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EDITORIAL

1879 AND 1979

This issue of Reality, appearing as it does a hundred years after the famous British defeat by the Zulu army at Isandlwana, is given over mainly to a series of articles on the origins, conduct and aftermath of the Anglo-Zulu war. The authors examine the history of the Zulu people during this period in the light of facts kept hidden or glossed over in the past. They place interpretations on the causes of that war and on what has been done to the Zulu nation in the century since Isandlwana.

The facts presented in these articles will be unpalatable to most white people and some of the conclusions reached are controversial. We hope their airing will help to provoke a discussion which will dispel some of the myths which history teachers have, no doubt most of them unwittingly, helped to sustain these hundred years. For, stripped of the frills, the story of the Zulu people in that period has been the story of the continuing exercise of alien power against them. The power which initially flowed from a superiority of arms was followed by the power of "the law", in whose making they had no say, and the power of an economy which would not leave them alone until they could no longer survive without it.

It seems clear that the principle that guided the British officials who instigated the war against Cetshwayo was that the end would justify the means. Well, it didn't. This same principle has been the guiding light of South Africa's present

rulers these past thirty years, although it is only recently that some of them have admitted it in public. We suspect that it will fail them too.

One person who saw quite clearly a hundred years ago that the end would **not** justify the means was Bishop Colenso. We include in this issue the text of the famous sermon he preached in Pietermaritzburg two months after Isandlwana. That sermon is relevant to the rest of our subject matter; its spirit is very relevant to us today.

No doubt in Pietermaritzburg in 1879 the Bishop's sermon struck a discordant note in settler and official ears, yet the material we publish here supports almost every point he made. That the note would be discordant Colenso must have known, but it didn't deter him from striking it. To settler and official ears his ministry in Natal must have sounded like one long succession of discordant notes, but not to Zulu ears, to whom he must have seemed their one true and constant white friend.

As we enter the year of the centenary of the Anglo-Zulu war the need for white voices as discordant to white ears in this day, as was Colenso's in his, has never been more evident — be they the voices of churchmen, judges, politicians, or just plain men-in-the-street. For it is probably on the hearing of such white voices by black ears that the future citizenship of white people in Southern Africa will depend. □

BEYOND THE WASHING OF THE SPEARS

by John Wright

This month sees the one hundredth anniversary of the British invasion of the Zulu kingdom in January 1879. It also sees the beginning of a series of well-publicized 'celebrations' organized by descendants of Natal's colonial settlers to commemorate what most of them would unquestioningly regard as the victory a century ago of British civilization over Zulu savagery. Though most of them will not consciously recognize it, one of the main functions of their coming together for these occasions will be communally to reaffirm this view, and thus to reinforce the ideology of white superiority which the white-skinned ruling classes of South Africa have long used, and continue to use, to justify their political repression of the country's black-skinned working classes.

The survival of this ideology, which is basic to the reproduction of the whole system of labour repression variously known as apartheid, or separate development, or plural development, demands as one of its preconditions the perversion of southern African history-writing. It demands that those elements of the southern African experience which do not fit in with the image of a beneficent white (read capitalist) leadership gradually civilizing (read proletarianizing) the black peoples under its authority should be eliminated from public consciousness. In the case of the Anglo-Zulu war this means among other things typecasting the Zulu as a primitive warrior people who were prevented only by the British army's intervention of 1879 from destroying the progressive colony of Natal. Savage and bloodthirsty though they were in war, the Zulu after all proved noble and honourable in defeat, and when their country was eventually annexed, first to Britain and then to Natal, settled down as trusted retainers of their new masters.

This, the popular text-book view of the war and its aftermath, does not concern itself over much with the realities of the causes of the war, nor with the realities of the Zulu experience in the hundred years since. It does not concern itself with the greed and hypocrisy of the British officials who manoeuvred the Zulu into war; it does not concern itself with the subsequent reduction of an independent people to the position of an impoverished peasantry and underpaid wage-labour force. It propagates rather, a view of Zulu history which had its origins far back in the history of European penetration into south-east Africa but which is still, for political reasons, preserved today.

European writing on the Zulu begins after 1824 with the diaries of the traders, Henry Francis Fynn and Nathaniel Isaacs, but it was not until the middle of the 19th century, when the colony of Natal was established, that literate Europeans were able to observe the Zulu at some leisure and to speculate at greater length on their pre-documentary

history. By the time of the Anglo-Zulu war, officials and chroniclers in Natal could feel that they knew most of what there was to know about the historical background of their opponents. The literary image of the Zulu that was emerging by this time was intimately linked with scientific opinion as to the origins and significance of race differences.

Strongly influenced by the ideas of Charles Darwin, the Victorian founding fathers of the discipline of anthropology had refined the medieval idea of a 'great chain of being' to produce the concept of the development of a hierarchy of races, with the Anglo-Saxon gentlemen at the pinnacle. It was firmly believed that the 'primitive' peoples at the bottom of the hierarchy represented earlier stages of Anglo-Saxon man's development, frozen, as it were, at the maximum level of attainment that their innate capabilities permitted. Thus by the comparative study of races the Anglo-Saxon could learn something of his own past. It also followed that once these 'primitives' had reached their maximum potential their societies assumed a changeless character, remaining in a fixed state, without history. Where the nature of these societies had clearly changed through time, the change was explained as the result of the external influence of a superior race.

Given the existence in the mid-19th century of this intellectual climate, it is not surprising that the British defeat at Isandlwana in 1879 came to the late Victorians as a great shock. It was not to be expected that a people comparatively low on the scale of races, and thus considerably limited in intellectual ability, could outwit the British aristocracy and defeat a British army. Although the blow was not sufficiently heavy to make an impression on the monolith of racist theory, the shock waves are preserved in the literature of the later 19th century. Earlier writers looked down from the top of the tree of life with patronizing restraint — primitive man was quaint in his carefree existence, but not dangerous. Thus Rider Haggard could evince a certain envy for the 'idyllic' life of the native, although at the same time seeing the white man's moral duty as being to uplift him. But later British authors clearly felt that their native subjects were shaking the lower branches of the tree. Thus in Buchan's *Prester John* the native is a sinister character who is a threat to white civilization; and in the emergent southern African historiography of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Theal, Cory, and other writers were at pains to demonstrate what they saw as the chaos of the African past and the lack of restraint in the African character. The effect was to convey the impression that danger from the native was ever-present, and that it was commendable and proper for the European settler to 'civilize' him (i.e. make him work).

In adopting scientific racism and its associated tenets, these writers were acting in accordance with the beliefs of their

age. Their approach is paralleled in the historiography of other areas which were reached by the tentacles of European colonialism. However, the historiography of southern Africa is given a twist of its own by the manner in which the racist approach of the 19th century has persisted well into the second half of the 20th. Thus in the case of recent Zulu historiography, even Donald Morris's highly regarded **The Washing of the Spears**, first published in 1965, contains evaluations reminiscent of those made by 19th-century commentators. 'The Bantu', the author writes, were 'an aimless people, happy and careless, with little sense of time and less of purpose'. The Anglo-Zulu war was brought about by the 'irresponsible power' of the Zulu, power which 'caused a considerable threat to the continued existence of the European civilization in its vicinity'. Similarly, C. T. Binns's **The Warrior People** reproduces the 19th-century view that the 'Zulu' originated from a group of slaves belonging to Jewish masters in Ancient Egypt, who were driven south by alien forces and whose sensibilities were damaged by the heathen hordes of central Africa. The evidence consists of a few superficial cultural similarities between the Zulu and the Hebrews. Other typical Victorian prejudices are present. For instance, we are told that the 'Bantu' have 'simple but retentive minds', and their potential is limited because of a lack of contact with 'more progressive peoples'. It is significant that rubbish such as this could be published in South Africa as recently as 1974, but one assumes that the publisher had an eye for a profitable market. It is presumably the same market which will sustain the film **Zulu Dawn** and other popularizations of 1979.

Since the late 1950s, however, scholars have been developing a view of southern African history which expressly rejects the racist assumptions that came into vogue in the later 19th century. From this more recent perspective, the Anglo-Zulu war can be seen as having been instrumental in setting in motion the historical processes that created the conditions of economic and political repression in which South Africa's five million Zulu people live today. It has also become clear that the way in which the history of the war has been presented in most of the literature has served to inform the ideology used today to maintain this repression.

It is fitting that in this anniversary month **Reality** should, from this newer perspective, address itself to an examination of how the popular western image of the Anglo-Zulu war came into being, of why the war occurred at all, and of how its effects are felt today. It is also fitting that the first of the articles that follows is a reprint of a sermon given two months after the outbreak of the war and the Zulu victory at Isandlwana by the then Bishop of Natal, the courageous and outspoken John William Colenso. Virtually alone among the white colonists, Colenso was prepared publicly to defend the Zulu cause and condemn the policies of the men who had instigated the war. But he was more than the champion of what he saw as a wronged people; in his impassioned address of a hundred years ago he was saying things about the causes and conduct of the war that historians have only recently again come to accept.

The range of the other articles published in this issue is not as comprehensive as was originally envisaged, but the themes which they cover remain the same. Jeff Guy reveals how the myths about the Anglo-Zulu war which have been

disseminated by generations of western writers were in the first instance deliberately manufactured by British politicians and military leaders anxious to further imperial policies on the success of which their own professional and personal reputations were closely dependent. As he emphasises, these myths were not of the Zulu's making, nor of the rank and file of the British army's — essentially they were the product of a capitalist class pursuing a policy of imperial expansion. Thus the war was the result, not of Zulu militarist aggression, as it is so often portrayed in the literature, but of deliberate provocation on the part of highly placed British officials. Thus the Zulu did not in fact lose the war, as apologists for the British officer caste would have it, but, by forcing the British to come to terms, were able to hold on to the political and economic independence which the British had gone to war to destroy.

At the same time, the deposition of the Zulu king, Cetshwayo, by the British, and the concomitant destruction of centralized political authority in the kingdom, began a process of internal feuding that weakened the Zulu to the point where, in the late 1880s, their enemies were able to partition the kingdom among themselves. Thus began the exploitation by alien peoples of Zulu land and labour that has continued to the present. The function of myth-making historians, Guy argues, has been to disguise the realities of the Zulu experience and so enable this pattern of exploitation to continue.

Peter Colenbrander's paper focusses on the immediate origins of the Anglo-Zulu war, and in particular on the role of the senior British official in southern Africa in the late 1870's one Sir Bartle Frere. Colenbrander examines in detail each of Frere's arguments that the war was provoked by Zulu aggression and intransigence, and finds them without substance. Instead, he cites as prime causes of the war Frere's policy of territorial expansionism, and his successful manoeuvring of his superiors into a position where they would have no option but to back the use of military measures against the Zulu. These conclusions are not new, but it seems that they cannot be argued too often.

Dick Cloete tackles perhaps the most difficult task of those faced by the authors of these papers — that of summarizing in a short space the main features of that almost totally neglected period of Zulu history, the period from the destructive civil war of the 1880s to the implementation of the National Party's 'homeland' policies in the 1960s. He has produced what is in many ways a pioneering piece of work. His two main themes are, first, the gradual disintegration of the Zulu agrarian economy under the impact first of mining and then of industrial and agricultural capitalism; and second, the search of the Zulu people for new forms of political expression, given the removal or subversion of their traditional leaders by successive white governments, and given the existence of violent state opposition to any kind of popular political movement.

