EARLY MINE AND RAILWAY HOUSING IN SOUTH AFRICA:
a two-part study of ideology and design in working-class housing

Jaco Wasserfall

King's College
Department of Architecture

Dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Cambridge
October 1989
To Christl
Précis

This study is concerned to explore the vulnerability of working-class housing in South Africa to ideological manipulation, be it of economic and/or political derivation. More descriptively, by delineating the ideological role of early forms of workers’ housing in the development of capitalist South Africa, this two-part enquiry aims to reveal the instrumental potential of working-class housing in the spheres of labour control and social management, and to bring to the fore the manner in which ideology can operate through design.

Two early innovations in the realm of working-class housing, the establishment of which dates back to the later nineteenth century and the birth of South Africa’s first industrial community, form the focus in the opening study. Part I seeks to expound, by investigating the contrasting approach to the housing of black and white mine-workers at the Kimberley diamond fields, the true deliberations which lay behind the creation of the parallel institutions of the closed compound, on the one hand, and the garden suburb of Kenilworth on the other. The former is shown to have provided the mineowners with a directly coercive means of coming to terms with black migrant labour, and the latter to have furnished them with a means of surmounting, by ‘acquiescence’ rather than through the exercise of force, the growing power of white labour. Both innovations came to serve as practicable models in the spheres of labour control and social management to other large employers of labour in South Africa, such as the State Railways, and to urban management in general.

Part II negotiates railway housing provision during the first half of this century against the backdrop of the ‘poor white’ crisis, a social dilemma of major proportions caused by pervasive rural impoverishment and the subsequent drift into the urban areas of unskilled and mostly illiterate Afrikaners. Poor white relief in time developed into a chief objective of Government, with the Railways forming the vanguard of its so-called ‘civilised labour’ policy after 1924 in giving preference to white workers over black in unskilled and skilled jobs regardless of the greater expense. The State Railways in due course became the largest single employer of Afrikaners in the urban areas.

One result of the Railways’ ‘rehabilitative function’ in easing the adjustment to the urban way of life of newly proletarianised Afrikaners will be shown to have been the portable railway model village. It will also be illustrated how it was to design, among other things, that the Railway Administration looked in an attempt to integrate its white employees into the social fabric of towns - the cultural strongholds of English-speaking whites - when the custom of housing railway families on the opposite side of the railway line to the town gave rise to the association thereof with ‘living on the wrong side of the tracks’.
Acknowledgements

This work was carried out under a Scholarship from the Cambridge Livingstone Trust. The financial assistance of the Livingstone Trust in respect of fieldwork and that of King's College towards the reproduction costs of photographs and this dissertation are gratefully acknowledged.

In conducting this study I have relied on the assistance of numerous individuals and institutions in Britain and South Africa. The University of Cambridge, the Department of Architecture, and the Martin Centre in particular, have provided a convivial research environment without which the completion of this work would have been unthinkable.

I would like to thank, first and foremost, my supervisor, Dr Dean Hawkes, for his unstinting support and guidance during the research leading to this dissertation, and especially for his tirelessness in reading and rereading the draft chapters.

In Kimberley, my warmest thanks are due to Mrs Lyn Elmer of the McGregor Museum and Dr M.H. Buys of the De Beers Consolidated Archive. I am also grateful to De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd for allowing me access to source material relating to the early Kimberley compounds and Kenilworth model village.

In Cape Town, I would like to thank Carl Gerneke of the School of Architecture and Urban Planning and the staff of the African Studies Library at the University of Cape Town. I am also indebted to the staffs of the Cape Archives Depot and the Dutch Reformed Church Library in Cape Town.

In the Transvaal, I would like to note with appreciation the assistance rendered by the staffs of the following sections of the South African Transport Services: the SATS Library, Museum, Photographical Section, the Architectural Section and the Plan Room of the Chief Civil Engineer in Johannesburg; Departmental Housing in Pretoria; the District Engineer's Office of the S. A. Transport Services in Nelspruit.

I am also grateful to the staffs of the Public Library in Johannesburg, the State Archive Depot in Pretoria, and the Africana Section of the Library of the University of Pretoria. Many thanks are due also to the Librarian of the Town Library in Waterval-Boven, as well as Mr Fred Geyser for filling me in on the history of the town.

Finally, I wish to express my sincere appreciation of the support of my family and friends, and in particular of my wife, Christi, whose encouragement and support - and enduring assistance - made the production of this dissertation possible.

