to the build up of the powerful atmosphere of gloom and foreboding.[47] To illustrate Plaatje's intention one can quote from a newspaper editorial that he wrote at the time of the reappearance of Halley's Comet in 1910: 'In common with other Bantu tribes', Plaatje then wrote, 'the Bechuana attach many ominous traditions to stellar movements and cometary visitations in particular. This superstition was by no means shaken by their contact with missionaries and their perusal of the Bible history of the Maji', and nor, he might have added, by their perusal of Julius Caesar, a quotation from which (one of Plaatje's favourite quotations) appeared at the head of the article:

> When beggars die, there are no Comets seen
> The Heavens themselves blaze forth the death of Princes.

Plaatje added, in this editorial, that 'space will not permit of our going as far back as the 30s and 50s to record momentous events, in Sechuana history, which occurred synchronically with the movements

---

47. For a discussion of the function of Halley's Comet in Mhudi, see T. Couzens' valuable introduction to Mhudi, Quagga Press edition, 1975, and Heinemann African Writers Series, 1978.

of heavenly bodies'.[48] In Mhudi Plaatje found space to do just this, and in this manipulation of symbols that had meaning in both Tswana oral and English written culture is to be found much of the cultural richness and enjoyment of the book.

Plaatje is doing much the same thing - although at a rather more humorous level - in his exploitation of the lion stories in the early part of Mhudi.[49] The point to be made here - although limited space precludes a full elaboration of the ways in which Plaatje is doing this - is that Plaatje again is quite deliberately drawing upon similar literary traditions from different cultures. The enjoyment that he derives from this is evident in the spirited and humorously ironic manner in which he does this; and there is - as Stephen Gray has commented - perhaps just an element of cultural snobbery involved as well. Yet we should not neglect the more serious purpose underlying this trans-cultural humour, demonstration of a point that he had made in his contribution to the Book of Homage to Shakespeare in 1916. Here he had expressed the view that he thought it probable 'that some of the stories on which his [Shakespeare's] dramas are based find equivalents in African folk-lore'. Between writing this and writing Mhudi, Plaatje had gone into the matter and found his prediction to be correct. The lion stories in Mhudi were one of the results.

Mhudi represents a fascinating and quite deliberate blending of cultural traditions on Plaatje's part, an early example - in terms of

---

48. Tsala, 10 July 1910; see also Plaatje's article, 'Natives and Eclipses', DFA, 8 April 1931.
49. For this theme, see especially S. Gray, 'Sources of the First Black South African Novel in English', Munger Africana Library Notes, December 1976. I believe that Gray underestimates, though, the extent to which Plaatje is deliberately exploiting the parallels between English and Tswana literary and oral culture.

the development of African literature - of the scope for creativity that lay in this interaction; and an implicit statement of the worth and value of each, and of the importance of rendering the one intelligible in the terms and language of the other. In this sense, Mhudi can be seen as the other side of the coin of Plaatje's English-into-Tswana translations. The one is - in part at least - the rendering of something of the richness of those elements of Tswana oral tradition into a language and form that make it available to an outside audience; the other is the rendering of the literary traditions of Shakespeare into the language and idioms of Tswana. And in each case Plaatje is creating a written work that draws upon the traditions of two cultures to create something with characteristics, qualities and a life of its own.

Yet there is considerably more to Mhudi than a cultural exercise of this kind. Mhudi is an examination of the historical genesis of many of the inequalities and injustices of twentieth-century South Africa. It is also an interpretation of nineteenth-century South African history from an African - and a Rolong - point of view, something that was necessary, as Plaatje explained in his Preface, since South African historical writing - as well as South African literature - had 'hitherto been almost exclusively European'. The Great Trek, for example, is seen by Plaatje from what was - in terms of the literature of the time - a novel perspective, less the beginning of South African history or the advance of civilisation, more the intrusion (nearly half-way through the book) of yet another tribe who only escape destruction at the hands of Mzilikazi through the succour and assistance that they are provided with by the Rolong at Thaba Nchu. Plaatje is concerned

also to counter the view that equated civilisation with the colour of one's skin, or Christianity with an observance of its outward forms. He responds not by portraying everything African as good, and everything white (Boer) as bad, but by emphasising the virtue of certain human and social qualities, regardless of colour, and by suggesting - in the story of friendship between Ra-Thaga and Phil-jay, and Mhudi and Annetjie - the means of overcoming the kind of racial attitudes against which he had fought for so long. It is a statement of Plaatje's belief in the importance of individual, moral change to the resolution of the problems of twentieth-century South Africa, of the 'settled system' which claimed as one of its victims Plaatje's own daughter, Olive, to whom the book is dedicated.

Mhudi is a novel of prophecy and warning, containing a implicit parallel between the response to the tyranny of Mzilikazi and that which would inevitably follow if the new rulers of South Africa failed to heed the warnings of a hundred years ago.[50] Yet Mhudi is also a novel of hope and inspiration, qualities embodied above all in the courage, the strength and the wisdom of Mhudi herself. A great survivor, Mhudi lives as a tribute to the women in Plaatje's own life - his wife, Elizabeth; his daughter, Olive; and to the women who gave him so much support and encouragement at the time that Mhudi was actually being written, Mrs. Solomon, Mrs. Unwin, the Colensos, Alice Werner. From this last group in particular Plaatje had come to appreciate the parallels between racial and sexual discrimination, and

---

50. For an elaboration of this theme, see especially T. Couzens' two Introductions, and his articles, 'Sol Plaatje's Mhudi', Journal of Commonwealth Literature, VII, No.1, June 1973; 'The Dark Side of the World: Sol Plaatje's Mhudi', English Studies in Africa, XIV, No.12, 1971.

from them, too, he had developed a belief that women, more than men, possessed the qualities from which there could emerge a more sane and a more just reordering of society. In the character of Mhudi such beliefs found their most eloquent expression, paralleled effectively in the novel by Umnandi, wife of Mzilikazi.

Mhudi deserves far more comprehensive treatment than is possible here. It was in many ways a remarkable literary production whose qualities, complexity and sophistication have only recently begun to be recognised and explored. At the time it was published, and for a long time after, there is scant evidence of much awareness of what the book was really about, or any notion that it should be seen as a contribution to South African literature as a whole. Its publication did draw forth a number of laudatory comments in the press and elsewhere, but these concerned themselves more with the significance of the fact that a black South African had written a novel than with much of an assessment of its literary qualities.[51] Others pointed to the contrast between the achievement of writing a novel and the status of the author. Plaatje's old friend, Vere Stent, for example, wrote that 'if Plaatje was a French subject they would fete him and make him a member of the Academie. In South Africa, he is only a Native, and may not even ride a tram in the capital of the Union'.[52] Another long-standing acquaintance, Sir David Harris, spoke in the same vein: 'A Native who can write a book of such exceptional merit', he said 'is capable of occupying high office in the Union'.[53] Imvo thought

---

51. E.g., Imvo, 26 May 1931; The Times, 31 August 1931; South African Outlook, 1 December 1930.
52. Our Heritage, July 1931, quoting Vere Stent in the Pretoria News.
53. DFA, 5 December 1930.

that Plaatje had 'essayed the realm of fiction' with 'no mean success', and drew a similar parallel between Plaatje's achievements and the lack of recognition accorded to him:

> It is an auspicious sign that some of the Bantu leaders find the time and inclination for striving to attain achievement in literature notwithstanding their political activity and anxiety to rescue their people from the state of oppression that must obsess them. Of such we have a noble example in Sol T. Plaatje of Kimberley, a man of middle age who sacrificed secure billets in his younger years for the sake of his race, and entered into a public life which, had he possessed a European encestry, would have been awarded with plutocratic emoluments. Instead, he has had to eke out a difficult living that must have tinged a less philosophical soul with justifiable acerbity, and perhaps, despair. The Bantu race of the future, long after his political efforts have been forgotten, will place him in the position of high esteem as a pioneer of literature.[54]

****

Mhudi was the only English language novel of Plaatje's that was published. It was not, however, all that he wrote, In 1978, there came to light a rough and incomplete 70-page MSS of Plaatje's on the history and traditions of the Baca tribe, whose descendants then - as now - lived in the Mount Frere district of the Eastern Cape.[55] Plaatje evidently toyed with several titles for this work, and listed several possibilities:

> 'A forty years romance in the life of the Ama-Baca, a South East African Tribe'
>
> 'With Other Peoples' Wives: a Romantic Epic of the Baca, a South East African Native Tribe'

54. Imvo, 26 May 1931.
55. Plaatje/Molema Papers (UNISA).

The Other Fellow's Wives) An Epic covering two
Other People's Wives) generations in the history of the Baca, a South East African Tribe

Like Mhudi, this MS is set in the period of the Mfecane in the early part of the nineteenth century. It relates the experiences of the great chief Madikane and his Baca people, who escape from Chaka's tyrannical rule and flee southwards to the Eastern Cape, establishing themselves as an independent nation and building themselves up through a policy of incorporating the wives and daughters of the tribes that they encountered, and defeated, on their way southwards. The period in which this all takes place - the 1820s and 1830s - is clearly one that fascinates Plaatje. For him it is the heroic age of South African history, the period in which so many of the loyalties, the traditions and the identities of the age in which he himself lived were forged. This was as true of the Xhosa and Mfengu as it was of the Tswana. Because of their involvement in a common historical process, many of the themes that were developed into these loyalties were similar, and it is thus not surprising that Mhudi and 'With Other People's Wives' have much in common too. In Plaatje's account of the experiences of the Rolong and the Baca the theme of resistance to tyranny is central, and in both omens and prophecy play a central role. In 'With Other People's Wives', the eclipse of the sun (which historically took place in 1824) coincides with the death and defeat of Madikane after he had led his people from Chaka's dominion, but its effects are turned to the advantage of the Baca by his son Ncapayai who is then able to defeat the new enemies of the Baca - the Tembu. At this point the MS comes abruptly to an end, having covered only one generation of the history of the Baca instead of the two that Plaatje seems to have intended.

Incomplete as it is, 'With Other People's Wives' raises a whole range of problems, most notably in relation to the question of the source material upon which Plaatje's account is based. From the form in which it is written the impression is that it is close to oral tradition, that Plaatje interposes himself as a narrator to a lesser extent than he does in Mhudi. This impression is strengthened by an important passage which looks as though it might have served as the basis of a preface of some kind, but which occurs after some eight pages:

> Why did I do it?
> Outside the Baca tribe my limited reading has not disclosed another people whose history within living memory furnished miracles that approximate to Moses and the Red Sea and the destruction of Senacherib's army. The more I investigated this history the prouder I felt that this South Africa of ours can show a tribe whose history includes epical topics paralleled only by some of those found in the annals of the ancient Israelites and I have often wondered why apart from occasional sketches by Mr. W.C. Scully epical incidents like these of the Baca escaped the notice of all able writers.
>
> So while many stories are written to provide readers with a thrill or a shock and incidents are recorded to fill a gap in some narrative this Book is the Expression of pride - race pride - in the fact that South Africa... [incomplete]

The important pharase to note - at the beginning of this passage - is Plaatje's reference to 'within living memory': when he talks of investigating Baca history, he was doing it at first hand, for there was simply no written source available to him upon which his account could have been based. W.C. Scully's writings may well have provided Plaatje with the impetus to investigate the subject further, but beyond brief comments there, in Bryant's Olden Times in Natal and Zululand, and in J.H. Soga's South-Eastern Bantu which appeared in 1930, there was no printed compilation of Baca traditions in existence, and

neither of the above books contain anything like the level of detail that is evident in Plaatje's account. And all are silent about that aspect of Baca history that Plaatje takes as absolutely central - their method of taking in the womenfolk of their defeated enemies and incorporating them into the tribe.[56]

In concerning himself with the history and traditions of a people other than the Rolong or Tswana generally, with whom Plaatje had always been so closely identified, 'With Other People's Wives' marks an important change of direction for Plaatje, an indication, perhaps, of the direction in which his future literary career might have gone if he had lived longer; an indication, too - as the above quoted passage would suggest - of his awareness of the need for black South Africans to take pride in the history of their people as a whole, not just that of their own tribe or people, and to tap the wealth of oral tradition in his country before it was too late.

56. J.H. Soga, The South-Eastern Bantu (Johannesburg, 1930); A.T. Bryant, Olden Times in Natal and Zululand (London, 1929); Scully's writings in the Baca - to which Plaatje refers - appear in the following: 'Fragments of Native History: the AmaBaca', The State, June 1909; By Veldt and Kopje (T.Fisher Unwin, 1907); Kafir Stories (T.Fisher Unwin, 1895); Further Reminiscences of a South African Pioneer (T.Fisher Unwin, 1913). I am most grateful to T. Couzens for the copies of the Scully material.

CHAPTER 11

FINAL YEARS AND RETROSPECT

Although now in his mid-fifties, Plaatje displayed few signs of slowing up in 1931 and the early part of 1932. If anything he drove himself harder than ever. In the press his voice continued to be heard on the political issues of the day, and with increasing frequency over the contentious orthography question; and he achieved success at last in his long campaign to bring secondary education to the Lyndhurst Road Native School, culmination of many years' campaigning over the issue.[1] Perhaps reconciled to another five years of Nationalist rule following the election of 1929, he devoted more and more of his time and energy to his native language and culture - to the dictionary, the new edition of the Proverbs, the Shakespearean translations, the Folk Tales, and in his efforts to arrange their publication. Lack of funds not only prevented him from publishing what he had already written, but also carrying out the further research that he believed to be so important. 'There is much that wants writing in the line of old Native Research', he wrote to Robert Moton in July 1931, 'but valuable data lie unprinted, of immense historical value; and I have no financial aid to visit such localities and the old people are fast dying out and being buried with the information which is thus being lost to posterity'.[2]

It was not just the lack of funds that Plaatje felt bitter about, for in this field as well Plaatje was becoming acutely conscious of the way in which a new breed of academics, the anthropologists, were

1. DFA, 29 May 1931.
2. Moton Papers, GC 160, Plaatje to Moton, 16 July 1931.

claiming for themselves the right to interpret yet another aspect of 'native life'. What had taken place in the field of politics and orthography was happening here as well. Plaatje's feelings were expressed very clearly in the same letter to Robert Moton as he explained his difficulties:

> I frequently appealed to Dr. Loram to use his influence in America for such financial aid. He would listen and question me so sympathetically - the net result was that after two years raising false hopes I read in the [papers] how he secured £250, from the Government, and £900 from the Carnegie Trust for a White Man to do in Zululand the Kind of Research that I have been explaining to him about my researches in Bechuanaland. I believe that if a White Man came along and stole my powder, he would have no difficulty in getting a £1,000 for half-cooked second hand information (often distorted) about Natives. Yet a couple of hundred sterling could bring a Sechuana dictionary and a volume of Native fables and Traditional Poems in the vernacular to the printing Press.[3]

Denied access to such funds, Plaatje was forced to look elsewhere for the money to print his books. The results seem to have been mixed. A public meeting was held in the recently opened Abantu-Batho Hall in Kimberley a month after he wrote to Robert Moton, but the treasurer of the committee could only report that the sum of £19 had been raised.[4] In May 1932, however, Plaatje was able to report a much larger contribution from Countess Labia, daughter of Sir J.B. Robinson. The chances of his work getting into print began at last to look much brighter.[5]

****

3. <u>Ibid</u>.
4. <u>DFA,</u> 11 August 1931.
5. <u>DFA,</u> 26 May 1932.