This issue of **Reality** is published to encourage all South Africans to take a sober and critical look at the import of this year's commemorations of the war of 1879. □

Acknowledgement

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A SERMON OF 1879

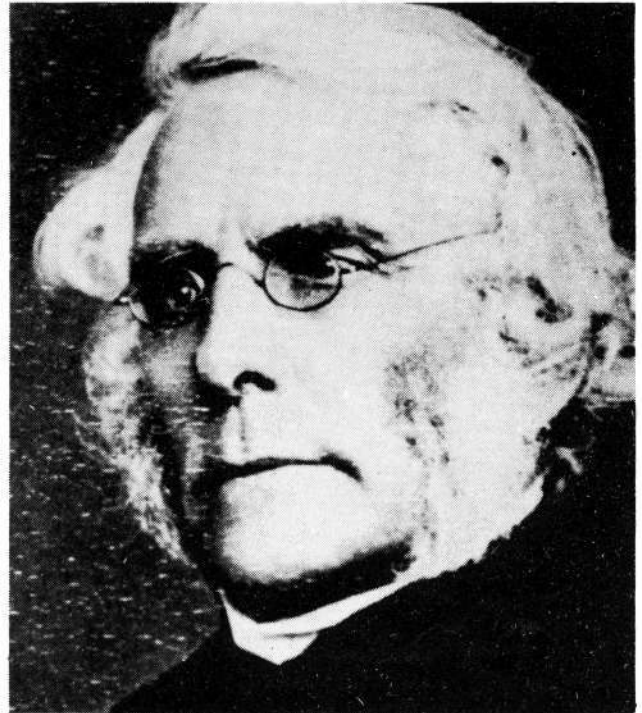
by J.W. COLENZO, BISHOP OF NATAL

(We reprint below the text of a sermon, entitled 'What doth the Lord require of us?', given by the Right Reverend J. W. Colenso, Bishop of Natal, at a memorial service in St. Peter's cathedral, Pietermaritzburg, in March 1879, two months after the British defeat at Isandlwana — editors.)

This day has been appointed by him who rules in the Queen's name over us 'to be a day set apart for the purposes of prayer and humiliation'; and, as a 'minister of religion,' I have been specially 'invited' by him, with 'others, Her Majesty's loving subjects,' to 'join in observing the same accordingly.'

Most heartily do I respond to the call of our Governor, who has spoken, I am sure, out of the fullness of his own heart. He has done, we believe, his utmost, as a Christian man, a lover of peace, a lover of justice to prevent by wise and friendly measures this dreadful war. And we know also that his hopes have been disappointed, and all his efforts to settle the matters in dispute amicably and righteously, keeping good faith, the faith of Englishmen, even with a savage King and People, have been made in vain. And, I doubt not, he feels deeply himself what he calls upon us to express before God, a sense of those sins which, as a people, we have committed, and to the consciousness of which our late disaster has roused us — a sense of 'our manifold transgressions,' not in our private, but in our public capacity. Truly, the 'great calamity which has befallen us as a Colony' has brought home these sins to us sharply, having filled many homes, both here and in England, with mourning and woe, and spread over us all a gloomy cloud of dread and anxiety, which, though for the moment lightened by the recent news from England, has by no means yet been cleared away.

Have we then been 'doing justly' in the past? What colonist doubts that what had led directly to this Zulu war, and thus to the late great disaster, had been the annexation of the Transvaal, by which, as the Boers complain, we came by stealth, 'as a thief in the night,' and deprived them of their rights, and took possession of their land? We all know that while the Secretary of State on April 23, 1877, was saying in his place in the House of Lords that 'as to the supposed threat of annexing the Transvaal, the language of the Special Commissioner had been greatly exaggerated,' it had already been annexed on April 12th, under authority issued months before by himself. No doubt, he had been beguiled by the semblance of great unanimity, of the general desire for annexation, among the Transvaal people; whereas the expression of such a desire, we know, came chiefly from Englishmen, most of them recent arrivals in the land, and not from the great body of old Dutch residents. He had also been, of course, very deeply impressed by the reports which had reached him about the state of the country, the weakness of the government, its empty exchequer, its failure in warlike measures against the natives, and the cruel outrages committed by individual Boers in some of these conflicts. But these outrages were reprobated by their own fellow-countrymen. And the friendly services, advice, and



John William Colenso, Bishop of Natal from 1853 to 1883.

aid, which were at first supposed, and were, in fact, professed to be offered, might have done much to straighten what was crooked, and strengthen what was weak, in the machinery of government, and rectify the other evils complained of. And thus would have been laid at the same time the foundation of a deep and lasting friendship between the two white peoples, which before long would have resulted — if not in a willing Union, yet, in all events a happy Confederation under the British flag, an event to be desired by all when the time is ripe for it. But no! we could not wait; Confederation was desired at once; it was the idol of the hour. It would have been too long to look for it to be brought about, in the ordinary course of things, by those gradual, though sure, processes of change which nature loves. And so the deed was done, and we sent some of our officials to help in the work, and twenty-five of our Mounted Police, a small body indeed in appearance, but quite enough of armed force for the purpose in view with a body of soldiers stationed within call on our northern frontier, and with the armies of England at their back; for we know full well, and the Boer knew, that, if one single shot had been fired in anger at the escort, the violent subjugation, and perhaps desolation, of their land would have surely and speedily followed.

So we annexed the Transvaal, and that act brought with it as its Nemesis the Zulu difficulty, with respect to the territory disputed with the Boers. Have we 'done justly' here? I assume what is stated in the published Award that the three English Commissioners have reported their opinion that the land in question south of the Pongola — almost identically what was claimed by the Zulus — belongs

of strict right to them and not to the Boers. I assume that our Commissioners conscientiously discharged their duty in the matter, heard and considered carefully all the evidence produced on both sides, and produced in the presence of the representatives of both, an essential requisite in such an enquiry, and came to the deliberate conclusion that the Transvaal claim had not been sustained, and that the Zulu claim was justified. But how have we been acting all along in respect of this matter? From the year 1861, in which the Boer claim was first made, and in which also the Zulus first complained to this Government of Boer encroachments, sixteen years were allowed to pass before we took any effectual steps to settle the dispute — we, the Dominant Power in South Africa. During all that time, with one exception, we quietly looked on, allowing these alleged encroachments upon the land of those, who were looking up to us for justice, to grow and be established, as if they were acknowledged rights, while the Zulu King and People were sending to our Government continually their complaints and protests, as shown by official documents. From year to year we allowed this question to smoulder on, the feelings of both peoples getting hotter and hotter, but we did not 'do justly', as from our commanding position we were bound to have done — we did not interfere in the interests of peace, and insist on settling equitably this difference between our white and black neighbours. And in 1876, the 15th year, our Secretary for Native Affairs reported as follows:— 'This Government has for years past invariably and incessantly urged upon Cetshwayo the necessity for preserving the peace, and so far with great success. But messages from the Zulu king are becoming more frequent and more urgent, and the replies he receives seem to him to be both temporising and evasive.'

In those fifteen years eighteen messages were sent by the Zulu King on this subject, the fourth of which, on July 5, 1869, nearly ten years ago, contained these words:—

'The Heads of the Zulu People have met in Council with their Chiefs, and unanimously resolved to appeal to the kind offices of the Government of Natal, to assist them to avert a state of things which otherwise appears inevitable.

'They beg the friendly intervention and arbitration of this Government between them and the Boer Government.

'They beg that the Lieutenant-Governor will send a Commission to confer with both sides, and decide, with the concurrence of the Zulus, what their future boundary shall be, and that this decision shall be definite and final as regards them.

'They beg that the Governor will take a strip of country, the length and breadth of which to be agreed upon between the Zulus and the Commissioners sent from Natal, so as to interfere in all its length between the Boers and the Zulus, and to be governed by the Colony of Natal, and form a portion of it, if thought desirable.

'The Zulu People earnestly pray that this arrangement may be carried out immediately; because they have been neighbours of Natal for so many years, separated only by a stream of water, and no question of boundary or other serious difficulty has arisen between them and the Government of Natal; they know that, where the boundary is fixed by agreement with the English, there it will remain.

'Panda, Cetshwayo, and all the Heads of the Zulu People assembled directed us to urge in the most earnest manner upon the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal the prayer we have stated.'

Our then Lieutenant-Governor, the late Mr Keate — all honour be to his memory! — on the receipt of this request, promised to take steps in the matter, and did so. For two years and a half a correspondence was carried on with the Boer Government on the subject; arbitration was agreed to, Lieutenant-Governor Keate himself to be the arbitrator; the

requisite papers were promised to be sent, the time for the arbitration was settled. But all came to nothing; the promised papers were never sent; the arbitration never took place; Lieutenant-Governor Keate's term of office came to an end in 1872; and on May 25, 1875, the Acting President issued a Proclamation annexing the land in dispute to the Transvaal!

And thus this matter, which might have been settled easily in 1861, was allowed to grow into very serious importance. Farm-houses were built and small townships founded within the Disputed Territory; and we — the Dominant Power — did nothing to check these proceedings, which were certain to embarrass greatly any future attempt to settle the dispute. At last, our present Governor, with a true Englishman's sense of right and justice, took the matter in hand, and at the end of 1877 proposed, and in due time appointed, the Boundary Commission, which reported in favour of the Zulus.

Did we even then 'do justly?' I must speak the truth this day before God, and honestly say that in my judgment we did not. Some time before the Commissioner's Report was made, the High Commissioner had said that we must be 'ready to defend ourselves against *further aggression*', that 'the delay caused' by the Commission 'would have *compensating advantages*,' that 'it appeared almost certain that serious complications must shortly arise with the Zulus, which *will necessitate active operations*' — when all the while the Zulus were only claiming south of the Pongolo, land which has now been declared to be 'of strict right' their own, and, north of it, land east of the Drakensberg, which may as justly be their own, but respecting which no inquiry has yet been made. And we know that, before the Award was given, large bodies of troops had been collected on the frontier, our volunteers called out, our native levies raised; and that Award, which might have been the herald of peace, was converted, by the demands coupled with it, into a declaration of war. Nay, the Award itself was, in my judgment, stripped of almost all its value for the Zulus by a clause of the Memorandum, reserving under British guarantee all private rights acquired under the Boer Government, which had granted out in farms, it is said, the whole land in question though it had no right to grant any of it. The Zulu King would have had no control over it; he would not have been able to send any of his people to live on it, or any of his cattle to graze on it, or even to assign places in it to any Zulus who might have elected to move from the Transvaal to the Zulu side of the boundary.

II

'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy?' Have we shown ourselves in the character of men who 'love mercy'? Truly it would have been a noble work to have used the power and influence of England for improving the social and moral condition of the Zulu people. Having first 'done justly' in respect of the Award, we should have had a vantage-ground from which much might have been done by peaceful means in this direction. A Resident might have been placed in Zululand, with the hearty consent of the King and People, who had asked more than once for such an officer to be appointed on the border, to keep the peace between them and the Boers. His presence would have had great effect in forwarding such changes in the Zulu system of government as we all desire, being known to be backed by the whole power of England, then mysterious, untried, and therefore more to be respected; and his influence would have had the additional weight of that traditionary reverence for the English nation, which has been handed down among the Zulus from Chaka's time. Such changes usually, as the High Commissioner has said, 'like all great revolutions, require time and patience'. But even if, instead of waiting for the gradual improvement of the people, as wise men would do, we determined to enforce them at once, there was a way of

doing this which at one time indeed was talked of, as if it had been really contemplated, viz, by advancing into the country slowly and gradually, entrenching at short stages, neither killing people nor plundering cattle, but repeating our demands from time to time, showing thus that we had only the welfare of the Zulus at heart, that we are Christian men, who loved justice and mercy, and only wished to bring about reforms which we knew to be good. Of course, if we took such a work in hand at all, we were bound not to heed any additional expenses such delay would entail, which, in point of fact, would have been as nothing to that which must now be incurred. The success, however, of such an experiment would, obviously, have greatly depended on our receiving daily the surrender of Chiefs and people wishing to shake off the yoke of the Zulu King and coming to seek our protection. And of such surrenders, so confidently expected at one time, we have seen as yet no sign whatever.