Declaration

This dissertation is less than 80,000 words long and the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.
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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO STUDY

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate, in a South African milieu, the susceptibility of working-class housing to political and ideological manipulation, and to evince how readily it can be put to use in satisfying objectives other than a mere need for shelter.

By thus contemplating aspects of the history of working-class housing as an instrument of social control in South Africa, this two-part enquiry also endeavours to bring to the fore the manner in which ideology can operate through design.

Furnishing the opening study with an apposite focus are two early innovations in the realm of workers' housing in South Africa, the establishment of which dates back to the first mineral discoveries and the birth of the country's first industrial community.

In dealing with the contrasting approach to the housing of black and white mineworkers at the Kimberley diamond fields, Part I seeks to disclose how and why mining capital's true deliberations found spatial expression in the closed compound on the one hand, and a carefully laid out garden suburb on the other. Both these innovations came to serve as practicable models - confirmed rehearsals in the spheres of labour control and social management - not only to the country's other large employers of labour, but also to urban management in general.

Forming the subject of enquiry in the second study is the housing provided by the biggest single employer in the country for many years, South Africa's State Railways.

Continuing the themes of industrialisation, urbanisation and workers' housing, Part II negotiates railway housing provision during the first half of this century against the background of the 'poor white' crisis, a major social dilemma caused by the unabated drift into the towns and cities of destitute and largely uneducated whites, most of whom were Afrikaners. The significance of housing provision in the Railways lies in the role of that institution in spearheading the chief stratagem of the Hertzog government in ameliorating poor whiteism, viz. the so-called 'civilised labour' policy.

1.1. Research context

... the economics of internal planning, the standards of construction, equipment and fittings, and the built form of estates - in brief, the political economy of design - is probably the most underdeveloped dimension in the entire analysis of the housing question.1

1 Merrett, S., State housing in Britain, p. 101; Manuel Castells, in his book The urban question. A Marxist approach, p. 468, raises the same issue.
‘THE SILENT TESTIMONY OF INARTICULATE OBJECTS’

In his rendition of the ‘homes fit for heroes’ house-building campaign of the Lloyd George coalition government in the months following the Armistice of 1918, Mark Swenarton appraises the relationship of design, ideology and the state in post-war Britain. ² It was the Housing Act introduced in 1919 which, for the first time, made local authorities in Britain into major suppliers of housing.

Bearing witness to the significance of this housing programme are about three-quarters of a million houses built by local authorities in England and Wales between the two world wars. These two-storey cottages have formed a distinctive element in the British townscape ever since, and still constitute an important part of the country’s housing stock as even today they house nearly one family in twenty. Built in ‘groups of four or six, with medium or low-pitched roofs and little exterior decoration, set among gardens, trees, privet hedges and grass verges, and often laid out in cul-de-sacs or around greens’, the municipal garden suburbs of the 1920s were remarkable not only for the manner in which they were laid out, but also in relation to the internal arrangement of the houses. ³

Unlike traditional working-class houses packed onto the ground in long terraces, the new houses then built by the state ‘provided not just the basic necessities, but also included luxuries that previously had been found only in the houses of the well-to-do’. ⁴ Paradoxically, these improved ‘standards of construction and equipment of local authority dwellings in the early post-war years’ were attained during a time of ‘considerable economic hardship for the mass of the British people as they struggled to recover from a destructive war’. ⁵

In the light of the belief held by Government in the wake of the Armistice that, unless drastic measures were taken, Britain would follow Russia and Germany into Bolshevik revolution, Swenarton deems the housing programme of 1919 to have been ‘an insurance against revolution’: ‘How was a mass army to be induced to return peacefully to a civilian life of which the realities - poverty, unemployment, insecurity, bad living conditions - were so unattractive, when they held the weapons that could be used to overthrow those realities?’ Swenarton further intimates that the government for this reason came to share a conviction which originated with the industrial patrons of the garden city movement, namely that ‘by a dramatic improvement in housing conditions the population would be reconciled to a status quo that was, in other respects, unchanged’. ⁶ With the garden city having provided a suitable model, Swenarton goes on to say that it was to design that Government looked ‘to carry out the ideological function that lay at the heart of the “homes fit for heroes” campaign’. ⁷

The design of the houses, based on the Tudor Walters Report, thus formed a central element in the housing strategy of the Lloyd George government. ⁸ Indeed, the large, comfortable houses provided by the state were intended as visible evidence of the arrival of a ‘new era for the working classes’ of Britain. ⁹ The author concludes by suggesting that ‘design - the silent testimony of inarticulate objects’ - is one of the ways in which “suitable” ideas are propagated and reinforced’, a surmise resting upon the notion that the processes of ideology are ‘not confined to those channels dealing explicitly with ideas (education, the press, television, etc.), which have usually been identified as the “ideological apparatuses” of society’. ¹⁰