1931 was significant in Plaatje's life for two important new developments. Perhaps most unexpected of these was a six-week visit to the Belgian Congo in May and June. The idea arose when Plaatje noticed an advertisement for an international exhibition due to be held in Elizabethville, capital of the Belgian Congo. 'It struck me then', he wrote afterwards, 'that a visit up there and a study of race relationships on the spot might yield information of some value to the Native Welfare Associations in the South'. He put the proposal to the General Manager of the South African Railways, who 'obligingly concurred in the idea, and opened the way with a free press ticket to the Congo border, 2165 miles away'.[6] Plaatje departed from Cape Town - where he had been busy with IOTT matters and in leading a deputation to the Minister of Native Affairs about the Lyndhurst Road School - at the end of May. Taken in hand by the Belgian authorities after his arrival, Plaatje was highly impressed by what he saw. The policy of labour stabilisation on the coppermines contrasted sharply with the South African system of perpetuating migrant labour, and he considered the Belgian Congo's taxation and educational policies to be far more equitable than in his own country. The legal system of the Belgian Congo, as well, he considered to operate much more fairly than in South Africa: in the Congo, he thought, 'it would scarcely be possible to endure an unedifying spectacle like the Native Administration Act whereby the Union Parliament has legalised the sale of Native girls, like so many horses, and called the sale lobola'.[7] Nine years after he left the United States, Plaatje's visit to the Congo performed a similar function in providing a contemporary yardstick against which to judge South Africa.

6. Our Heritage, August/October 1932.
7. S.T. Plaatje, 'Taxation in the Belgian Congo', Umteteli, 23 January

On his way back Plaatje stopped briefly in Bulawayo, and addressed a gathering of Europeans in the town's Wesleyan Hall, the first (and probably the last) time that a white Rhodesian audience had given a hearing to a black South African. The meeting was very well attended (extra chairs had to be brought in), and fully reported in the local paper, the Bulawayo Chronicle. Plaatje was careful to steer clear of expressing any opinion on Rhodesian affairs, but denounced South Africa's 'native policies' and the legal discrimination in its statute books. In response to a question at the end of his address he took the opportunity to illustrate a few home truths. Thus his reply to a question asking his opinion on segregation:

> There was a time when the native thought segregation was a desirable thing - that was the segregation you read in Johnson's dictionary. But poor Johnson did not know what segregation means. Segregation in practice does not mean that the white people should have their own area of control, and the native theirs. No! it means that the native must live cheek by jowl with the white man, and the only segregation you have is between the native and his money; he must have no land or property. That is what we call segregation in action.[8]

On this occasion, as on so many others in the past, Plaatje dealt - without too much difficulty - with the typical response of any white South African (or Rhodesian) audience, putting forward the spectre of 'miscegenation': this was a point, Plaatje replied,

> upon which the native is very much misrepresented. The task of friends of the natives is rendered very difficult by some people who, whenever you suggest anything in the interests of the native, turn round and ask you whether you would like to see your daughter marry a Kaffir. That shows that some people in the world are no good for

8. Bulawayo Chronicle, 20 June 1931.

> anything except their sons-in-law. (Laughter.) I wish those people would understand that we natives have no intention of doing anything of the sort. We, too, have a proverb like your 'birds of a feather'. It is 'the leopards know each other by their spots'.[9]

Prior to visiting the Belgian Congo Plaatje had been involved in establishing a monthly journal called Our Heritage. It was this that occupied his attention after his return to Kimberley. The organ of the International Order of True Templars, Our Heritage had been started as a result of discussions and recommendations at the IOTT's five-yearly meeting (which Plaatje had attended) in Vrededorp in January 1931. The feeling had been that the movement badly needed a paper of its own, and a considerable amount of discussion had taken place. The R.W. Templar (J.W. Mushet), who offered to become its first editor, explained that 'the intention was to publish the paper in English, but that Afrikaans items and any items in Bantu languages would be published in these languages', and that its object was to 'keep us all in touch with each other but even more than that to spread our message through such a medium'. It was therefore 'resolved to start the paper as soon as arrangements could be made and to issue 3,000 copies to start with'.[10]

Plaatje's name had not been mentioned in connection with the editorship of the new journal, but when the first number appeared in June 1931 he had become (with J.W. Mushet) one of its two joint editors. From the content of the five issues of Our Heritage that have survived it is clear that of the two, Plaatje played the predominant role. Our Heritage contained articles by Plaatje in Afrikaans, English and Tswana. They were by no means confined to the Temperance Movement. The leading

9. Ibid.
10. Synopsis of Proceedings, IOTT Conference, Vrededorp, 6-8 January 1931.

article in the first issue, for example, was a review of political developments in South Africa since Union twenty-one years ago, and subsequent issues contained articles by Plaatje about his experiences in the Belgian Congo, on the orthography question, and general news items likely to be of particular interest to the Tswana.[11]

One should not doubt Plaatje's commitment to the cause of Temperance that Our Heritage espoused: there was probably no single issue that he felt more strongly about. He regarded alcoholism as a moral failing which his people had to overcome before they could make any progress politically or economically, before, indeed, they deserved to do so; and he had little time for arguments that focused attention upon the social and economic conditions that gave rise to the problem, for this way, he considered, was the way to inaction and despair. At the same time, it is evident that in Our Heritage Plaatje had at last found the forum for the expression of his views which he had sought since the demise of Tsala during the First World War; and that in the IOTT he had found an organisation that was capable and willing to support what he was doing without undue interference. Glad to have thus found the editorial freedom that he wanted, Plaatje hoped - as he wrote in a letter to Dr. DuBois in July 1931 - to turn Our Heritage into a fortnightly 'very soon'.[12]

---

11. The only extant file of Our Heritage is in the South African Library, Cape Town. Issues were as follows: Vol.1, No.1, June 1931; No.2, 2 July 1931; No.3, August/October 1931; No.4, November 1931; No.5, December 1931. It is unlikely that Charles Stewart, writing in the Cape Argus on 9 April 1932, was correct in stating that 'Sol T. Plaatje, the "black Shakespeare", publishes a monthly paper called "Our Heritage" at Kimberley in Sechuana'.
12. DuBois Papers, Plaatje to Dubois, 16 July 1931.

Our Heritage probably did not survive beyond December 1931, the date of the last extant issue. The goal of achieving an immediate circulation of 3,000 was a very ambitious one, and its prospects of achieving this - indeed of surviving at all - cannot have been improved by the severe economic depression that existed in South Africa at the time. But Plaatje nevertheless remained active in a number of other directions. In the early months of 1932 he contributed further to the daily and weekly press on the orthography question, and in February launched an attack on the Native Service Contract Bill, a new piece of legislation which aimed to tighten up still further the control of farmers over their labour.[13] In January there was another IOTT Conference, in April and May a further trip to Cape Town to try and persuade the government to do something about the high unemployment amongst Africans in Kimberley, a matter that had been made much worse by the recent decision of De Beers to close all their mines.[14] While Plaatje was in Cape Town he addressed a girls' high school (white) in Rondebosch, a suburb of the city. Three weeks later the matter was raised in the South African House of Assembly. Was it true that this had taken place, asked the Nationalist MP Harm Oost, and would the Minister of Education take steps 'to prevent a recurrence of such incidents'?[15] Plaatje's reactions were not recorded. At the end of the month he addressed another meeting, of his own people in Kimberley,

---

13. Umteteli, 13 February 1932; see also S.T. Plaatje, 'A White Man's Native Language', Umteteli, 2 April 1932.
14. Umteteli, 27 February 1932.
15. Debates of South African House of Assembly, 13 May 1932, 4602-3. The Minister declined to take any action on the grounds that the matter was one that fell under the provincial administration.

to report on how he had got on in Cape Town.[16] It was the last meeting that he ever addressed.