I repeat the question, Wherein, in our invasion of Zululand, have we shown that we are men who 'love mercy'? Did we not lay upon the people heavily, from the very moment we crossed their border, the terrible scourge of war? Have we not killed already, it is said 5 000 human beings, and plundered 10 000 head of cattle? It is true that, in that dreadful disaster, on account of which we are this day humbling ourselves before God, we ourselves have lost very many precious lives, and widows and orphans, parents, brothers, sisters, friends, are mourning bitterly their sad bereavements. But are there no griefs — no relatives that mourn their dead — in Zululand? Have we not heard how the wail has gone up in all parts of the country for those who have bravely died — no gallant soldier, no generous colonist, will deny this — have bravely and nobly died in repelling the invader and fighting for their King and fatherland? And shall we kill 10 000 more to avenge the losses of that dreadful day? Will that restore to us those we have lost? Will that endear their memories more to us? Will that please the spirits of any true men, true sons of God, among the dead? Above all, will that please God, who 'requires of us' that we 'do justly' and 'love mercy'? Will such vengeance be anything else but loathsome and abominable in His sight, a pandering to one of the basest passions of our nature, bringing us Christians below the level of the heathen with whom we fight? Alas! that great English statesman could find no nobler word, at such a time as this, than to speak of 'wiping out the stain', if he really meant that the stain on our name was to be 'wiped out' with the blood of a brave and loyal people, who had done us no harm, nor threatened to do us harm, before we invaded their land, — if he did not rather mean that our faults in the past should now, when our hands are made strong again, be redeemed with acts of true greatness, acts worthy of Englishmen, acts of Divine power, the just and merciful actions of Christian men.

III

'What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?'

Ah! 'to walk humbly with our God!' Our mother-country has wakened up at the cry of distress and terror which has reached her from Natal, when friends in England, and many here, were thinking but of a pleasant march, a military promenade, into Zululand. They were sending us vast reinforcements with all speed. To human eyes our power will be overwhelming, our victory triumphant and sure. But do we really believe in the Living God, who requires of us, if we would receive His blessing, 'to do justly, and to

love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him'? And have we left him out of our calculations, the Lord of the spirits of all flesh, to whom the Zulus belong, as well as the English? Let those, who will, bow down and worship their dumb idols, brute *force*, and proud *prestige*, and crafty *policy*. But we believe, I trust, in the Living God, and, if so, then we are sure that, not His blessing, but His judgment, will rest on us, if we are not just and merciful now, whatever we may have been in the past — *now*, when we have come into His Courts with a profession of sorrow for the wrongs we have done, and with prayer 'that no further disaster be allowed to befall us, and that peace may be speedily restored.'

The Zulu King, it is well known, has sued at our hands for peace. It may be that he has done this, as some think, because his army has suffered much — because his counsels are divided — because he fears that some of his great chiefs will desert him — because he is laying some deep plot against us. But it may be, as I trust and believe, that he is sincere in his expression of grief for the present war, and the slaughter at Isandlwana. As far as I can read the obscure and evidently confused and incorrect reports of his message, which have appeared in the newspapers, he seems to say — 'This war is all a dreadful mistake — a horrible nightmare! Is it possible that I am fighting with my English Father, with whom I have lived all along in unbroken friendly intercourse? I have no wish whatever to do so. My young men did wrong in crossing at Rorke's Drift: I ordered them not to cross, and, when I struck, I struck only in self-defence, and as before, in my own and my father's time, so ever since that bloody day, the Zulus have never invaded Natal. As Englishmen, speak the word that no more blood be shed; let the war be brought to an end; and give me only such terms as I and my people can accept.'

I say that, with the very possibility of such feelings having impelled the Zulu King to send this message — and it closely agrees in tone with the last message which he sent before the Ultimatum was delivered — if we would 'walk humbly with God,' and put our trust in Him, and not in the God of force — we are bound to meet the Zulu King on the way, when he comes with a prayer for peace — to propose to him, from our higher and stronger position, such terms as it shall be within his power to accept — to show him that we Christians trust more in our strength Divine, as a just and merciful nation, than in mere military power — and, having done this, to leave the rest with God.

But if, after this solemn day, we will not do this — we, our kings and princes and prophets and priests — will not do what the Lord requires of us, will not 'do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with our God' — if we will go on killing and plundering those who have never seriously harmed us, or threatened to harm us, until we made war upon them — treating his message of peace with contempt and neglect, even with ridicule, ascribing it falsely to the promptings of men in our midst, judging unfairly and misrepresenting the Zulu King, both in the Colony and in words sent to England — if we will do these things — then indeed there will be reason to fear that some further great calamity may yet fall on us, and perhaps overwhelm us — by the assegai, famine, or pestilence — in what way we cannot tell, but so that we shall know the hand that smites us.

For 'Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord who exercise loving-kindness and judgment and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.' □

THE BRITISH INVASION OF ZULULAND: SOME THOUGHTS FOR THE CENTENARY YEAR

by Jeff Guy

It is now one hundred years since the British invaded the Zulu kingdom and the Zulu, by the effectiveness of their resistance, brought their name so dramatically before the world. Although the way had been prepared by travellers' accounts, and by the "intelligent Zulu" who had initiated Bishop Colenso's heretical writings, it was the destruction of the British camp at Isandlwana, the defence at Rorke's Drift, and the death of Louis Napoleon that spread the name Zulu and their reputation to all parts of the world and made them probably the best-known of Africa's peoples. To be the best-known does not of course mean the best-understood; indeed it can be argued that the enormous interest shown in the Zulu has created myths and misconceptions of such weight and density that they have smothered their subject and denied the outsider the opportunity of reaching a more objective understanding of the Zulu and their history.

The Zulu have meant many different things, to different peoples, at different times in their history. For some the word epitomises savagery; for others it is a symbol of black vigour and independence, and an inspiration and spur to revolt. For the British, both at home and abroad, the Zulu, once they had been defeated and were no longer seen as a threat, became the noblest of savages: bloodthirsty, but men of honour; the most fearsome of enemies but, once in their place, the most faithful of companions. Ideas like these can be found in the majority of books and films which have the Zulu as their theme, from the vivid outpourings of Rider Haggard's extraordinary imagination to the most recent attempts to capitalise on the public's apparently endless interest in what is called the Zulu War. It is in works on the war that the myths about the Zulu are best represented, and while not all of them are worthless, and one is fine military history¹, most of them are sad distortions, telling us far more about the writers and their audience than about their subject. They are stories set firmly in the traditions of imperial adventure: tales of reckless bravery, fought for civilization, Queen and country, in far-off lands against a barbaric foe. If some sympathy is shown for those whom the British attacked, their plight is usually dismissed with a rueful shrug; the cost of progress is often high, and one of the tragic ironies of history is the price which has to be paid in pursuing great ends.

However, one hundred years after the British invasion, we should be able to see these events more clearly. The war was not just a particularly dramatic episode in the imperial

past. It was a calculated attack, by the most powerful nation in the world, made to bring about certain changes in the social and political order in southern Africa. To carry this out solemn pledges were broken, and lies were propagated, by men who are still described as upright and true by historians. And they did not stop at betraying trust. They turned the British army into Zululand, letting loose on men, women and children thousands of professional soldiers, equipped with the weaponry of the industrial age. They caused the death of perhaps ten thousand people and brought chaos and suffering to the lives of hundreds of thousands of others, starting a process of subjugation and oppression which is with us today. For the majority of people who participated in the war, or were affected by it, the British invasion of Zululand in 1879 was not a glorious adventure, and the fact that it is still being portrayed as one is an indication of our failure to shake off the callous, racist myths of the imperial past.

I
In its most fundamental terms the Zulu kingdom was invaded to facilitate the advance of capitalist production in southern Africa; it is within this framework that we have to understand the individual motives and actions of the men who initiated the war. The originator was Lord Carnarvon, Secretary of State for the Colonies in Disraeli's Conservative government, and deviser of what is known in history books as the "Confederation Scheme". The origins of this scheme lay in the discovery of diamonds in the southern African interior at the end of the 1860s. This created a source of indigenous capital in the sub-continent, far greater than that hitherto provided by commercial farming and trade. Diggers moved in thousands to Griqualand West creating a new market and new demands, and at the same time exposing southern Africa's backwardness in levels of production for the market, in its systems of transport and communication, and the degree of political development needed for the control of its peoples. Furthermore the diamond fields attracted thousands of African labourers from all parts of southern Africa who exchanged their labour for wages, and also for firearms.

The movement of labour, the impact of the new demands on African societies, the spread of firearms, and the lack of control wielded by the employees, caused complex changes, the manifestations of which disturbed both the African societies and their white neighbours. At times this led to



A rare 19th-century photograph of Zulu soldiers in ceremonial dress.

violence as in the Langalibalele incident in Natal in 1873. Officials in London looked at the situation in southern Africa with concern. It seemed as if there was sufficient locally generated wealth to provide a sounder, more secure, system of government: however as long as the region was divided into different political systems there was no chance of bringing into being the overall control required for the development of southern Africa. By his confederation scheme Carnarvon hoped to break down the political divisions between the British colonies, Boer republics, and independent African states and communities. Once this was done, and the people of southern Africa brought under centralised control, it would be possible to build the infrastructure needed for the more effective exploitation of southern Africa's wealth.

Carnarvon met considerable opposition to his plans for confederation within southern Africa. The Cape felt that the sacrifices it would have to make for the other communities would be too great, and the Boer republics were reluctant to give up their independence. African leaders were not consulted. Carnarvon did find some local supporters however, and the most important of these was Theophilus Shepstone, Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal for the previous thirty years, and a man with a considerable reputation in London as an astute administrator with an unrivalled knowledge of southern Africa and its people.

A well-known British historian has written, in a book published recently, that Shepstone was "an attractive, courageous and knowledgeable man with a deep affection for, and understanding of, the Zulus"³ Conclusions such as these are drawn from the secondary material on South African history and reveal the extent to which South African historians have failed to distance themselves from their imperial past. If any one man was responsible for the destruction of the Zulu kingdom and the suffering of its

people then it was Somtsewu — the name by which Shepstone was known to the Zulu, and which does not mean "mighty hunter . . ." &c, &c, but is a Zulu/Sotho hybrid meaning "Father of Whiteness". Shepstone's vision of the future of the sub-continent was expansionist; he was driven by the conviction that the future of South Africa depended on the acquisition of the resources of the sub-continent by whites, and that they should be served by black labour. At the same time Shepstone was sufficiently aware of the realities of the situation to know that a frontal attack on the African way of life, and the appropriation of their land, was not possible. He therefore supported the idea of leaving Africans in possession of large tracts of land, but, by gradually usurping political control, diverting the surplus products and labour created in African societies to support colonial systems of government.

While he was Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal much of Shepstone's energy was expended in attempting to acquire African labour and African land for the colony. Thus the independent kingdom of the Zulu, which shared a common frontier with Natal, was of particular interest and concern. Not only did it have large amounts of land and labour, both of which lay out of reach of Natal, but it occupied territory between the Boer republic of the Transvaal and the sea, thereby cutting Natal off from the wealth of the African interior.

Unlike most southern African black communities the Zulu kingdom had, by the 1870s managed to retain its essential independence. The Zulu remained in possession of the core of the territory which Shaka had conquered at the beginning of the century. They had successfully resisted the attempts of settlers to seize their land, of missionaries to convert them, and of traders to change their economic life. As a result the labour of Zululand was expended within the kingdom and supported a population of perhaps 250 000

and an army of about 30 000 to defend their heritage.

