

FROM WARRIORS TO WAGE-SLAVES

The Fate of the Zulu People since 1879

by Dick Cloete

Ten years after the British invasion in 1879 the Zulu State no longer existed. Territory had been lost to the Boers of the New Republic, which was joined to the Transvaal in 1887 and returned to Natal in 1903 to constitute the northwestern districts of Vryheid and Utrecht. The Zulu population of this area, more than 4 000 square miles in extent, were reduced to the status of labourers or squatters on white-owned farms, and have never regained possession of this land. The rest of Zululand had been placed under a protectorate by the Imperial government in 1887 following the destructive civil war of the early 1880s.

The indigenous mode of production which had supported the Zulu people and ensured the reproduction of their society had been shattered. The centralised administrative structure had been destroyed, and years of civil war had intensified hostilities between various factions within the nation, thus creating a political situation which was to hinder co-ordinated Zulu action in the future.

During the civil war factional leaders had followed a deliberate policy of denying their enemies access to their fields. Unable to plant crops, people were faced with starvation. Consequently there was a steady increase in migrant labourers from the area. This development was regarded with approval by the Natal colonists, who had long been jealous of the self-sufficiency of the Zulu economy which denied them a source of labour. To encourage the trend a hut tax was introduced, following the extension of a British protectorate over the area in an attempt to ensure that wage labour would become a long-term necessity.

Rinderpest in the 1890s, followed by East Coast Fever in the early years of the 20th century, virtually wiped out what cattle were left to the Zulu and led to a further worsening of their economic position. While the combination of destructive warfare and natural disasters undoubtedly played a role in initiating migratory labour, it would be wrong to ascribe its continuance to such contingent circumstances. The Zulu state had passed through other periods of conflict and famine and emerged with its economy intact. The reasons why the people of the one-time Zulu state were to become permanently dependent on migratory labour lie in their incorporation into the economic life of the South African subcontinent.

The discovery and exploitation of mineral resources in the interior of South Africa opened the way for the rapid development of capitalist agriculture in Natal. In 1868 diamonds were discovered at Kimberley, but it was particularly the discovery of gold on the Rand in 1886 that spurred the development of agriculture. In 1895 the railway from Durban to the Rand was completed, and the accessibility of this market meant new opportunities for capitalist farming, with the railway also providing a way to an export market. After 1898 higher import tariffs encouraged the development of secondary industry in Natal while Durban began to grow as a port and industrial centre.

The white colonists of Natal had always suffered from a difficulty in obtaining labour on the conditions which they were prepared to offer. The problem was generally ascribed to the existence of reserves which gave blacks access to land and also to the practice called 'kaffir farming', that is, the renting out of land to blacks by absentee white land-owners. In addition a small but a significant number of blacks had bought land in Natal with money earned through farming and other activities such as transport riding. To whites, eager to profit from the new opportunities, the existence of blacks able to earn a living on their own land and even to pay the taxes designed to force them into wage labour was a continual irritation.

In 1897, when Zululand was annexed to Natal, the interests of the colonists demanded that land and labour should be forthcoming. A land commission was appointed and reported in 1904, opening 2 613 000 acres to purchase by white settlers and establishing reserves in the remaining 3 887 000 acres. The area opened to white settlement included 81 000 acres of the Nkandhla District and 27 000 acres at Nquthu. These two districts of southern Zululand were already densely populated. The New Republic had taken land in this area, and people had moved into the districts from the Boer territory and from Natal. After the Anglo-Zulu war loyal chiefs and their followers were settled there as a matter of policy to create a buffer zone. In the 1890s population pressure was already evidenced by the large number of boundary disputes and faction fights. Nevertheless, because it was prime cattle ranching territory, part of it was opened to white settlement.¹

The commission's recommendation that blacks be allowed to purchase land in the non-reserve areas was ignored by the Natal Government. Not only were blacks prohibited from purchasing land in these areas but once the land was bought by a white farmer they could not stay on as rent-paying tenants. Only if they worked for the white farmer would they be able to remain on the land. Combined with the loss of territory to the New Republic, this meant that the Zulu were left with about a third of the land originally contained in the Zulu kingdom. The major provisions of the 1913 Land Act, which prohibited black purchases of land in white areas and the renting of white land by blacks, had been anticipated by almost a decade in Zululand. With minor alterations, the apportionment of the land has remained the same up to the present.

The full effects of land shortage began to be felt by blacks in the 1920s as white sugar and cotton farmers took up land on a large scale on the Zululand coast, and sheep and wattle farmers did the same in the interior. The resulting evictions forced people to seek land under chiefs in the reserve areas. Population pressure grew not only as a result of this influx but also from natural increase. The results of this process were aptly described by a Durban trade unionist, Zulu Phungula, in 1948.