****

Plaatje died in Nancefield, Johannesburg, on 19 June 1932. He had gone to Johannesburg at the beginning of the month to try and arrange - so Dr. Molema recalled - the publication of several of his books, but caught influenza in the cold spell of weather that Johannesburg was then experiencing. He had insisted on fulfilling his engagements nevertheless, but on the way back to Nancefield he was taken more seriously ill. Dr. Xuma, the well-known African medical practitioner and a friend of Plaatje's, was called immediately. He drove Plaatje back to Nancefield, and diagnosed pneumonia. Plaatje's wife, Elizabeth, was summoned from Kimberley, and she came at once. Two days later, on a Sunday afternoon, Plaatje died. The news spread rapidly in Johannesburg's African townships, and the next day was announced in all the main daily newspapers.[17]

Although the end had come suddenly, for those who knew Plaatje the news came as a shock, but not a complete surprise. For it could have happened any time. Plaatje had contracted a serious heart ailment during the great influenza epidemic in 1918-19, and had been told by doctors that he had seen - in South Africa, England and

16. DFA, 26 May 1932.
17. S.M. Molema, 'Biography', 106-8.

America - that he could not expect to live long.[18] Working as hard as he did - on occasions up to 18 hours a day - it was remarkable that he had survived so long.

The funeral took place in Kimberley three days later. Isaiah Bud-M'belle, with Plaatje in Johannesburg when he died, had been urged to allow the funeral to take place there, but had refused, knowing that he would never be forgiven by the people of Kimberley.[19] Over a thousand people - of all races - attended the open air funeral service. On the way from Plaatje's home in Angel Street the funeral cortege stopped for a memorial service in the Lutheran church in No.3 Location, and listened to a tribute from Rev. Z.R. Mahabane, the Minister conducting the service. The sentiments he expressed were typical of many that followed at the graveside. 'A great patriot', Mahabane said,

> he devoted his great talents to the service of his people and country. In this service he did not spare himself, but worked day and night. He lived not for himself, but for others, and ultimately laid down his life on the altar of national interests.[20]

Further tributes followed in the press in the succeeding days and weeks; in England, The Times carried an obituary, written by one of his English friends.[21] Three years later a tombstone was erected on the site of his grave in Kimberley. It stands to this day. On it is inscribed the following:

I khutse Morolong: Modiredi wa Afrika

Rest in peace Morolong: Servant of Africa.

****

18. For Plaatje's recollections of this, see Cape Times, 4 June 1927. Plaatje had been, he recalled, 'convinced that the end was not far off'.
19. DFA, 23 June 1932.
20. Ibid.
21. The Times, 28 July 1932.

So ended the life of Sol T. Plaatje. By any standards, it had been - in its range of interests, activities and achievements - a remarkable one. His career is central to any proper understanding of South Africa's political history, the history of its press, and of its literature and literatures. When one considers the difficulties, the discouragement, the financial embarrassment that Plaatje faced for almost the whole of his adult life, the achievement assumes a new perspective. Nothing in Plaatje's life came easily. Few men have worked so hard, and with such persistence and determination, to serve the interests of their people in so many different directions. Occupying a critical role at the point of intersection of two very different societies, Plaatje's life was largely devoted to preserving the interests and integrity of the world from which he came in conditions and circumstances that would have deterred all but the most determined men. It was this that gave a unity and sense of purpose to Plaatje's many-sided life and career.

Plaatje undertook so much because he saw that there were so few other people capable of sharing these tasks with him, and because he possessed a view of society as an organic whole that did not predispose him to drawing sharp distinctions between different aspects of it. He saw the social, cultural, economic and political integrity of his people as interdependent, and he therefore concerned himself with all of these things. His 'one ambition', so Isaiah Bud-M'belle wrote, 'was to acquire such knowledge as would enable him to serve and lead his people in their transitional stage'.[22] It was an ambition that

---

22. I. Bud-M'belle, unpublished biography (Plaatje Papers, SOAS archives), 2.

took him far afield, and of necessity he was forced to adopt many different roles, to present himself in many different postures. He learnt to play these roles with great skill, humour and perception.[23] 'He had a way particularly his own', Bud-M'belle wrote, 'of approaching, interviewing, and placing his case before cabinet ministers of all different shades, and other highly placed authorities of English or Dutch extraction - a rare and valuable quality not possessed by other Bantu leaders';[24] and he was equally adept at presenting his case overseas, from audiences in the National Liberal Club in London to Liberty Hall, New York.

Yet Plaatje never disappeared into the roles that he played, or lost sight of the point and purpose of entering into them. Certainly what Shula Marks has termed 'the ambiguities of dependence' are as evident - at one level at least - in the career of Plaatje as they are in that of John Dube, the subject of her study: both men lived their lives within similar constraints of 'dependence' or powerlessness.[25] Plaatje's Brotherhood Movement, for example, cannot be understood without taking this into account; and one can point without difficulty to the many apparent contradictions that existed in Plaatje's speeches and behaviour. One is nevertheless struck by the underlying consistency and sense of purpose and direction in all that Plaatje did,

---

23. Plaatje took a particular pride in dealing with Boer politicians. He explained his approach in a letter to Robert Moton in 1924:

> There are places so hostile to British and Imperial rule that even General Smuts as Prime Minister never visited them for fear of being hissed off the platform for his loyalty to England; but I always manage to get by, taking care, however, to hold my hat in my hand, when to the bewilderment of local custom, I am let in by the front door.

Moton Papers, GC 109/810, Plaatje to Moton, 22 September 1924.

24. I. Bud-M'belle, unpublished biography, 14.
25. S. Marks, 'The Ambiguities of Dependence: John L. Dube of Natal', JSAS, Vol.1, No.2, (1976).

product of his commitment to the beliefs and values - in the Christian faith, in the value and integrity of his native culture, in the political ideas of Cape liberalism - that had taken shape before he entered public life as editor of Koranta ea Becoana in 1902.