The settler communities which virtually surrounded Zululand by the 1870s looked enviously at the resources which they were unable to appropriate, and, in spite of the kingdom's strength, its rulers were well aware that in the context of expanding settler colonialism their position was a precarious one. There were divisions within the kingdom which its neighbours were eager to exploit. On Zululand's north-western border the Boers were advancing, creating the tensions and disputes which had formed the prelude to so much suffering amongst the Zulu's African neighbours. Thus when the old king, Mpande died in 1872, his son and successor, Cetshwayo, asked for formal recognition from Theophilus Shepstone. The Secretary for Native Affairs was only too ready to take advantage of the invitation: it was sound policy to acquire a degree of influence over Natal's formidable neighbour, it would facilitate the movement of African labour through Zululand, and it might be used in Natal's quest for land and labour. Cetshwayo in turn believed that in gaining Natal's support for his succession he had acquired a useful diplomatic ally, especially in his border dispute with the Boers. In September 1873 Shepstone travelled to Zululand and formally recognised Cetshwayo as King of the Zulu.

In the following year Shepstone went to London to consult with the Colonial Office in the aftermath of the Langalibalele affair in Natal. Carnarvon was deeply concerned about southern African affairs and Shepstone's ideas, it has recently been argued,⁴ had a significant effect on his thinking and the subsequent development of the plan for Confederation. Two years later Carnarvon chose Shepstone to play a crucial part in the scheme when he was given the authority to annex the Transvaal to Britain, if he could count on Boer support.

In April 1877 Shepstone annexed the Transvaal and became its first administrator, and in so doing destroyed the diplomatic understanding he had reached with Cetshwayo. Whereas the Zulu had expected his support in their dispute with the Transvaal he had now "become a Boer" himself. Moreover Shepstone, urgently in need of Boer backing for the annexation, attempted to win this by persuading the Zulu to accept certain Boer claims to their land.

In October 1877 Shepstone travelled to the Zulu border for discussions on the boundary dispute. The Zulu delegation saw through Somtsewu immediately and accused him of treachery. In his fury and frustration Shepstone at first thought of marching his escort into Zululand, but then turned to less direct, but ultimately more effective methods, of bending the Zulu to his will. In his despatches he began to back Boer claims to the Zulu land, justifying his changed attitude on the grounds that he had discovered documents in the Transvaal previously unknown to him. Historians have as yet failed to find these documents. Then, as an official put it later, he turned his coat in a most "shameless" manner. He wrote of the imminent danger that the Zulu kingdom posed to the peace and prosperity of southern Africa.

"Had Cetywayo's thirty thousand warriors been in time changed to labourers working for wages, Zululand could have been a prosperous, peaceful country instead of what it now is, a source of perpetual danger to itself and its neighbours."

These warnings were eagerly accepted by the High Commissioner in southern Africa, Sir Bartle Frere. Frere had been appointed to implement the confederation scheme and was an imperial official of great experience. The political union of southern Africa was to be the crowning achievement of his career. With the Transvaal apparently out of the way it was clear to him that the Zulu, independent, self-sufficient, feared by their neighbours, were the most immediate obstacle to his plans.

To prepare the way for the removal of this obstacle Frere

began to write a series of public despatches in which he described the Zulu and their king in the most exaggerated and lurid terms. Shepstone's letters and despatches were of great assistance to Frere and he used them, together with information from colonial officials, traders and disappointed Zululand missionaries to demonstrate that there was an attempt being made in southern Africa to unite the forces of barbarism against those of progress: that many African leaders felt "that the time was come for them all to join to resist the flood of new ideas and ways which threatened to sweep away the idle sensuous Elysium of Kaffirland, such as Gaika and Chaka and Dingaan fought for and enjoyed". The answer to this threat lay in the extension of white authority: the African

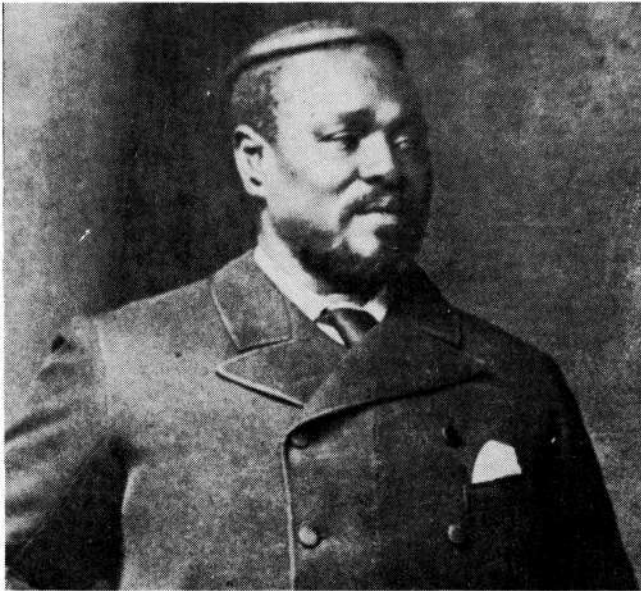
"must be **governed**, not neglected and left to follow their own devices. They are very teachable, and can be made to take in all the cost and much of the labour of their own government, but the impulse and the standards of right and wrong must be European."⁵

Frere chose to depict Cetshwayo as the leader of this atavistic movement. He was a "bloodthirsty tyrant" who took his uncle Shaka as a model, and with his army, that "celibate, man-slaying machine" as Frere was to describe it, he threatened the peace of the sub-continent. Making use of rumours from Zululand to support his charges he accused Cetshwayo of subjecting his people to brutal tyranny, and he turned minor border disputes into examples of provocation and defiance. In spite of mild protests from his superiors in London over what appeared to be an unnecessarily aggressive approach, and the warning that he should avoid war in south Africa at the moment, Frere moved troops to the Zulu border. Then, in December 1878, without obtaining authority from London, Frere presented the Zulu king with an ultimatum, the demands of which Cetshwayo could not accept without surrendering his sovereignty. On the morning of 11 January 1879 British troops, under the command of Lord Chelmsford, entered Zululand to enforce the demands of the ultimatum.

Again, it is an indication of the failure of South African historians that the well-known author of an extremely successful biography of Disraeli has written that, after the annexation of the Transvaal, for the Zulu

"an attack on the Boers meant war with the English, towards whom Cetewayo was on the whole quite well disposed. Why in that case, it might be asked, go to war at all? The answer is that the whole social structure of the Zulu state was geared to that purpose. Cetewayo had revived the traditional system whereby the youth of the nation was conscripted into strictly celibate regiments confined to great military homesteads in the area of the royal Kraal. Marriage was rigidly forbidden until the young warrior had washed his assegai in blood, as the saying went. The strongest of human instincts, therefore, was allied with natural bloodthirstiness in a determination to fight someone somewhere."⁶

To describe this passage as nonsense is being charitable and Lord Blake clearly knows more about the history of the Conservative party than about the natives. But his information is drawn from the sort of propaganda spread by the imperial officials before the invasion and which has still to disappear from the secondary material. Such views admittedly seem to be diminishing and it is perhaps now more common to adopt the view that the war was a necessary action, undertaken to give the Zulu their freedom and southern Africa security; or that the war was unfortunate, perhaps even a tragedy, but an example of the inevitable clash when two powerful but incompatible cultures meet. But now, in 1979, we can surely go further than this and ask why this specific clash took place; and this demands that we consider the fundamental changes which had taken place in southern Africa as a consequence



Cetshwayo kaMpande, king of the Zulu from 1872 to 1879: a photograph taken during his exile after the Anglo-Zulu war.

of the discovery of diamonds, and the vision that this raised in men's minds about the sub-continent's future. For this vision to be realised a greater degree of control, over a larger area, was necessary; only then could the region's resources be effectively exploited. The Zulu kingdom stood in the way of this and had to be removed, and its very success in withstanding change made it necessary to deploy thousands of British troops and mount an armed invasion.

To justify this, both to themselves and to those around them, the officials responsible had first to create a false image of the Zulu kingdom, to make a racial caricature of the Zulu king, to falsify the way of life of his people, and to distort their history. These means can be shown empirically to be based on falsification. Whether one can support or sympathize with the ends the officials had in view depends ultimately on one's own attitudes, to human society in general, and to South Africa in particular, and to the role South Africa's past has played in creating the present.

II

It would be difficult to find in the histories of the war any substantial passage which did not reveal either ethnocentric bias, misleading romanticisation, pro-British distortion, or racist attitudes. Historians tend to pass over the fact that the Zulu were defending themselves, their wives and children, and their way of life against an unprovoked attack; Zulu victories are too often characterised as massacres while the British inflict defeats on the enemy: the Zulu commit atrocities on their enemies, unlike the British when they destroy homesteads, shoot down thousands with ranked volley-firing, dismember their enemy at a distance with artillery, or "butcher the brutes" with their cavalry. There is a tendency to depict war in the exhilarating language of the chase. It is clear that this is how many officers taking part in the invasion saw it:

"We had a glorious go in, old boy, pig-sticking was a fool to it . . . With a tremendous shout of 'Death, Death!' we were on them. They tried to escape, but it was no use, we had them any how, no mercy or quarter from the 'Old Tots'."⁷

These sporting images which are so prevalent in the literature on the war can be ludicrous. For example Gerald French, in his defence of Lord Chelmsford published in 1939, explained Chelmsford's reaction to criticism after the Zulu victory at Isandlwana in the following terms:

"Lord Chelmsford withstood the shower of ignorant criticism and vituperation. Like most Thesigers (the family name) he was a cricketer, and long before his first experience of war had learnt to accept defeat with a good grace and to make no excuses. His critics, on the other hand, can hardly have been cricketers . . ."⁸

But expressions like this cannot just be laughed off, for they reflect the aristocratic/military ethos which pervades not only the sources but also the reconstructions of the invasion, and make it difficult to reach an understanding of the motives and the feelings of the majority of participants in the war. The bulk of the men who planned and prosecuted the war were drawn from the landed classes. They chose to depict the war as a game, the hunt writ large, and they influenced the whole image of war for the writers and film-makers who followed them. They are fascinated by this idealised picture of the British upper-class, eccentric, imperturbable, pursuing their way of life in the wilds of Zululand, but when necessary dashing and courageous.

However, the majority of men who fought and died in the war did not come from this particular social strata, and for them the British officer was not an attractive figure, and the war was no game. These were the Zulu whose country had been invaded, who had suffered terrible losses even in those battles in which they were victors. The words that Bishop Colenso preached after Isandlwana still have force:

" . . . we ourselves have lost very many precious lives, and widows and orphans, parents, brothers, sisters, friends are mourning bitterly their sad bereavements. But are there no griefs - no relatives that mourn their dead - in Zululand? Have we not heard how the wail has gone up in all parts of the country for those who have bravely . . . and nobly died in repelling the invader and fighting for their King and fatherland? And shall we kill 10 000 more to avenge the losses of that dreadful day?"⁹

And what of the British soldier in the ranks, the man whose life depended on the decisions made by those placed over him, and who in 1879 died too often as a result? Although a worthwhile attempt has recently been made to give him a voice¹⁰ the evidence we have about his feelings during the war is slight. But it seems unlikely that this private was expressing an isolated opinion when he wrote, the morning after the defence of Rorke's Drift,

" . . . I daresay the old Fool in command will make a great fuss over our two officers commanding our company in keeping the Zulu Buck back with the private soldier what will he get nothing only he may get the praise of the public . . ."¹¹

And what of the Sergeant who saw the battlefield at Isandlwana:

" . . . when we saw what has happened every man could not help crying to see so many of our poor comrades lying dead on the ground, which only a few hours before that we left them all well and hearty. You could not move a foot either way without treading on dead bodies. Oh, father, such a sight I never witnessed in my life before. I could not help crying to see how the poor fellows were massacred."¹²

Or Private Moss from Wales?

"Dear father, and sisters, and brothers, goodbye. We may never meet again. I repent the day I took the shilling. I have not seen a bed since I left England. We have only one blanket, and are out every night in the rain - no shelter. Would send you a letter before but have had no time, and now, you that are at home stay at home."¹³

I have been unable to find any adequate analysis of the social background of the British soldier at this time but it

can be assumed that he was drawn from the working-class or its fringes. One historian of the British army describes him as recruited "mostly from the very poorest and most ignorant"¹⁴ in Britain, and we know that large numbers of men in the Anglo-Zulu War came from Wales and others from the industrial areas. It seems to me that an important perspective of the war, as yet untouched by historians, is that it was fought by men drawn from the British proletariat on the one side, and on the other side by men fighting to save themselves from becoming members of that class in South Africa.