"In the location my grandfather had five wives and twenty young men. Let me mention one hut of the five. My father had four brothers. His elder brother married two wives, the second had four wives, my father had two, the other had two, and the fifth had three wives. I am not mentioning the fifteen half-brothers to him. Let us now look back to my father's living on the area where my grandfather lived. Is this not crowded because the land does not expand? Which place can be ploughed by the present generation?"²

The tribal land tenure system served to maintain what was increasingly becoming a myth, that the low level of black wages was justified by black access to the means of subsistence production. A recent survey of unemployed people in KwaZulu has shown that today two out of three have no access to subsistence agriculture to fall back on.³ The subdivision of land was further encouraged by the fact that the size of the stipends paid to chiefs was directly proportional to the number of their followers. This of course acted as a considerable incentive for chiefs to squeeze as many people as possible onto the land. In 1923 the Native Urban Areas Act was passed to prevent the

influx of black people into the towns in the white areas. It was followed in later years by other influx control measures. Combined with the lack of accommodation and other facilities in the towns, this ensured that much of the population increase would be confined to the rural areas and that work seekers would continue to migrate to the towns without their families.

During the period from 1936 to 1970 there was an almost threefold increase in the number of men who migrated from rural KwaZulu. In 1936 this represented one in every three men from the age group fifteen to sixty-four. By 1970 more than one out of every two men in this age group was absent. In Nkandhla and some other areas the proportion was as high as eight out of ten in 1970.⁴ The number of women migrants has also increased dramatically. A number of accounts attest to the destructive impact of migrant labour on family life. Studies have also shown that the low level of wages paid to black labour in South Africa, given the decline in, or in many cases the non-existence of, production in the subsistence sector, has led to high incidences of malnourishment, particularly amongst children, in the homelands.⁵

All these factors bear testimony to the failure of subsistence agriculture under the pressure of population growth. Agriculture in black areas was not helped by a policy of almost total neglect from a government heavily committed to the development and subsidisation of white agriculture. From 1910 to 1936 the state spent over 113 million pounds on white agriculture. This corresponds to about 1/8 of the agricultural sector's contribution to the gross national product.⁶ The traditional agriculture of the Zulu people was relatively unsophisticated and depended, in order to maintain its productivity, on people's ability to move onto new lands every few years. Once this was no longer possible it became imperative that new, intensive techniques be adopted if agriculture was not to suffer. Even if instruction in such techniques had been available — and to the vast majority of people it was not — the implementation of these techniques required inputs of labour and cash which were simply not available. Labour was unavailable because the most productive members of the society had become migrants who came home for only a few weeks a year. And cash was unavailable because the low wages paid to blacks meant that there was little money to invest in improved seed, fertiliser, and agricultural implements.

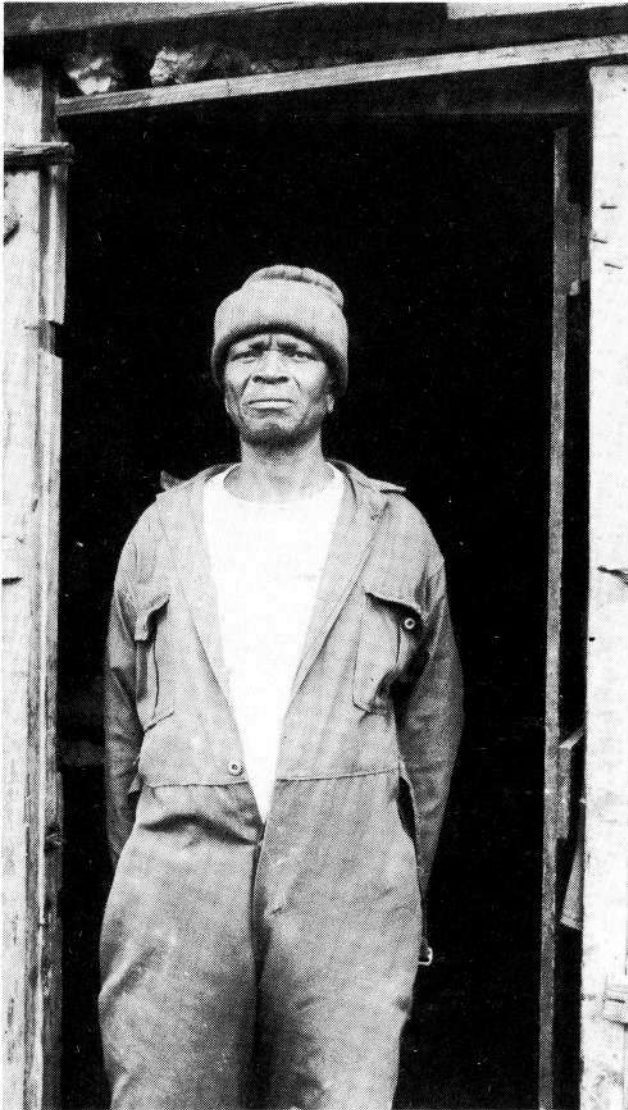
In 1956 the Tomlinson Commission tabled the most