It was Plaatje's strength - and perhaps ultimately his limitation as well - that he never departed from these beliefs; his strength, because they provided him with the moral purpose and a consistent set of principles with which to guide his actions and against which to judge subsequent developments in his country; his limitation - although it could not have been otherwise - because these beliefs, so firmly held, came to be overtaken by the great changes that took place in South Africa during his lifetime. They could not equip him for the leadership of his people in a period that saw - for very many of them - transformation from agricultural producers to urban proletariat. Plaatje never quite came to terms with the reality or permanency of these changes, or the new loyalties that they produced. He remained a man of the country, not the city. Like other spokesman who emerged in comparable periods of political, social, and economic change elsewhere, Plaatje viewed what he saw in his lifetime with the values and ideals of a rural past. Throughout his life one of his major preoccupations was with the land, the countryside. This he regarded as the 'natural environment' (a phrase he often used) of his people, and he disliked Johannesburg every bit as much William Cobbett - a man who viewed early nineteenth-century England from a similar perspective - disliked the London of his day. In Plaatje's view the urban African working class were essentially displaced rural cultivators: 'failing anything better', he told the Native Economic

Commission in 1931, 'the principle industrial centres should have a reserve where an overworked Native or miners' pthisis victime could mind his own goat and spend the evening of his life under his own vine or fig tree'.[26]

In reality Plaatje's strengths and limitations were different aspects of the same whole. From the depth of his roots in pre-capitalist society and his commitment to the ideals of Christianity and Cape liberalism emerged a political philosophy that came to be overtaken by forces over which he could, ultimately, exercise no control. At the same time they provided the inspiration for a life-time of ceaseless endeavour, and made possible a contribution in the field of literature for which Plaatje is perhaps best known today. Few people, indeed, explored more effectively and imaginatively the creative possibilities that lay in the coming together of different cultures. Yet to focus upon any one of Plaatje's achievements or activities is to run the risk of obscuring the essential unity of all that he did, or of distorting his own perceptions and priorities. Were Plaatje to return to South Africa today he would be less concerned with the state of his literary reputation than with the state of the country as a whole. Certainly he would have little difficulty in recognising present-day South Africa as the logical outcome of those ideas and policies that he had devoted the greater part of his life to fighting.

---

26. Evidence to Native Economic Commission (SAIRR Archives), 5292; see also p.5326 for an example of Plaatje's use of the term 'natural environment' ('...farm life is the Native's natural environment...').

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Manuscript
   A. Official
   B. Unofficial
   C. Privately Held

2. Official Publications

3. Newspapers and Periodicals

4. Articles and Unpublished Papers

5. Books and Pamphlets

6. Theses

7. Interviews

8. Miscellaneous

1. MANUSCRIPT

A. Official

Public Record Office
- CO 417, CO 551, CO 705.

Botswana National Archives
- Resident Commissioner's files;
- Education Department files.

Cape Archives
- Education Department;
- Attorney-General;
- Native Affairs.

Central Archives, Pretoria
- Transvaal: Secretary for Native Affairs
- Union of South Africa: Governor-General, Native Affairs, Department of Justice
- Johannesburg Municipal Archive.

Free State Archive Depot, Bloemfontein
- Land Registry; Native Affairs

Library of Parliament, Cape Town
- Manuscript Annexures

B. Unofficial

i) Britain

Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society Papers (Rhodes House, Oxford)
British and Foreign Bible Society Archives (Queen Victoria Street, London)
Cobden Unwin Papers (National Liberal Club Library, London)
Council for World Mission Archives (SOAS)
International Institute of African Languages and Cultures Archive (High Holborn, London)
Daniel Jones Papers (SOAS)
Methodist Missionary Society Archives (SOAS)
Migeod Papers (Royal Commonwealth Society Library, London)
Plaatje Papers (SOAS)
Smuts Papers (Cambridge University Library)
Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Archives (Tufton Street, Westminster, London)
Weil Papers (British Library)
Willoughby Papers (Selly Oak Colleges Library, Birmingham).

ii) South Africa

C.G.H. Bell Papers (Rhodes University Library, Grahamstown)
Colenso Collection (Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg)
De Beers Archives (Kimberley)
Hertzog Papers (Central Archives, Pretoria)
Kimberley City Council Archives (Kimberley)
Lestrade Papers (University of Cape Town)
Lovedale Collection (Rhodes University Library)

Merriman Papers (South African Library, Cape Town)
Molema/Plaatje Papers (UNISA, Pretoria)
Molema/Plaatje Papers (Wits University Library)
Molteno Family Papers (University of Cape Town)
H. Pim Papers (Wits University)
Rheinallt Jones Papers (Wits University)
Roberts Papers (Rhodes University Library)
Olive Schreiner Papers (South African Library)
W.P. Schreiner Papers (South African Library)
Solomon Family Papers (South African Library)
South African Institute of Race Relations Archives (SAIRR, Johannesburg)
Stent Papers (Wits University Library)
Xuma Papers (Wits University Library)

iii) United States

W.E.B. DuBois Papers (University of Massachusetts)
Hampton Institute Visitor's Book (Hampton, Virginia)
R.R. Moton Papers (Tuskegee Institute, Alabama)
National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People Archives (Library of Congress)
Booker T. Washington Papers (Library of Congress)
Carter G. Woodson Papers (Library of Congress)

iv) German Democratic Republic

Berlin Missionary Society Archives (Berlin)

C. Privately Held

Professor D.C. Cole (African Languages Department, Wits University)
Rev. J. Dire (Edenburg, O.F.S.)
Lovedale Press (Lovedale, South Africa)
Moading College (Botswana)
National Adult School Movement (London)
Mrs. Frieda Matthews (Gaborone, Botswana)
Mr. Johannes Plaatje (Kimberley)

2. OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS

Cape Colony: *Report of Commission of Enquiry into the Diamond Trade Act, 1887 (G3 1888)*

Cape Colony: *Reports of Superintendent-General of Education, 1880-1896*

Cape Colony: *Reports of General Manager of Telegraphs, 1879-1884*

Cape Colony: *Reports of Postmaster-General, 1879-1884*

Cape Colony: *Reports of General Manager, Posts and Telegraphs Department, 1885-1899*

Cape Colony: *Reports of Civil Service Commission, 1890-1903*

Cape Colony: *Government Notice, No.805,* 15 September 1890

Cape Colony: *Blue Books on Native Affairs, 1890-1909*

Great Britain: Colonial Office: *Report on the Native Land Question in Griqualand West,* by Lt.-Col. Charles Warren, June 1880 (Warren Report)

Great Britain: Parliamentary Papers: *Correspondence Relating to Dube/Botha. The Natives Land Act, 1913,* 1914, Cd.7508.

Great Britain: Parliamentary Papers: Hansard: *House of Commons Debates,* July 1919.

South Africa: *South African Native Affairs Commission. Report and Minutes of Evidence.* Cd.2399, 5 vols. 1905.

Union of South Africa: *Report from the Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Justice Bill* (Senate Select Committee 1-'12)

Union of South Africa: *Report of the Native Land Commission* (U.G. 25 '16)

Union of South Africa: *Report of the Native Affairs Commission for the Years 1925-1926* (U.G. 17, 1927).

Union of South Africa: *Report of the Native Affairs Commission for the Years 1927-1931* (U.G. 26, 1932)

Union of South Africa: *Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Union Native Council Bill, Coloured Persons Rights Bill, Representation of Natives in Parliament Bill, and the Natives Land (Amendment) Bill* (S.C. 10, '27)

Union of South Africa: *Report of the Select Committee on the Native Administration Bill, May 1927* (S.C.11, '27)

Union of South Africa: *House of Assembly Debates,* 13 May 1932, 4602-4603.

3. NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS

A.P.O. (Cape Town)
Abantu-Batho (Johannesburg)
Africa and Orient Review (London)
African Sentinel (London)
African Telegraph and Gold Coast Mirror (London)
African Times and Orient Review (London)
African World (London)
African World Annual (London)
Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Friend (London)
Bechuanaland News (Vryburg)
Berliner Missionsberichte (Berlin)
Brotherhood Journal (London)
Brotherhood Outlook (London)
Bulawayo Chronicle
Bantu World (Johannesburg)
The Buzzer (Kimberley)
Cape Argus (Cape Town)
Cape Times (Cape Town)
Chicago Broad Ax
Chicago Defender
Christian Commonwealth (London)
Christian Express/South African Outlook (Lovedale)
The Citizen (Kimberley)
The Clarion (Cape Town)
The Crisis (New York)
Daily Chronicle (London)
The Daylight (Toronto)
Daily Dispatch (East London)
Daily Independent (Kimberley)
Detroit News
Eastern Province Herald (Port Elizabeth)
Evening News (Portsmouth)
Falkirk Herald
The Friend (Bloemfontein)
The Friend (Society of Friends, London)
Forward (Glasgow)
Griqualand West Church Magazine (Kimberley)
Hampshire Telegraph and Post (Portsmouth)
Ikwesi le Afrika (Durban)
Ilanga lase Natal (Ohlange)
Imvo Zabantsundu (Kingwilliamstown and Johannesburg)
Ipepa lo Hlanga (Pietermaritzburg)
Izwi la Bantu (East London)
Kimberley Star
Koranta ea Becoana (Mafeking)
Labour Leader (London)
Leighton Buzzard Observer
Mafeking Mail
Manchester Guardian
Negro World (New York)
New Statesman (London)

New York Age
Northampton Daily Echo
Our Heritage (Cape Town)
The Outlook (London)
Portsmouth Times
Pose ea Becoana (?Mafeking)
Pretoria News
Quarterly Review of the Bloemfontein Mission (London)
Queenstown Daily Representative
Rand Daily Mail (Johannesburg)
South Africa (London)
South African Spectator (Cape Town)
South African Worker (Cape Town)
Southern Workman (Hampton, Virginia)
The Star (Johannesburg)
The State (London)
The Times (London)
Times Literary Supplement (London)
Transvaal Leader (Johannesburg)
Tsala ea Becoana (Kimberley)
Tsala ea Batho (Kimberley)
U.C.T. Quarterly (Cape Town)
Umteteli wa Bantu (Johannesburg)
Washington Bee
West Africa (London)
The Worker's Dreadnought (London)

4. ARTICLES AND UNPUBLISHED PAPERS

P. Bonner: 'The 1920 Black Mine-Workers' Strike: a Preliminary Account' (unpublished paper presented to South African Social History Workshop, CIAS, 1978).

J.M. Chirenje: 'Chief Sekgoma Letsholathebe II: Rebel or 20th century Tswana Nationalist', *Botswana Notes and Records*, Vol.3, 1971.

T. Couzens: 'The Dark Side of the World: Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi*', *English Studies in Africa (Johannesburg)*, XIV, 2 (1971).

" '"The Old Africa of a Boy's Dream": towards interpreting *Prester John*' (unpublished paper presented to African Studies seminar, Wits University, 1978).

" 'A Short History of the World (and other Black South African Newspapers)' (unpublished paper presented to African Studies seminar, Wits University, 1976).

" 'Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi*', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, VII, No.1, June 1973.

" and S. Gray: 'Printer's and Other Devils: the texts of Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi*', *Research in African Literature*, Vol.9, No.2, Fall, 1978.

R.H. Davis: 'John L. Dube: a South African Exponent of Booker T. Washington', *Journal of African Studies*, 2, 4, 1975-6.

" 'Elijah Makiwane and the Cape School Community', *African Affairs*, Vol.78, No.310, January 1979.

A.J. Dachs: 'Missionary Imperialism: the case of Bechuanaland', *Journal of African History*, XIII, 4, 1972.

C.M. Doke: Review of *Diposho-posho*, *Bantu Studies*, Vol.V, 1931.

" 'The Linguistic Situation in South Africa', *Africa*, Vol.1, 1928.

" 'A Preliminary Investigation into the State of the Native Languages of South Africa with Suggestions as to Research and Development', *Bantu Studies*, Vol.VIII, 1933.

I. Duffield: 'Africans in London, 1909-1921: leaders, activities, and associates' (unpublished paper, University of Edinburgh, 1973).

W. Eiselen: Review of *Dintshontsho tsa Bo-Juliuse Kesara*, *Bantu Studies*, Vol.XII, 1938.

S. Gray: 'Plaatje's Shakespeare', *English in Africa*, Vol.4, No.1, March 1977.

" 'Sources of the First Black South African Novel in English', *Munger Africana Library Notes*, 37, December 1976.

J.H. Harris: 'General Botha's Native Policy', *Journal of the African Society*, XVI, 1916.

" 'General Botha-Statesman', *Fortnightly Review*, CI, January-June 1917.

N. Hogan: 'The Posthumous Vindication of Zachariah Gquishela: some reflections on the politics of dependence at the Cape in the nineteenth century', Collected Seminar Papers of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Vol.7, 1976.

D. Jones: '"Mahoko a Becwana" - the second seTswana Newspaper', Botswana Notes and Records, Vol.4, 1972.

R. Jones: 'The Black Problem in South Africa', Nineteenth Century and After, Vol.57, January-June 1905.

P. Kallaway: 'Black Responses to an Industrialising Economy' (unpublished paper presented at Wits University Labour Conference, 1976).

" 'F.S. Malan, the Cape Liberal Tradition, and South African Politics, 1908-23', Journal of African History, XV, 1, 1974.

T. Keegan: 'Peasants, Capitalists, and Farm Labour: Class Formation in the Orange River Colony, 1902-1910' (unpublished seminar paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, SSA/77/1).

M. Legassick: 'British Hegemony and the Origins of Segregation in South Africa, 1901-1914' (unpublished seminar paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, COLR/73/8).

" 'The Making of South African Native Policy, 1903-23: the origins of segregation' (unpublished seminar paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1972).

" 'The Rise of Modern South African Liberalism: its assumptions and social base' (unpublished seminar paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, March 1972).

K. King: 'Africa Related Material in Black American Colleges and the Phelps Stokes Fund of New York', African Historical Studies, III, 2, 1970.

G.P. Lestrade: 'Some Remarks on the Practical Orthography of the South African Bantu Languages', Bantu Studies, Vol.III, 1927-9.

A. Lloyd James: 'The Practical Orthography of African Languages', Africa, Vol.1, 1928.

Sir F.D. Lugard: 'The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, Africa, Vol.1, No.1, January 1928.

S. Marks: 'The Ambiguities of Dependence: John L. Dube of Natal', Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol.1, No.2, 1976.

" 'Natal, the Zulu Royal Family, and the ideology of segregation', Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol.4, No.2, 1978.

" Review of P. Walshe, Rise of African Nationalism, Journal of African History, XIII, 4 (1972).

T. Ranger: 'Connections between "Primary Resistance" Movements and Modern Mass Nationalism in East and Central Africa. Part I', Journal of African History, IX, 3 (1968).

'A Practical Orthography for Tswana', Bantu Studies, Vol.XI, 1937.

P. Rich: 'African Politics and the Cape African Franchise, 1926-1936' (unpublished seminar paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, SSA/77/2).

" 'The agrarian counter-revolution in the Transvaal and the origins of segregation, 1902-1913' (unpublished paper, Wits University African Studies seminar, 1976).

C. Saunders: 'F.Z.S. Peregrino and the South African Spectator', Quarterly Review of the South African Library, 32 (3), March 1978.

W.C. Scully: 'Fragments of Native History: the Amabaca', The State, June 1909.

G.A. Shepperson: 'Notes on Negro American Influences on the Emergence of African Nationalism', Journal of African History, I, 2 (1960).

S. Trapido: 'Liberalism in the Cape in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', Collected Seminar Papers of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Vol.4, 1973.

" 'African Divisional Politics in the Cape Colony, 1884-1910', Journal of African History, IX, 1 (1968).

C. van Onselen: 'Randlords and Rotgut: an essay on the role of alcohol in the development of European imperialism and southern African capitalism', History Workshop, 2, 1976.