III

This continual viewing of the war through the eyes of the class that prosecuted it does more than close us off from the experiences of most of the participants. It also leads to severe misinterpretation about the war and its part in the history of South Africa. Generally speaking, accounts of the invasion concentrate on the formal battles: the Zulu victory at Isandlwana, the defence at Rorke's Drift, the British victory at Khambula, and the culmination of the war at Ulundi where the British army had its revenge, and in so doing put an end to the independent Zulu kingdom and the reign of the House of Shaka. I would argue that this approach is severely limited, and in fact reflects the interpretation forced on events at the time by politicians and by military leaders who were far more concerned about the protection of their positions and their reputations than in giving an accurate account of the events which took place.

As I have stated above, the framework in which the war must be seen is that of the needs of developing capitalism in southern Africa. This required a single political and administrative authority to supervise a system which allowed greater control, more efficient communication, and the free flow of labour on the sub-continent. Frere's position as the man appointed to oversee confederation was hampered early in 1878 when Lord Carnarvon resigned from the British government. His place was taken by Sir Michael Hicks Beach, a man who does not appear to have been as committed, well-informed or enthusiastic about confederation as its initiator. Furthermore, at this particular point in time the demands of foreign policy made it necessary to deploy British troops in other parts of the world. Hicks Beach therefore tried, not very firmly, to dissuade Frere from going to war with the Zulu in pursuit of confederation. Frere's response was to ignore Hicks Beach's warning, deprive the Colonial Office of information, and to take advantage of the length of time it took to communicate with London, hoping to present his superiors with a defeated Zululand before they were able to check him.

He was confident that he could do this. Shepstone had persuaded him that the Zulu kingdom was so divided and that opposition to Cetshwayo was so widespread that it "would fall apart when touched". And we can get an idea of how Frere planned to treat the conquered Zulu from his private correspondence. After the British army had been in Zululand for more than a week and there had been no sign of the Zulu army it seemed as if Shepstone had indeed been right and that Cetshwayo was unable to rally his people and mount a concerted defence. Frere wrote to Chelmsford:

"Acting as Glyn's and Wood's columns are now doing, you will virtually annex and settle the country, as you proceed, and greatly simplify proceedings when Cetshwayo is disposed of. I have no idea of recommending any revival of a paramount chief or king or of any separate Zulu nationality. An active and absolute Military Administrator, with a firm grasp of the country, by means of the pick of your native Regts. as Sepoys and Police, and supported by a backbone of H.M. Troops, will keep order among the chiefs who submit and obey, and will after putting down opposition govern directly, through headmen, the

subjects of those who resist — all as subjects of Queen Victoria . . . I am not reckoning my chickens before they are hatched, but merely sketching what should I think be our object in the, I trust now inevitable, event of the Zulus being relieved from the monster who has so long been an incubus to them as well as a terror to his neighbours . . ."¹⁵

The day after this letter was written the Zulu army attacked the British camp at Isandlwana killing nearly 1500 of its defenders and capturing a huge store of arms, ammunition and supplies. Chelmsford and the remainder of the column retired to Natal to await reinforcements.

The news of the defeat at Isandlwana reached London on February 11. Disraeli wrote that he was "greatly stricken". "It will change everything, reduce our Continental influence, and embarrass our finances." His parliamentary opponents took full advantage of the defeat. The Liberals were inclined to the view that the forces of capitalism should be allowed to develop without state interference, and that the aggressive pursuit of land, labour and markets was not only of doubtful morality but also drained the pockets of the British tax-payer. In the press and in parliament Disraeli's Conservative government came under attack for its "forward" policy which had led to the disaster at Isandlwana.

Now fully aware of the folly of having given Frere so much freedom his superiors brought him under control. The High Commissioner was publicly censured and he was formally reminded that he did not have "the authority either to accept a cession of territory or to proclaim the Queen's sovereignty over any part" of Zululand, and that Her Majesty's Government was "not prepared to sanction any further interference with the internal government of the country than may be necessary for securing the peace and safety of the adjacent colonies."¹⁶

Thus Frere's hopes of a quick, inexpensive war which would crush Zulu independence before the morality or the efficacy of the invasion could be questioned were destroyed on the battlefield of Isandlwana. Shepstone's plans to use imperial policy to gain Zulu land and labour for Natal and to establish a bridgehead for expansion into the African interior were also lost as a consequence of the effectiveness of the Zulu resistance. And moreover the confederation policy itself had suffered a grievous blow: as de Kiewiet put it, Isandlwana

"marks a definite turning point in British South African policy. A policy that in straining after confederation had not hesitated to annex an independent republic, and that would certainly have annexed Zululand and other territories, now turned about and began to slip down the arduous path it had steeply trodden, back again finally to abandonment and non-interference."¹⁷

Arguing in terms of the policy which had initiated the war and the intentions of the men who prosecuted it, it could be said that the Zulu defeated the British in 1879.

At the same time however the war had gained a momentum of its own; the Zulu by their victory at Isandlwana had ensured that the British would continue their onslaught against them. The defeat at Isandlwana had to be avenged. Britain's reputation as the dominant nation had to be asserted, at home to those who paid for the British army, and in southern Africa and beyond to those who lived under British control. The dreadful consequences of daring to effectively defend one's independence against the British army had to be publicly demonstrated. Furthermore, the British officers whose incompetence had led to Isandlwana had to try and restore their reputations by inflicting an unequivocal defeat on the Zulu.

In the conventional view all these aims were achieved at the battle of Ulundi on 4 July 1879 when the Zulu army attacked the British forces and is supposed to have suffered

such terrible losses that it never went into the field again. Ulundi is usually described in terms of a decisive battle between Africa's greatest army and the British redcoat, with the heirs of Shaka finally being taught where real power lay in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. I would argue that this interpretation of the significance of the battle of Ulundi is, once again, the consequence of depending too heavily and uncritically on sources derived from the men who initiated and led the war – the men who needed just such a victory to save their military and political reputations.

To appreciate this we must examine the situation faced by the military leaders on both sides at the end of June 1879, five months after Isandlwana and a few days before Ulundi. Cetshwayo, as leader of the Zulu army, was in an extremely difficult position. Firstly there were the terrible losses the Zulu had suffered in their engagements with the British, culminating in their attack on the northern column at Khambula in March when perhaps 2000 Zulu died. But as important a factor as these casualties in battle was the social disruption caused by the invasion. The Zulu kingdom did not possess a "standing army", organised to fight without seriously disrupting life in the kingdom. The mobilisation of the army caused confusion in the administration of the state, and disruption in the processes of production upon which life in the kingdom depended. The movement of tens of thousands of men within the kingdom added to the distress, for the Zulu army was still organised as a raiding force. Thus, while arrangements for feeding the army existed, they were insufficient to supply the army in the field, within the borders of the kingdom, for extended periods of time. The passage of the army through the kingdom caused suffering and deprivation amongst the Zulu homesteads which lay in the soldiers' path. By the time the Zulu attacked British positions the soldiers were often starving. The need to fight a defensive war on Zulu soil placed a severe strain on Zulu society as a whole.

Furthermore the fact that the Zulu soldiers dispersed to their homes after every engagement made it impossible for Cetshwayo to develop an effective strategy to use against the enemy. He wanted his men to avoid massed attacks on heavily defended British positions and instead to lay siege to the British forces and attack their extended supply lines. But this proved impossible because the Zulu army could not keep itself supplied in the field for the required length of time: the soldiers mounted precipitate attacks and then dispersed to their homesteads to regather their strength and protect their property – from British and Zulu forces.

Cetshwayo's decision to adopt a defensive strategy also severely limited the effectiveness of the Zulu army. The king had decided that he would be in a far stronger diplomatic position if, as non-aggressor in the war, he kept his troops within Zululand's borders. If, after Isandlwana, he had allowed the Zulu army to sweep Natal the effect would have been devastating. However, determined to demonstrate that he was the innocent party in the dispute, he kept his troops back, and allowed the British to regroup, bring in reinforcements, and attack him once again.

If the Zulu king had been able to harry British supply lines for extended periods the effect on the army would have been disastrous. For the British army was also suffering severe problems, over and above those they experienced on the battlefield. The essence of the British strategy consisted of marching large concentrations of heavily armed men into Zululand, in the hope that they would provoke a Zulu attack, when they would cut down the enemy with rifle and artillery fire. It seems to me that this strategy was badly conceived, for the British found it even more difficult to support their men in the field than the Zulu. The troops were kept supplied by waggon-trains and in the rainy season the crude tracks of Natal and Zululand broke down under the weight of the traffic. The grazing along the lines

of march was consumed and the draught animals died of exhaustion and disease. Local sources were unable to keep up with the demands the British made on their waggons and animals, and the troop movements slowed down, and the costs of the war soared. And as expenditure increased so did the political embarrassment of the Conservative government. For as Gladstone said, "It is very sad but so it is that in these guilty wars it is the business of **paying** which appears to be the most effective means of awakening the conscience."¹⁸

As the months passed the British government lost what confidence they had left in Frere and Chelmsford's ability to bring the war to a speedy close. In May both men were superseded by Sir Garnet Wolseley. Wolseley had the reputation of being an efficient and ruthless general, who could be depended upon to obey his political superiors and produce results. It was felt that he could be trusted to terminate this expensive, and politically dangerous, example of imperial ineptitude.

When the news of Wolseley's appointment reached him, Chelmsford realised that if he was to save the shreds of his military reputation he would have to defeat the Zulu before Wolseley arrived in Zululand and assumed direct command over the British troops. By the end of June Chelmsford had managed to move his force to the edge of the White Mfolozi valley and the royal homestead of Ulundi was some fifteen miles away. By this time Wolseley was approaching the Zululand coast. Chelmsford's supply line was dangerously extended but he cut himself off from his base and on the 4 July he marched a huge square of 5000 men onto the Mhlabathini plain where the royal homestead was built, and succeeded in provoking a Zulu attack. The intensity of the British fire drove the Zulu off and Chelmsford, unable to support his troops in the field any longer, began moving them back to Natal. There he resigned his command having avenged the defeat at Isandlwana and broken the Zulu power.

But was the battle of Ulundi the great military victory that it was made out to be? Clearly there were strong pressures on the British to make it appear as a crushing defeat of the Zulu, and there are suggestions that its significance has been exaggerated. Bishop Colenso suspected this at the time when he asked

"But was it a **political success** or any more than a bloody but barren victory? The burning of Ulundi and other kraals means nothing in Zulu eyes, as I hear



Theophilus Shepstone, Secretary for Native Affairs in Natal from 1845 to 1876, Administrator of the Transvaal from 1877 to 1880.

from the natives. And there is no clear evidence as yet that the loss of so many warriors . . . has broken the spirit of the natives."¹⁹

Sir Evelyn Wood, who was in the square at Ulundi and who had also seen the Zulu attack at Khambula, wrote that he "could not believe they would make so half-hearted an attack."²⁰ Estimates give the time the battle lasted as between 25 and 45 minutes. The riflemen fired an average of 6.4 rounds each. Even considering their numbers, and the support given by the Gatlings and artillery, this cannot be called a high rate of fire, and yet no Zulu reached the square. The number of casualties on the Zulu side is usually given as 1500, based it would seem on Chelmsford's "estimate" as there was no body-count after the battle. Wolseley said he did not believe the number exceeded 400. Pockets of resistance continued long after Ulundi. Unable to persuade the Zulu to formally surrender Wolseley had to re-occupy Ulundi in August. Cetshwayo was only captured at the end of August and while he was in captivity he smuggled out a message ordering certain Zulu groups to lay down their arms. There were skirmishes between Zulu and British troops through August into September.