The Zulu *izinduna* who received the British ultimatum of December 1878. From left to right in the front row are Vumandaba kaNteti Biyela, Muwundula kaNomansane, Gebula Kunene.

comprehensive plan yet devised for the development of the black areas. A precondition for the implementation of its recommendations for agriculture was the removal of about half the population from the land and the granting of freehold tenure to those people remaining. This the government refused to countenance, on the grounds that it 'would undermine the whole tribal structure' on which the administration and political control of these areas was based.⁷

An example of what happened when, despite this refusal, the government attempted to set up the economic units proposed by the commission, can be taken from the experience of the people in Nkomokazulu section of Usutu ward in Nongoma district. A preliminary land survey showed enough land to create 125 full economic units designed to yield a gross income of R122,00 p.a. However there were 365 families in the area. As a result only a token number of full economic units were allocated, the rest of the land being divided into smaller portions.⁸ Increases in agricultural production in recent years appear to be attributable to the small number of capitalist farmers, for instance those farming sugar cane, and to Bantu Investment Corporation projects, rather than to any increased productivity in the subsistence sector. In fact statistics in this sector record a decline in production.⁹ This underlines the continued dependence of black people on migratory labour. Attempts to decentralise industry and to provide jobs on the borders of the black areas and within them



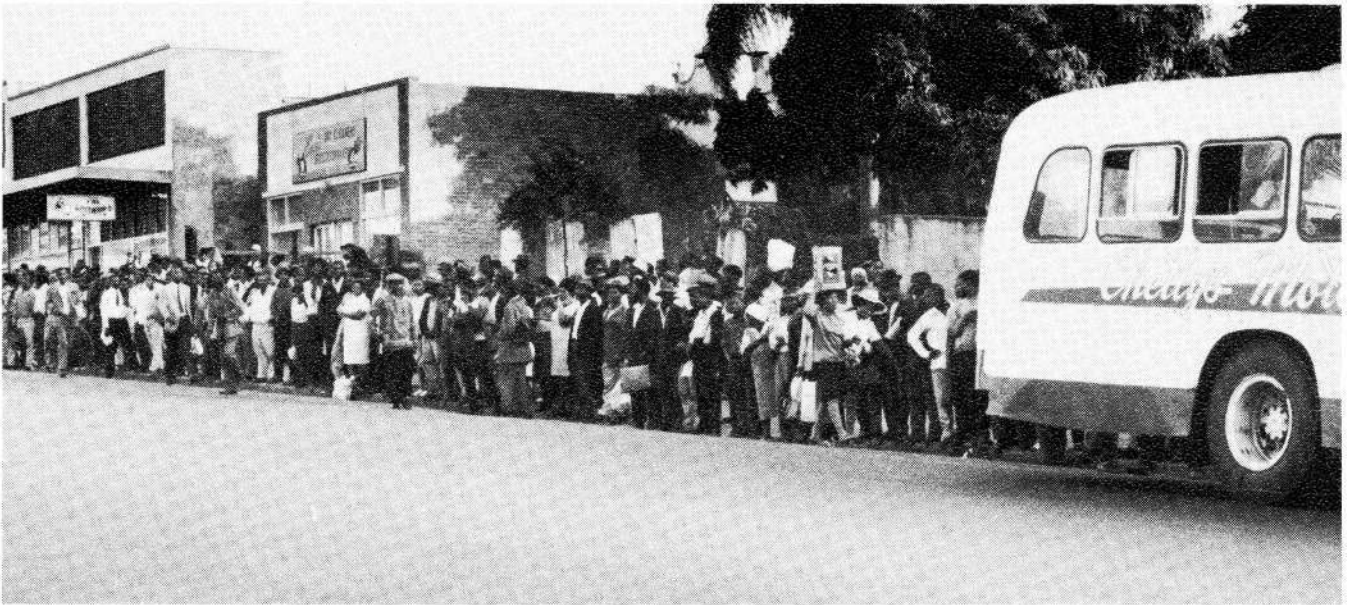
1979: This *umnumzane*, or family head, is, like many others, a migrant labourer who does not see his wife or children for months at a time.

have met with limited success. The growth of unemployment in South Africa as a whole, to the extent that there are now an estimated two million unemployed, means increased hardships for the people of Zululand.