" 'South Africa's Lumpenproletariat Army: the Regiment of the Hills, 1890-1920', Collected Seminar Papers of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Vol.7, 1976.

" 'The Witches of Suburbia: Domestic Service on the Witwatersrand, 1890-1914', Collected Seminar Papers of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Vol.9, 1978.

R. Whitehead: 'John Harris and the Chartered Company, 1910-1923', Collected Seminar Papers, Centre for Southern African Studies, York University, 1974.

A. Werner: Review of S.T. Plaatje, Sechuana Proverbs, Journal of the African Society, 16, 1917.

" Review of S.T. Plaatje, A Sechuana Reader, Man, November 1917.

B.P. Willan: '"In aid of the most oppressed Negroes of the world": Sol T. Plaatje's visit to North America, 1921-1922' (unpublished paper presented at Conference on Linkages between Black America and South Africa, Howard University, May 1979).

B.P. Willan: 'The South African Native Labour Contigent, 1916-1918', Journal of African History, XIV, 1, 1978.

" 'Sol Plaatje, De Beers and an old tram shed: class relations and social control in a South African Town, 1918-1919', Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol.4, No.2, 1978.

" 'The Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society and the South African Natives' Land Act of 1913', Journal of African History, Vol.20, No.1, 1979.

" (with T. Couzens) 'Sol T. Plaatje: an Introduction', English in Africa, Vol.3, No.2, September 1976.

A. Young: 'British Policy and Attitudes towards the Treatment of Africans in South Africa, 1919-1925', Collected Seminar Papers, University of York Centre for Southern African Studies, Vol.1, 1974.

5. BOOKS AND PAMPHLETS

D. Abercrombie: In Honour of Daniel Jones: Papers Contributed on the Occasion of his eightieth birthday (London, 1964).

P. Abrahams: Wild Conquest (London, 1951).

R. Allen: The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-1928 (Toronto, 1971).

P. Becker: Path of Blood: the Rise and Conquests of Mzilikazi, Founder of the Matebele (London, 1962).

" Rule of Fear: the Life and Times of Dingane, King of the Zulu (London, 1964)

M. Benson: The African Patriots: the story of the African National Congress (London, 1963).

C.T. Binns: The Life and Death of Cetshwayo (London, 1963).

P.L. Breutz: The Tribes of the Mafeking District (Pretoria, 1955).

A.J. Bronstein et al (eds.) A Biographical Dictionary of the Phonetic Sciences (New York, 1977).

E.A. Brookes: The History of Native Policy from 1830 to the Present Day (Pretoria, 1927).

J.T. Brown: Setswana English Dictionary (Gaborone, 1973)

J. Bryce: Impressions of South Africa (London, 1899).

A.T. Bryant: Olden Times in Zululand and Natal (London, 1929).

I. Bud-M'Belle: Kafir Scholars Companion (Lovedale, 1903).

M. Channock: Unconsummated Union (Manchester, 1977).

J.M. Chirenje: Chief Kgama and his Times (London, 1978).

J.H. Clarke: Harlem: a community in transition (New York, 1964).

D.T. Cole: An Introduction to Tswana Grammar (London, 1955).

J. Comaroff (ed.): The Boer War Diary of Sol. T. Plaatje (London, 1973).

R.L. Cope (ed.): The Journals of the Rev. T.L. Hodgson, Missionary to the Seleka Rolong and the Griquas, 1821-1831 (Johannesburg, 1977).

A.S. Cripps: An Africa for Africans (London, 1927).

B. Cronon: Black Moses: the story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Assosiation (Madison, 1955).

T.R.H. Davenport: South Africa: a Modern History (London, 1977).

Dictionary of South African Biography (Vols. 1-3, Cape Town, 1972-)

J. DuPlessis: A History of Christian Missions in South Africa (London, 1911).

M. Evans: Black and White in South-East Africa (London, 1910)

R. Finnegan: Oral Literature in Africa (London, 1970).

B. Gardiner: Mafeking: a Victorian Legend (London, 1966).

I. Geiss: The Pan-African Movement (London, 1974).

A.S. Gerard: Four African Literatures (London, 1971).

I. Gollancz (ed.): A Book of Homage to Shakespeare (London, 1916).

H.H. Gowda (ed.): Essays in African Literature (Mysore, 1978).

A.E.H. Gregory: Romance and Revolution: the story of the Brotherhood Movement (Sevenoaks, 1975).

W.D. Hammond Tooke: Bhaca Society (London, 1962).

" The Tribes of the Mount Frere District (Pretoria, 1956).

W.K. Hancock and J. van der Poel: Selections from the Smuts Papers 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1966).

L.R. Harlan: Booker T. Washington: the making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901 (London, 1972).

D. Hay et al: Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Society England (Harmondsworth, 1975).

C. Heywood: Aspects of South African Literature (London, 1976).

M. Jacobson: The Silas T. Molema and Solomon T. Plaatje Papers (Wits University Historical and Literary Papers, Johannesburg, 1978).

D.D.T. Jabavu: The Life of John Tengo Jabavu, Editor of 'Imvo Zabantsundu', 1884-1921 (London, 1922).

" The Influence of English on Bantu Literature (Lovedale, 1943).

D. Jones: The Pronunciation and Orthography of the Chindau Language (London, 1911).

" The Phoneme: its Nature and Use (Cambridge, 1950).

" The Tones of Sechuana Nouns (London, 1928).

" A Cantonese Phonetic Reader (London, 1912).

T. Karis and G. Carter (eds.): From Protest to Challenge: a Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964 (4 vols., Stanford, 1972-77).

C.F. Kellogg: N.A.A.C.P. : a history of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Baltimore, 1967).

D. Kidd: Kafir Socialism (London, 1908).

E.F. Kilpin (ed.): Cape of Good Hope Civil List, annual editions, 1891-1902.

K.J. King: Pan-Africanism and Education: a study of Race Philanthropy in the Southern States of America and East Africa (London, 1971).

H. Kuper: Sobhuza (London, 1978).

L. Kuper: An African Bourgeoisie (New Haven, 1965).

C. Lewis and G.E. Edwards: Historical Records of the Church of the Province of South Africa (London, 1934).

S. Marks: Reluctant Rebellion (London, 1970).

B. Matthews: World Brotherhood (London, 1920).

Z.K. Matthews: 'A Short History of the Tshidi Rolong', Fort Hare Papers, 1, 1945.

T. Mofolo: Chaka (Morija, 1925).

S.M. Molema: The Bantu - Past and Present (Edinburgh, 1920).

" Montshiwa: Barolong Chief and Patriot, 1815-1896 (Cape Town, 1966).

T.D. Mweli Skota: African Yearly Register (Johannesburg, 1930).

Minutes of the First non-European Conference (Kimberley), (Cape Town, 1927).

M. O'Rell: John Bull and Co. (London, 1894).

J.D. Omer Cooper: The Zulu Aftermath: a Nineteenth Century Revolution in Black Africa (London, 1966).

R.E. Philips: The Bantu in the City (Lovedale, 1938).

S.T. Plaatje: Mhudi (Lovedale, 1930); Quagga Press edition with introduction by T. Couzens (Johannesburg, 1975); Heinemann African Writers Series, with Introduction by T. Couzens (London, 1978).

" Native Life in South Africa (London, 1916); second edition (London, 1916); fifth edition (New York, 1921).

" Some of the Legal Disabilities suffered by the Native Population of the Union of South Africa and Imperial Responsibility (London, 1919).

" The Mote and the Beam (New York, 1921).

" Sechuana Proverbs with Literal Translations and their European Equivalents (London, 1916).