It seems to me that a far more significant factor in the termination of the war than the battle of Ulundi was the message Wolseley spread through Zululand when he arrived in the country: the Zulu were told that if they laid down their arms and returned to their homes they would be allowed to remain in possession of their land and their cattle — the very things they had gone to war to defend.

The situation after Ulundi is best described as one of stalemate, with both sides wanting to end hostilities. The Zulu needed peace because they had been under arms for six months, had suffered severely as a result, and unless they could gain access to their land and prepare it for planting when the spring rains came they faced famine. Any attempt to extract a war indemnity however, or to annex large tracts of territory, might well have persuaded certain groups to retire to defensive positions and adopt harassing tactics at a local level — some Zulu in fact did this. But the Zulu did not have to make this choice between subjugation and resistance, because the British on their side had no wish to prolong hostilities. A decisive victory in battle was needed to protect political reputations by giving British policy a veneer of continuity, and as an example to colonial peoples of British power. At the same time, for reasons of economy, other military commitments, and the political capital being made out of the war it was necessary to bring the conflict to an end. It was therefore far easier to follow Chelmsford's example and elevate the battle of Ulundi to the rank of a crushing military victory, and bring peace to Zululand by allowing the Zulu to remain in possession of their land.

Thus the most important factor in the Zulu submission in 1879 was the fact that the British did not demand fundamental changes in the Zulu way of life; they were allowed to retain their land and their cattle, they were not placed under colonial officials, and no fines or taxes were imposed. After six months of war the intensity of Zulu resistance had persuaded the British that the cost of advancing capitalist production by force of arms was too high. As a result the Zulu were allowed to remain in possession of their means of production and the products of their labour: the British officer was allowed to pose as the conqueror of Africa's greatest army.

But to argue that the significance of the formal battles which occurred during the invasion has been exaggerated, is not to deny the fundamental role of the war in the history of the subjugation of the Zulu. Although Wolseley left the Zulu in possession of their land he did dismantle the Zulu state by sending the King into exile, disbanding the Zulu military system, and dividing the country up into thirteen chiefdoms. The forces which had brought about the invasion had been checked but not halted, and they

continued to threaten Zulu independence. Eventually they succeeded in turning the Zulu against themselves, and they finally lost their independence in a disastrous civil war which so weakened the Zulu society that its enemies were able to partition it amongst themselves. Thus in the decade that followed the British invasion the Zulu heritage was divided amongst local settler communities and Britain, and Zulu labour no longer supported Zulu independence but was turned to serve the interests of capitalist production in South Africa. The war of 1879 played an important part in the process of conquest, but only a part in it.

If, in the centenary year, we are to try and see the war not only for what it was, but for what it is, we must sweep away the dreams, and the nightmares, of the men who brought the war to Zululand, who failed against the Zulu army, and who have successfully obscured the extent of their failure and the nature of the war for one hundred years. And while we commemorate the brave men who fell in the war we must also remember why they died; what the British hoped to achieve, and why the Zulu defended their independence with such vigour. We must also remember that the invasion is not an event isolated from us, something of the past like the redcoat and the Gatling, the shield and the assegai, for it started a process of oppression which has not yet passed. While the war benefitted a few, it led directly to the impoverishment and exploitation of a far greater number of South Africans. Those who died in the war, and those who suffered as a consequence of it, deserve a better memorial than the sentimental trash, in print and film, created by men and women who see in this tragedy only commercial opportunity. Much of the work on the war of 1879 should be seen in fact as part of the process of exploitation that the invasion itself initiated, and for this reason the destruction of such myths of our imperial past is surely an aspect of the struggle for freedom from exploitation in the present. □

NOTES

- 1 D. R. Morris, *The Washing of the Spears* (London, 1966).
- 2 For an important article on developments within southern Africa in the nineteenth century, especially on the role played by the imperialist powers, see A. Atmore and S. Marks, 'The Imperial factor in South Africa: towards a reassessment', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1974).
- 3 Robert Rhodes James, *The British Revolution* (London, 1976), I, p. 33.
- 4 In an article by Norman Etherington entitled 'Labour supply and the genesis of South African confederation in the eighteen seventies', which is to be published in the *Journal of African History*.
- 5 J. Martineau, *The Life and Correspondence of Sir Bartle Frere* (London, 1895), II, pp. 224, 225.
- 6 R. Blake, *Disraeli* (London, 1966).
- 7 F. Emery, *The Red Soldier* (London, 1977), pp. 232, 233.
- 8 G. French, *Lord Chelmsford and the Zulu War* (London, 1939), p. 144.
- 9 J. W. Colenso, *What doth the Lord require of us? . . .* (Pietermaritzburg, 1879).
- 10 Emery, *Red Soldier*.
- 11 Morris, *Washing of the Spears*, p. 420.
- 12 Emery, *Red Soldier*, p. 94.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 95–6.
- 14 C. Barnett, *Britain and Her Army 1509–1970* (London, 1970), p. 313.
- 15 French, *Chelmsford and the Zulu War*, p. 83.
- 16 C.2260, nos. 7 and 16.
- 17 C. W. de Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa: a Study in Politics and Economics* (Cambridge, 1937), pp. 234–235.
- 18 James, *The British Revolution*, p. 35n.
- 19 J. W. Colenso to Chesson, 25 July 1879. Folio 26, Z 24: Killie Campbell Africana Library.
- 20 E. Wood, *From Midshipman to Field Marshall* (London, 1906), 11, p. 81.

AN IMPERIAL HIGH COMMISSIONER AND THE MAKING OF A WAR

by Peter Colenbrander

'... Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the shadow ...'

(T. S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men")

On 11 January, one hundred years ago, the British forces under General Chelmsford invaded Zululand. Thus began the Anglo-Zulu war, a war which was to prove a major turning point in the history of the Zulu people. For, though the hostilities did not terminate in as decisive a victory for British arms as has been claimed in traditional accounts; though it did not in itself lead to the extinction of Zulu independence, or the total disruption of Zulu social and economic traditions; it, and the political settlement which followed, set in train the civil strife that was to undermine the political and psychological cohesion of Zulu society. This internecine struggle in turn culminated in the annexation of Zululand to the British Crown in 1887, and ultimately in its incorporation into Natal in the following decade. Thus the process by which the Zulu were drawn into the world of the white man, and exposed to a barrage of new and often disruptive political and economic forces, had its most important origins in the war of 1879.²

A month before its outbreak the representatives of the British High Commissioner, Sir Bartle Frere, had presented to their Zulu counterparts an ultimatum, some of the terms of which had to be met within 20 days, the remainder 10 days later.³ It may be supposed that these terms represent the gravamen of the British case against the Zulu, but a closer study suggests that the document is misleading and of relatively little worth in understanding why this fateful conflict came about.

In part the ultimatum comprised demands for the redress of grievances arising out of specific border incidents. Amongst these were clauses requiring the surrender of three of the sons and the brother of the Zulu chief, Sihayo, for trial in Natal, and the payment of a fine of 500 cattle for Cetshwayo's non-compliance with the earlier demands of Sir Henry Bulwer, the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, for their surrender. These demands refer to the forcible retrieval on 28 July 1878 by the accused of two of Sihayo's wives who had recently fled to Natal, and their subsequent execution in Zululand. It has been argued that this was a serious breach of relations with Natal, and that Cetshwayo's offer of £50 as a solatium in lieu of the surrender of the culprits was an inadequate and unwise response. Some attempts must, however, be made to understand Cetshwayo's position. In part his failure to take a more serious view of the incident is explicable in terms of the official reaction to an analogous situation in November 1876; on that occasion Bulwer did not so much as issue a

protest. Moreover, it would have been politically imprudent of Cetshwayo to alienate so powerful a chief as Sihayo at a time when political power in Zululand had become more diffused. It would have been equally foolish to antagonise the younger generation of men (to which group Sihayo's sons belonged) who made up the bulk of his subjects and his fighting forces, particularly at a time when they, like their older compatriots and their king, had come to doubt the good faith of the British authorities on account of their unwarrantable tardiness in resolving the long-standing dispute between the Transvaal and the Zulu kingdom.

Moreover, after the delivery of the ultimatum, Cetshwayo strove determinedly to make amends by gathering up to 1000 cattle for the fine. However, the shortness of the time available, bad weather, and the promptitude with which the British began military operations (by instituting cattle raids, during the course of which Zulu blood was spilt) ensured that the herd never reached British lines. Nonetheless, it must be admitted that Cetshwayo probably had very little intention of surrendering the culprits as demanded. Given his preparedness to hand over more cattle than had been called for, can this reluctance really be regarded as a sufficient cause for war?⁴

A further clause called for 100 cattle as redress for the Smith-Deighton incident. In September 1878 These two men had been sent to survey a disused road on the Natal-Zulu border, and had been urged, in view of the tense situation then existing between Britain and the Zulu, to proceed with caution. Despite these injunctions they had foolishly strayed on to an island in the Thukela which the Zulu regarded as theirs and had been seized, hustled, and excitedly addressed by a group of Zulu for about one and a half hours before being released unharmed. This was a very minor incident, and in any case, was not sanctioned by Zulu authority. Indeed, Frere himself initially attached little significance to the affair. Only later was he to write,

"It was only one of the many instances of insult and threatening such as can not be passed over without severe notice being taken of them. What occurred ... seems to me a most serious insult and outrage and should be severely noticed."⁵

However, in making this claim Frere apparently had no fresh facts before him to substantiate his change of opinion.

A third condition was the surrender of Mbilini, a senior member of the Swazi royal house living in exile in Zululand, who had made an armed incursion into the Transvaal in October 1878, killing about 50 of its African inhabitants and making off with their cattle. Serious though this occurrence was its significance to Anglo-Zulu relations should not be exaggerated, for if there was a political motive behind Mbilini's action it was probably related

to his aspirations to the Swazi throne, and was almost certainly not part of a movement on the part of the Zulu against the whites. Indeed it is doubtful whether Cetshwayo was implicated in the affair, since he exercised little effective control over the renegade chief. Moreover, the king had in the past permitted the Boers to take punitive action against Mbilini and on this occasion he dissociated himself from the chief's behaviour.⁶

In fine, one can reasonably question whether these events were in themselves important enough to warrant the British invasion of Zululand in January 1879. Indeed, one incident was almost ludicrously trivial, and in relation to the other two Cetshwayo showed himself to be not so much the irredeemable savage of the European popular imagination, but as amenable to negotiation and not unwilling to conciliate the British and even the Transvaal Boers, with whom relations had long been tense. Furthermore it is clear from the above that these events occurred at a time when Anglo-Zulu relations had already taken a turn for the worse. The suspicion that they are essentially irrelevant to the war is confirmed by reference to the correspondence in early 1878 of the British naval and military commanders in South Africa. As early as 12 April, Commodore Sullivan had remarked that he had been told by Frere that

"... it appeared almost certain that serious complications must shortly arise with the Zulus which will necessitate active operations ..."

and that HMS *Active* should remain on the Natal coast.

"... to co-operate with the Lieutenant General and his forces ... (to) cover a possible landing."⁷

Moreover, General Thesiger (later Baron Chelmsford) had in June turned his attentions to the 'impending hostilities with the Zulu'. On 1 June he wrote,

"It is still, however, more than probable that active steps will have to be taken to check the arrogance of Cetshwayo."⁸

It should be noted that these comments were penned before the first of the border incidents of which Frere made so much had taken place, and in the case of Commodore Sullivan's observations, preceded it by more than two and a half months. One must surely conclude that though these incidents may have been the occasion of, and the pretext for the war, they were certainly not its cause. Indeed it would seem that Frere, who assumed office in March 1877, was, almost from the outset, predisposed to an expansionist policy in relation to the remaining independent African chiefdoms in southern Africa. To some extent this policy was the product of his belief in the superiority of the white man, a fairly typical Victorian view, though he was no crude racist, and was conditioned also by his earlier official experience in India at a time when many of the princely states had been assimilated, into the imperial orbit. The concept of subservient 'native' states was thus very much part of his professional outlook. He had come to believe that stronger, more developed states would almost inevitably have to assume responsibility for weaker, and to him, less civilised communities, and he held that opportunities for achieving this by peaceful means should not be shunned, otherwise it would only have to be achieved later by means of war.⁹ A letter of 10 August 1878 bears testimony to the influence of his Indian experiences on his general strategy in South Africa.