What was the political response of the Zulu people to the developments outlined above? In the first place it must be borne in mind that the central political organs of the Zulu state had been dissolved in terms of the settlement of 1879. The British appointed thirteen chiefs to take over the administration. The stated intention was to restore the heirs to the lineages which had ruled before Shaka created a unified Zulu state. The intention was not rigidly adhered to, and the opportunity was taken of rewarding some individuals who had supported the British forces, such as John Dunn and Hamu. When in 1897, Zululand was annexed to Natal, the Natal Native Affairs Department followed a policy of maintaining the authority of the chiefs, on the basis that this was the least disruptive, and also the cheapest, way of administering the black people. The Shepstonian policy of divide-and-rule was followed, and the colonial government became involved in a series of succession disputes and in factional strife which led to a rapid splintering of the Zulu people. By 1906, on the eve of the Bambatha Rebellion, there were 83 different tribal units recognized in Zululand.

Following the rebellion, many chiefs who were implicated or suspected of sympathising with Bambatha were deposed and replaced by men more amenable to the government and its policies. Often they had segments of different lineage groups placed under them, consisting of people who had no traditional loyalty to them. In addition, as noted earlier, chiefs gave land to people evicted from other areas. The result was that in the eyes of the people under them the chiefs were not representative of hereditary lineages but owed their position to government appointment. In the eyes of the Natal and, later the Union governments, they were civil servants who could be deposed if they failed to fulfil their prescribed duties. They were paid stipends by the government, and to further impress on them the need for a compliant attitude these stipends were paid in two sections, with payment of one section being dependent on the good conduct of the chief. The result of this situation has been that the chiefs have not been in the forefront of attempts to secure redress of the political and economic grievances of their people.

The Zulu royal family was also placed in a different position. When Cetshwayo returned from exile in 1883 he was recognised as head only of the Usuthu faction. The same position was accorded Dinuzulu, his successor, by the Natal and Union governments. When Dinuzulu died in 1913, his son, Solomon, was chosen to succeed him, but at first the white government refused to recognize him even as chief of the Usuthu. He was finally recognized in 1916 but only after he had been summoned before Botha, the Prime Minister. An allowance of £300 p.a. was promised him, and he was told that this made him a government official and that henceforth his first loyalty should be to the government. Solomon spent his reign trying to secure recognition as paramount chief from the government. As might have been expected in this situation, he refrained from action which might hinder his suit. At the same time he was able to maintain fairly close relations with the conservative leaders of the African National Congress (ANC) in Natal at this time. Finally his successor, Cyprian, was recognized as Paramount in 1951 by the National Party Government. This paved their way for the introduction of the Bantu Authorities Act and later, in 1959, the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act. In his 1960 New Year message Cyprian endorsed the government policy of separate development for the homelands on the basis that it offered the Zulu people the best chance of achieving self-determination.



1979: Five-thirty. For the bosses it's sundowner time.

Given the subversion of the traditional leadership, the main vehicle of political protest against the white government policies was the ANC. Until his death in 1946 the Natal organisation was dominated by the Rev. John L. Dube. Along with most of the other early Congress leaders, Dube was a product of a mission education, in his case the American Zulu Mission, which imbued him with a strong belief in the virtues of self-help and education. He stated:

"We believe that education, conducted on the right lines and with a due regard to our needs and opportunities in life after the school period, is destined to become the most potent factor in the upliftment and betterment of the Native Races of South Africa."¹⁰

At the same time he believed that political vigilance was necessary. During his own political career Dube concentrated on the land issue, attempting to improve the share of land allotted to blacks and to promote agricultural development.

The tactics he adopted were those of petition and consultation, placing an exaggerated reliance on the ability of the more 'enlightened' members of the white society to sway the majority. Mass action did not have a place in his political strategy. This position reflected his own elitism and desire for the opening of opportunities in the existing social structure to educated blacks. He was largely out of touch with the needs of the developing black proletariat, both urban- and rural-based, for whom any economic basis for self-help no longer existed. Their future was now firmly situated in the industrial setting.