" Diposho-posho/Comedy of Errors (Morija, 1930).

" Dintshontsho tsa bo-Juliuse Kesara (ed. by D. Lestrade, Johannesburg, 1937).

" (with D. Jones) A Sechuana Reader (London, 1916).

R.K. Rasmussen: Mzilikazi of the Ndebele (London, 1977).

B. Roberts: Turbulent City (Cape Town, 1976).

R. Ross: Adam Kok's Griquas (London, 1976).

E. Roux: Time Longer than Rope (London, 1948).

P. Sanders: Moshoeshoe, Chief of the Sotho (London, 1975).

A. Sandilands: Introduction to Tswana (Tigerkloof, 1953).

C. Sanders (ed.): Black Leaders in Southern African History (London, 1979).

I. Schapera (ed.): Praise Poems of Tswana Chiefs (London, 1965).

" " The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa (London, 1937).

" The Tswana (London, 1953).

Synopsis of Proceedings of the Thirteenth Session of the Right Worthy True Temple of the Independent Order of True Templars held at Vrededorp, Johannesburg, 6-8 January 1931.

W.C. Scully: Further Reminiscences of a South African Pioneer (London, 1913).

" Kafir Stories (London, 1895).

" By veldt and kopje (London, 1907).

R.H.W. Shepherd and B.G. Paver: African Contrasts (London, 1947).

R.H.W. Shepherd: Lovedale and Literature for the Bantu (Lovedale, 1945).

" Lovedale, South Africa (Lovedale, n.d.)

G. Shepperson and T. Price: Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting, and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915 (Edinburgh, 1958).

A. Sillery: The Bechuanaland Protectorate (Cape Town, 1952).

H.J. and R.E. Simons: Class and Colour in South Africa (Harmondsworth, 1969).

E.W. Smith: Aggrey of Africa (London, 1929).

J.C. Smuts: Plans for a Better World (London, 1942)

J.H. Soga: The South-Eastern Bantu (Johannesburg, 1930).

W.E.G. Solomon: Saul Solomon: the Member for Cape Town (London, 1948).

South African Native National Congress: Resolutions and Address by J.L. Dube, SANNC, Pretoria, 16 February 1917.

J. Stewart: Lovedale Past and Present (Lovedale, 1887).

R.W. Strayer: The Making of Mission Communities in East Africa (London, 1978).

L. and D. Switzer: The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho: a descriptive bibliographic guide to African, Coloured, and Indian newspapers, newsletters, and Magazines, 1836-1976 (Boston, 1979).

C.M. Tatz: Shadow and Substance in South Africa (Pietermaritzburg, 1962).

E.P. Thompson: The Making of the English Working Class (Harmondsworth, 1968).

L.M. Thompson: Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, 1786-1870 (London, 1975).

" The Unification of South Africa, 1902-1910 (London, 1960).

A.P. Thornton: The Imperial Idea and its Enemies (London, 1966).

A.N. Tucker: Comparative Phonetics of the Suto-Chuana Group of Bantu Languages (London, 1929).

S.T. van der Horst: Native Labour in South Africa (Cape Town, 1942).

J.W. Tuffley: Grain from Galilee (London, 1935).

E.A. Walker: W.P. Schreiner: a South African (London, 1937).

" A History of Southern Africa (London, 1959).

P. Walshe: The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa (London, 1970).

H.T. Wangemann: Ein Reise-Jahr in Süd-Afrika (Berlin, 1868).

" Ein zweite Reisejahf in Süd-Afrika (Berlin, 1886).

P.L. Wickens: The Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (Cape Town, 1978).

R. Williams: The Country and the City (London, 1973).

" The Long Revolution (London, 1961).

R. Winks: The Blacks in Canada: a history (New Haven, 1971).

W.C. Willoughby: Race Problems in the New Africa (London, 1923).

F. Wilson and D. Perrot (eds.): Outlook on a Century (Lovedale, 1972).

M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds.): Oxford History of South Africa, Vol.1, South Africa to 1870 (London, 1969); Vol.2, South Africa, 1870 to 1966 (London, 1971).

M. Wright: German Missions in Tanganyika, 1891-1941 (Oxford, 1971).

R. Young: African Wastes Reclaimed, (London, 1902).

6. THESES

J. Comaroff, 'Competition for Office and Political Processes among the Barolong Boo Ratshidi of the South Africa-Botswana Borderland' (PhD, University of London, 1973).

R.H. Davis, 'Nineteenth Century African Education in the Cape Colony: a Historical Analysis' (PhD, University of Wisconsin, 1969).

D.R. Edgecombe, 'The influence of the Aborigines' Protection Society on British Policy towards Black Africans and Cape coloured affairs in South Africa, 1896-1910' (PhD, University of Cambridge, 1975).

N. Etherington, 'The Rise of the Kholwa in South East Africa' (PhD, Yale University, 1971).

D.D. Hansen, 'The Life and Work of Benjamin Tyamzashe, a Contemporary Xhosa Composer' (MMusic, Rhodes University, ?1968).

M. Legassick, 'The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the Missionaries, 1780-1840: the politics of a frontier zone' (PhD, UCLA, 1969).

W.G. Mills, 'The Role of the African clergy in the reorientation of Xhosa Society to the Plural Society of the Cape Colony, 1850-1915', (PhD, UCLA, 1975).

L.D. Ngongco, 'Imvo Zabantsundu and Cape "Native Policy", 1884-1902' (MA, UNISA, 1973).

N. Parsons, 'Khama III, the Bamangwato, and the British, with special reference to 1895-1923' (PhD, Edinburgh University, 1973).

T. Tlou, 'A Political History of Northwestern Botswana to 1906' (PhD, University of Wisconsin, 1972).

S. Trapido, 'White Conflict and Non-White Participation in the Cape of Good Hope, 1853-1910' (PhD, University of London, 1970).

P. Warwick, 'African Societies and the South African War, 1899-1902' (PhD, University of York, 1978).

R. Whitehead, 'The Aborigines' Protection Society and the safeguarding of African interests in Rhodesia, 1889-1930' (PhD, Oxford University, 1975).

B.P. Willan, 'African Responses to European Rule in the Transvaal, 1900-1908' (MA, SOAS, 1972).

7. INTERVIEWS

Carried out 1976-78

Mrs. Martha Bokako (Thaba Nchu)
Lord Fenner Brockway (London)
Rev. J. Dire (Edenburg)
Rev. J. Jolobe (New Brighton)
Mr. John Kemm (Kimberley)
Mr. Simon Lekhele (London)
Mr. Paul Mahabane (Thaba Mchu)
Mr. Rex Molema (Mafeking)
Dr. J. Moroka (Thaba Nchu)
Mr. H. Selby Msimang (Edendale)
Mr. Johannes Plaatje (Kimberley)
Mr. Joseph Plaatje (Kimberley)
Mrs. Mary Plaatje (Natalspruit)
Mr. K. Roberts (Cape Town)
Miss D. Solomon (Cape Town)
Mr. T.D. Mweli Skota (Pimville)
Professor A. Tucker (Sevenoaks)
Mr. B. Tyamzashe (Kingwilliamstown)
Miss E. Westphal (Johannesburg)
Mr. Michael Van Reenen (London)

8. MISCELLANEOUS

Silver Shield and Illuminated Address presented by the Rolong Chief and People to Ben Weil, Mafeking 1902 (Mafeking Museum).

3 Phonograph Records by S.T. Plaatje (recorded in London, 1923) EMI Record Archive, Hayes, Middlesex.

Gravestones, Pniel Mission Station.