"You must be master as representative of the sole sovereign power, up to the Portuguese frontier on both east and west coasts. There is no escaping from the responsibility which has been already incurred, ever since the English flag was planted on the Castle here ...

I have heard of no difficulty in managing and civilizing the native tribes in South Africa, which I cannot trace to some neglect or attempt to evade the clear

responsibilities of sovereignty. Nothing is easier as far as I can see, than to govern the natives here, if you act as master, but if you abdicate the sovereign position, the abdication has always to be heavily paid for, in both blood and treasure ..."¹⁰

Despite Frere's preference for peaceful expansion it is clear from his official correspondence after May 1877 that he had come to accept the need for the forcible extinction of Zulu independence almost from the beginning of his tenure as High Commissioner.

What, apart from his general views on expansionism, led him to adopt this course? We must once again refer to the ultimatum which also embodied demands for the permanent reform of the traditional Zulu order. Among these were calls for the readmission of missionaries to Zululand and observance of certain undertakings made by Cetshwayo to the Natal Government in 1873, shortly after his accession, relating to the administration of justice in his kingdom.

The missionaries had long been active in Zululand, but early in 1877 reports reached Natal that attacks had been made on converts living on some stations and that several had been killed. In the ensuing period many converts and some of the missionaries fled the country. It is certainly the case that the Zulu authorities had long disapproved of missionary endeavour, partly perhaps on the grounds that Christianity, with its belief in a transcendent God, eroded the ideological basis of royal power; more palpably because those Zulu the stations attracted, who were often misfits and miscreants, were thus placed beyond the authority of the state. Despite this antipathy and the impression Frere later fostered that **many** converts had been sacrificed as part of a deliberate campaign against the missionaries, contemporary reports refer to the execution of only three converts, two for criminal activities. Bulwer, moreover, attached little political significance to these occurrences.

Nonetheless by mid-1878 no missionaries remained in Zululand. Distressing though their plight was to the personal feelings of a man as devout as Frere, it was not a legitimate ground for plunging Britain into war. Zulu relations with the missionaries were almost entirely a domestic concern, though in 1873 Shepstone had arranged with Cetshwayo that missionaries should not be expelled without official consent from Natal. This agreement did not, however, cover African converts. Since the missionaries had voluntarily departed on the advice of the same Theophilus Shepstone in expectation of a political crisis over the Zulu-Transvaal boundary dispute, Cetshwayo had not violated this arrangement. Manifestly Frere had no technical grounds for resurrecting this issue, and his action in doing so is peculiarly at variance with the views of the Earl of Carnarvon, his political mentor, and the Secretary of State for Colonies at the time of the missionary crisis. At the height of the affair he strongly reaffirmed the policy of non-responsibility for the missionaries; their pleas notwithstanding, if they could make no headway without British intercession, they should leave. Carnarvon was certainly not intent upon making an issue of this question.¹¹

Frere in his correspondence was also to expatiate upon Cetshwayo's alleged atrocities against his pagan subjects and was wont to describe him as a 'ruthless savage' with a 'faithless cruel character', whose 'history had been written in characters of blood'.¹² It is indubitably true that executions without trial occurred during this period, and in an unprecedentedly angry message sent to the Natal authorities in late 1876 Cetshwayo renounced their prerogative to prescribe to him how he should govern, and expressed his determination to continue these traditional practices which were, he claimed, a precondition of political stability and social discipline. This communication was, however, little more than an impetuous and probably inaccurately reported outburst. Furthermore, a number of the deaths for which the king was blamed seem to have been instigated by

subordinate chiefs without royal approval or knowledge. Even so it is questionable whether there was an increase in the incidence of executions so dramatic as to justify Frere's lurid characterisation of Cetshwayo's reign.

What is indisputable is that the information which reached the colonial officials was highly exaggerated, for it emanated from the missionaries who had an interest in blackening Cetshwayo's reputation in the hope of thus provoking the intervention of the British which they so desired. Certain of their reports were closely scrutinised by Bishop Colenso, and found to be singularly unreliable. Indeed Cetshwayo's dislike of the missionaries had increased after mid-1877 very largely because of their role as purveyors of distorted information, and because he suspected the motives behind their reports.¹³ In any case the governance of Zululand was of no concern to the British since, despite Frere's claims to the contrary at the time of the ultimatum it was not regulated by treaty agreement. The 'promises' made by Cetshwayo in 1873 were envisaged at the time as mere guidelines, for as Shepstone himself wrote,

"... it cannot be expected that the amelioration described will immediately take effect. To have got such principles admitted and declared to be what a Zulu may plead when oppressed was but sowing the seed which will still take many years to grow and mature."¹⁴

Any more than the other issues had done, this question did not make a major war with the Zulu in 1879 unavoidable or even justifiable.



Sir Bartle Frere, High Commissioner for South Africa from 1877 to 1880.

Yet all these incidents were coupled in the ultimatum with other clauses demanding a restructuring of Zulu society so fundamental that hostilities were indeed made inevitable. Thus, among other things, Frere called for the disbanding of the Zulu army and the abolition of restrictions on marriage, reforms which would have exposed the Zulu to external aggression and struck at the very foundations of the Zulu political edifice. He must have known that these terms could not be met within the stipulated time, and would in any event prove to be totally unacceptable. Truly it has been said of Frere that irrespective of the rights and wrongs of the case, and no matter how conciliatory Cetshwayo's behaviour, he was bent upon war and annexation at any price.

In laying such emphasis on the events discussed above, Frere was probably attempting to appease his own highly developed Christian conscience; he needed to convince

himself of the moral rectitude of his belligerent policy. He was also trying to vindicate that policy in the eyes of his superiors, who did not share his enthusiasm for the task of destroying Zulu independence. Carnarvon had contemplated a protectorate and possession of the coastline, but not forcible annexation, and in late 1878 his successor at the Colonial Office, Sir Michael Hicks Beach, expressed the Cabinet's strong aversion to the prospect of war. Thus Frere, in bringing about hostilities, was acting largely on his own initiative; and in circumstances which are singularly suspicious. The Colonial Office was only to receive a copy of his ultimatum on 2 January 1879, by which time it was too late to avoid hostilities.¹⁵

The real motives for Frere's policy remain to be established. In part its origins are to be found in his oft-repeated conviction that the Zulu military state, of its very nature, posed a fundamental threat to the peace and security of South Africa. The validity of his fears is, however, belied by the history of relations between the Zulu kingdom and its white neighbours. It is undeniably true that relations between the Zulu and the Transvaal had been embittered by long-standing boundary dispute between them, but it is doubtful whether Cetshwayo ever had any serious intention of invading the republic. Until 1876, at least, a close accord had subsisted between the Zulu and Natal; and Bulwer, the man most intimately concerned with the security of the colony, was able to characterise Anglo-Zulu relations till that date as 'friendly', and wrote favourably of Cetshwayo's 'moderation and forbearance'.¹⁶ Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the warfare that frequently broke out along the eastern frontier of the Cape had no counterpart in Natal, even though the often fordable Thukela and Mzinyathi (Buffalo) rivers were all that separated that colony from the Zulu.

Frere did, however, cite further factors to validate his belligerent policy. One was the acquisition of between eight and twenty thousand firearms by the Zulu during the course of the 1870s. Though contemporaries underestimated the ability of the Zulu to use the new weaponry effectively, it was widely held that the possession of guns would boost the confidence of the Zulu warriors and incite them to try conclusions with the Europeans. Moreover, by late 1877 Sir Bartle had become convinced that the initial successes of the Bapedi in their recent war with the Transvaal had wrought a similar effect and, further, had encouraged the formation of an inter-tribal alliance against the white man. Late in the following year he expressed the opinion that Cetshwayo was its chief architect. At least initially, Frere may have been sincere in his fears. Nonetheless one can justifiably question the accuracy and reasonableness of his interpretation of the situation, for as late as 23 December 1878, when a British invasion of Zululand was clearly imminent, the following report was received.

"The King has, however, declared and still declares that he will not commence war but will wait till he is actually attacked before he enters on a defensive campaign."¹⁷

These are certainly not the utterances of an inveterate warmonger. Frere was moreover in possession of the views of Bulwer who concluded that neither the Transvaal nor, by implication, Natal, was in any danger of attack and that a clash could be avoided.¹⁸

One cannot help feeling that there is something perverse and even wilful about Frere's adherence to his views on the Zulu question, an impression reinforced by his failure, or perhaps refusal, to understand the origins of the problem; the intense dispute already mentioned between the Zulu and the Transvaal over valuable grazing land in the vicinity of the Ncome (Blood) and Mzinyathi rivers in particular, and also the Phongolo river.¹⁹ This issue, and the British initiatives to achieve a confederation of white states in South Africa after 1874, with which it became intimately

associated, dominate the history of Anglo-Zulu relations in the second half of the decade. These two questions give colour and meaning to the actions and statements of British and Zulu alike during this period, and it is against this background that the Anglo-Zulu war must be understood.

Thus at one level the war is simply a dimension of the wider struggle between black and white over access to land. In this case the dispute had its most important origins in the alleged land cession of 1861 in terms of which the Boers laid claim to large tracts of Zululand. The Zulu were much aggrieved at the subsequent Boer encroachments, and not without reason, for the so-called treaty of cession is of largely dubious authenticity. Between 1861 and 1876 they had addressed eighteen requests to the Natal Government to arbitrate, pleas which had been in vain. The crisis deepened in 1875 when the Transvaal tried to give effect to its claims by levying taxes on the Zulu resident in the disputed area, and continued to deteriorate in the ensuing years: sustained drought intensified the competition for grazing, as did the probable increase in the Zulu population; the dislodgement of the Boers in the north of the republic as a result of the continuing difficulties with the Bapedi, speculation in land and its unequal distribution among the Transvaal burgers, and the republican president's policy of signing away land as security for his development projects.

Bulwer quickly perceived the causal inter-connection between the land question and the deterioration in Anglo-Zulu relations, and argued that its just resolution was essential to the preservation of peace in South Africa. Thus in February 1878 he took the initiative in appointing a boundary commission to investigate the dispute, and in their findings the commissioners substantially upheld the Zulu right to the area. In view of Frere's charges that the Zulu were habitually warlike, it is appropriate to observe, at the risk of repetition, that they accepted the establishment of the Commission, as also its final award, though this was less favourable than they had anticipated. Frere took or chose to take, the diametrically opposed view; Zulu intransigence over the territory did not, he opined, point to the source of the wider problem, but served as further verification of his claims about the grave threat they posed to peace. In some measure this assessment is understandable, for until he received the commissioners' report he believed that right was on the side of the Transvaal, and he had supported Bulwer's initiative on the assumption that the results would completely legitimise his plans for war.

Frere's handling of the situation after he had received the report is, however, inexcusable. To the High Commissioner had been given the responsibility of taking the final decision on the land question and of making it public, but Frere made no move for more than five months after receiving it. Indeed he made his decision known to the Zulu only on the day he presented his fateful ultimatum. In the interim he pressed for further reinforcements, citing as justification the growing tension with the Zulu, for which, in fact, his own tardiness over the land question and his policy of building up troop strength in Natal were largely responsible. He also sought new pretexts for war, and it will be recalled that the border incidents which he gave such prominence in the ultimatum all post-date his receipt of the boundary commissioners' findings. Moreover, though he accepted Zulu claims to sovereignty over the disputed land, he upheld the private property rights of the Transvaal farmers living there, thereby effectively perpetuating the territorial question. It can truly be said that from Frere's point of view, the war was a self-fulfilling prophecy; by his actions he gave effect to that which he both feared and wanted, hostilities with the Zulu.