In the 1920s the Natal branch of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union gained considerable support in the rural areas of Zululand. Under the leadership of A. W. G. Champion it resorted to mass protests in Durban in the late 1920s. They were stopped through violent suppression by the state. Trade unions have continued to enjoy considerable support amongst the Zulu people and there have been sporadic strikes over the years. However, the extreme problems facing black trade unions have limited their effectiveness in improving wages and working conditions. Amongst these are the lack of recognition of black unions under the Industrial Conciliation Act, and the danger of criminal prosecution facing black strikers. In addition, the fact that most black workers are unskilled or semi-skilled makes it relatively easy to dismiss them, while this is facilitated by the existence of large numbers of unemployed from whose ranks replacements can be drawn.

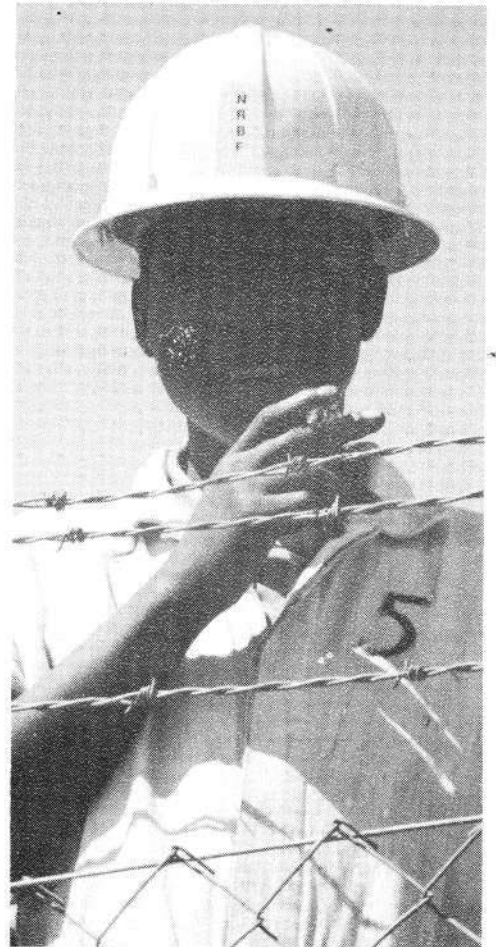
Following Dube's death Congress adopted a more activist approach, and moved towards confronting state power directly through mass civil disobedience in the defiance campaign of the 1950s. The focus on the pass laws which controlled influx to the towns was of more direct relevance to the situation of migratory labourers and the urban proletariat. The change in emphasis led to an estrangement between the Natal Congress, now led by Chief Albert Luthuli, and the Zulu Paramount. Initially Cyprian refused to condemn the defiance campaign, but under government pressure he came out in support of the segregation policy. The course which Congress had embarked on led to massive and violent state repression, culminating in the banning of Congress and associated organisations in the 1960s, forcing the organisation underground. Since that time political activity among the Zulu people has largely been channelled through the institutions imposed by the National Party government in terms of its homelands policies. □

NOTES

- 1 S. Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion: the 1906–8 Disturbances in Natal*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, p. 128.
- 2 D. Hemson, 'Dock workers, labour circulation, and class struggle in Durban, 1940–59', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 4, no. 1, October 1977.
- 3 C. Simkins, 'African unemployment in urban and rural South Africa: results of the rural survey', in *South African Unemployment: a Black Picture*, C. Simkins and C. Desmond, eds., DSRG and AIM, 1978, p. 85.
- 4 J. Nattrass, 'The migrant labour system and the underdevelopment of the African homelands: a case study of KwaZulu', unpublished paper, 1976, p. 3.
- 5 See for example L. Clarke and J. Ngobese, *Women Without Men: a Study of 150 Families in the Nqutu District of KwaZulu*, Institute for Black Research, Durban.
- 6 D. Kaplan, 'The state and economic development in South Africa', ASI paper, 1975, p. 8.
- 7 J. P. Niewenhuisen, 'Economic policy in the reserves since the Tomlinson Report', *S.A. Journal of Economics*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 3, 4, 13.
- 8 J. B. Mcl. Daniel, 'Recent trends and developments in Africa: rural resettlement schemes in African areas', *Journal for Geography*, vol. 3, no. 6, p. 646.
- 9 *KwaZulu Economic Review*, Benbo, 1975, pp. 34, 36, 40.
- 10 *Ilanga laseNatal*, 7 March 1919.
- 11 A. Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, London, 1962, p. 135.



1979: For many working-class families, state-enforced removals are part of 'normal' life.



1979: Portrait of a South African worker.



1979: 'Abelungu basibiza boJim, boJim' — the white people call us Jim.