No matter what or how sincere his other reasons for wishing to destroy the Zulu kingdom, that which in the final analysis

made this course unavoidable lay in the British policy of confederation, the achievement of which was to be the grand finale of his long and distinguished career. Lord Carnarvon had sought after 1874 to federate South Africa under the Crown so as to stabilise and ensure British paramountcy in the sub-continent, with the ultimate aim of securing the sea-route to the Orient and of consolidating the British empire at a time when Britain's world hegemony was beginning to be challenged by the emergence of powerful, new industrial states. In the light of subsequent events it is ironic that Carnarvon had hoped that political rationalisation would end both the boundary disputes, and the 'native problem' that had hitherto been the bane of the imperial factor in South Africa. By 1876, however, his plans had made no appreciable headway and in that year Shepstone was detailed to annex the Transvaal in the hope of breaking the logjam.

In bringing the republic under British control in April 1877 Shepstone vindicated his actions largely in terms of Boer vulnerability to African aggression. In particular he made much of the unusually tense situation that existed on the Transvaal-Zulu frontier in late 1876 and early 1877. Indeed, he was especially careful not to discourage Cetshwayo in the threatening stance he had adopted. As it had been in the past, the military power of the Zulu kingdom was at this time an invaluable instrument in the hands of the British for exercising leverage over the Transvaal. The annexation was a decisive turning point in the history of south-east Africa since it transformed the Transvaal-Zulu border question into a direct and pressing imperial responsibility. In the main the Transvaalers had at no stage actively favoured annexation, and as time progressed they had become increasingly opposed to the British presence, largely because of Shepstone's failure to establish peace on the disturbed Zulu frontier; the prospect of armed Boer resistance became increasingly real.

At the time of annexation Shepstone had effectively committed Britain to the maintenance of the territorial integrity as well as the security of the Transvaal, thus predisposing himself in favour of the Boer land claims. This commitment was to harden in the face of the mounting opposition, so that after late 1877 he had become an ardent advocate not only of the Transvaal's claims to their full extent, but also of the necessity for war against the Zulu.²¹ He now spoke of, 'the explosion that must come', and declared that, 'had Cetshwayo's 30 000 warriors been in time changed to labourers working for wages, Zululand would have been a prosperous peaceful country instead of what it now is, a source of perpetual danger to itself and its neighbours'.²² Shepstone's stance had, however, nothing to do with the rights and wrongs of the territorial dispute and, at least in the immediate sense, little to do with the perennial need of the European settlers for labour,²³ but much to do with political expediency and personal ambition; to reject the Boer case would provoke that hostility which would destroy the prospects of federation and ruin his reputation.

Frere was decisively influenced by Shepstone's dilemma. Thus, though the boundary commission had made possible a peaceable resolution of the crisis besetting Anglo-Zulu relations, the situation in the Transvaal made such a course unthinkable. In short the annexation of the Transvaal in pursuit of federation had from Frere's vantage point effectively transfigured the Zulu kingdom into a political anachronism and obstacle, where before it had been a useful ally of the British. More than anything else the need to prevent hostilities in the Transvaal, and to win the goodwill of its inhabitants as well as the support of the Cape, which was reluctant to assume responsibility for the defence of its weaker neighbours, led Frere to adopt a policy of war against Cetshwayo, with the aim of destroying his power, and his claims to the disputed territory.²⁴

The impact upon the Zulu of Shepstone's approach to the

territorial question after 1876 was immediate and profound.²⁵ For years Shepstone had taken the part of the Zulu who had looked to him to settle their difficulties with the Transvaal, and his *volte face* after the annexation had totally destroyed their confidence in him, and was, moreover, by far the most important reason for the decline of the Anglo-Zulu accord in the late 1870s. It quite rightly seemed to the Zulu that the British had rejected them, their old allies, in favour of the Boers, and they were filled with feelings of 'surprise . . . resentment and apprehension'.²⁶ It was precisely these feelings, of which Frere's handling of the situation was in part the cause, that played such a large role in convincing him of the need for war, and had served as an important pretext in bringing it about.

In fine, though the Zulu were not blameless, they were essentially the victims of the policy of confederation. However, by one of those peculiar ironies of history they were not the only casualties of the war; for the disaster at Isandlwana forcefully revealed to an acutely discomfited Cabinet the extent of Frere's insubordination and exposed it to hostile criticism for having launched the forward policy in South Africa which had *ipso facto* given rise to the unwanted war. In response Frere was chastised, his authority curtailed, his plan to annex Zululand repudiated, and the policy of confederation effectively abandoned. The war had thus discredited Frere, and destroyed the cause both he and it had been intended to serve. □

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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.

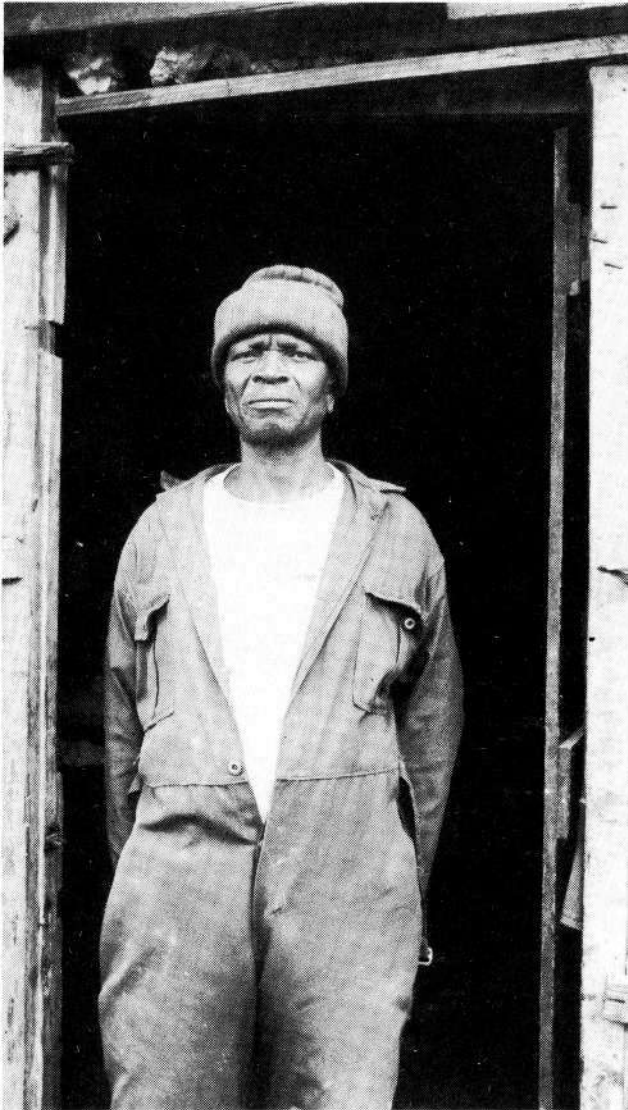
In 1956 the Tomlinson Commission tabled the most



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



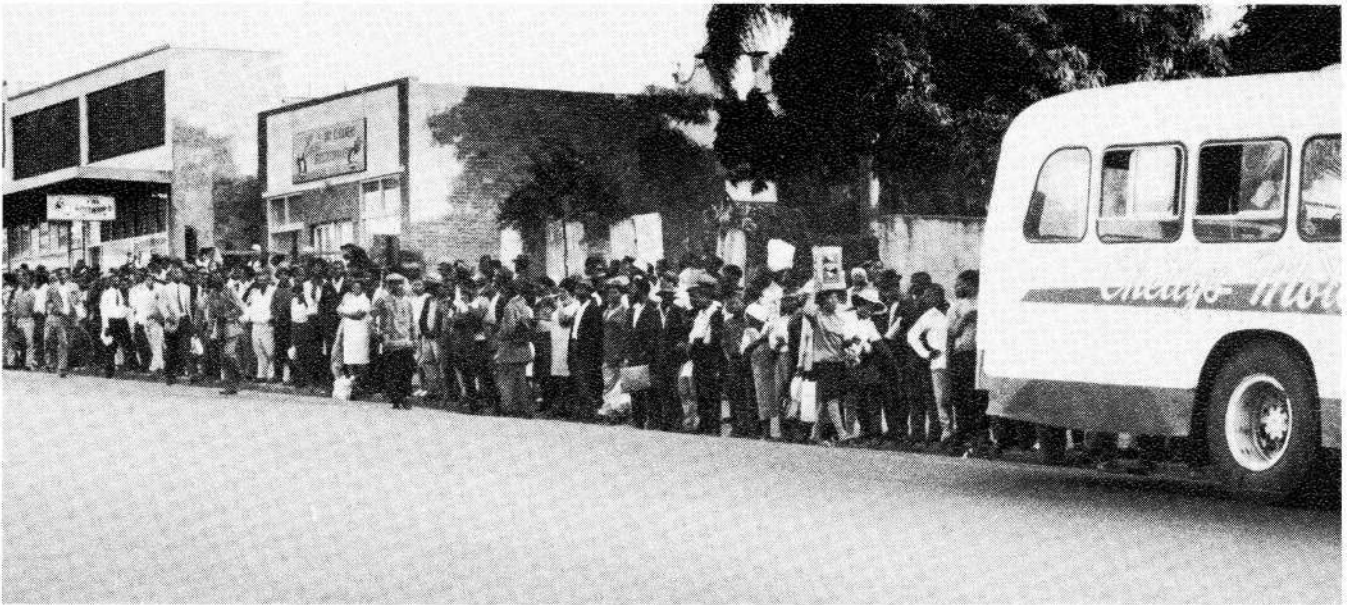
1979: This *umnumzane*, or family head, is, like many others, a migrant labourer who does not see his wife or children for months at a time.

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.



1929: 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.

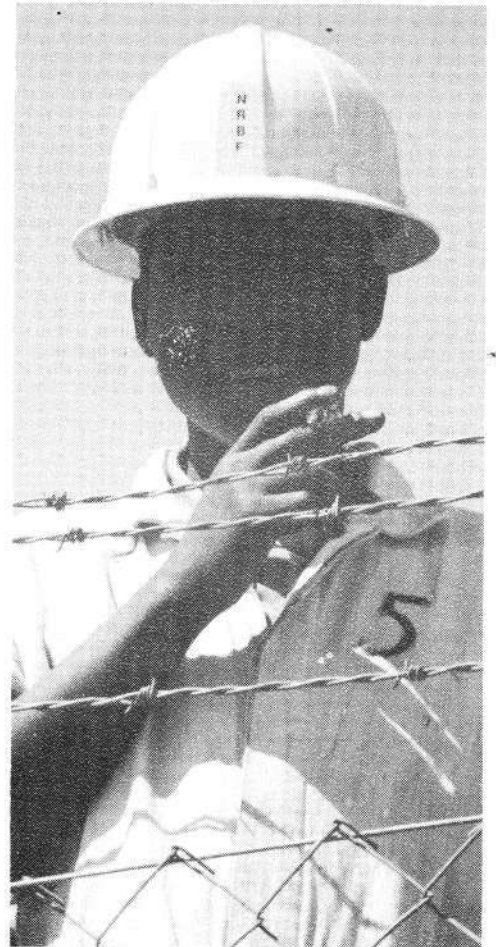
Following Dube's death Congress adopted a more activist approach, and moved towards confronting state power directly through mass civil disobedience in the defiance campaign of the 1950s. The focus on the pass laws which controlled influx to the towns was of more direct relevance to the situation of 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. □

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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.