Society in South Africa, on account of the division of its working class into two distinct groups set apart by their place in a system of domination and subordination, seems to offer an even more pertinent context for a study of the working of ideology through design. As Belinda Bozoli acknowledges in the introduction to The political nature of a ruling class, the South African example provides ‘a good opportunity for comparison and contrast, an opportunity to examine the proportional importance of directly coercive and less coercive methods of control over workers at various stages in the development of the capitalist system’. She also calls attention to a striking feature of the capitalist class, namely that its dominance ‘is more often sustained through the “acquiescence” of workers, than through the exercise of force over them’. ¹¹

Careful examination of the way in which the housing provided for the two groups of workers at specific times in history has facilitated both modes of social control is called for if the ideological role of housing in South Africa is to be unravelled. By delineating the role of early forms of miners’ and of railway housing in carrying out functions of a political or ideological nature, this thesis seeks to contribute towards a better understanding of the instrumental potential of workers’ housing in the spheres of labour control and social management and of the relevance of design in attaining just that.

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³ Ibid., p. 3.
⁴ Swenarton appraises the relationship of design, ideology and the state in post-war Britain. ² It was the Housing Act introduced in 1919 which, for the first time, made local authorities in Britain into major suppliers of housing.
⁵ The influential Tudor Walters Report was ‘the first comprehensive treatise on the political, technical and practical issues involved in the design of the small house’. It dealt authoritatively with issues such as housing policy and administration, site planning, standards of accommodation, the design and internal planning of houses, costs and standardisation: ibid., pp. 92-108.
⁶ The words of J. D. Gilbert, MP for Southwark, 1919: if the housing programme was to carry out a counter-revolutionary function, he argued, the new houses had to be, and had to be seen to be, ‘on quite different lines’ from those of the past and ‘a great improvement on anything we have’: Swenarton, M., op. cit., p. 86.
⁷ Ibid., p. 196 (my emphasis).
⁸ Bozoli, B., The political nature of a ruling class, p. 19.

1.2. Research focus

The capitalist class in all capitalist societies, because of its dominating nature, and its central place in the economic, political and ideological system, is of great importance to the understanding, not only of economic matters of immediate relevance to its interests, but of a number of social matters as well. The prism of the 'ruling class' reflects light upon a whole range of social, economic and political relationships and their ideological expressions and is... capable of illuminating the more general interconnections between various levels of social existence in capitalist society.\(^1\)

HISTORICAL SETTING

In a study dealing with housing provision as an established sphere of intervention in South Africa, no starting point is more befitting than the instance provided by the early housing arrangements for workers at the country's mines during those revolutionary years that followed the discovery of diamonds. No other period in South African history imparts a finer example of the divergent ways in which housing of this kind can be manipulated in meeting demands other than that of shelter.

The first few decades which followed the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and the subsequent discovery of gold in the Transvaal are of exceptional relevance to this study. These discoveries heralded the beginning of an era during which a mining revolution wrought transformations in every corner of the South African region, a period during which a capitalist class forged 'its internal and external relationships' and so came 'to express and realise its interests in the social formation at large'. This process of class formation in South Africa gained added momentum towards the turn of the century - progressively coming into being was 'a class of capitalists with a South African base' and with 'ambitions to dominate the region as a whole'. It was to housing - among other things - that mining capital had looked to provide the means in forging a social hierarchy more suited to the needs of industry.\(^13\)

Only by ruminating upon the political and ideological peculiarities of the economic system responsible for the Kimberley innovations in the housing of workers, viz. the closed compound and the model village of Kenilworth, can the pertinence of housing to the class struggle in South Africa begin to be grasped. Housing in South Africa's state Railways, by the same token, makes for a fascinating study in the pliancy of workers' housing in encouraging the process of class formation in South Africa.

\(^1\) Ibid., p. 3.

\(^13\) Ibid., p. 4. The first diamond in Kimberley was discovered in 1870 (the first in South Africa in 1867); the Witwatersrand gold reef was discovered in 1886 (the first alluvial gold in 1873).

FIGURE 1.1. A map of southern Africa in 1885 showing Griqualand West and the Kimberley diamond fields - the railway connecting the Fields to the coast was officially opened on 28 November 1885, five years after the annexation of Griqualand West to the Cape Colony.
FIGURE 1.2 The De Beers West End compound, the largest of the Kimberley closed compounds at the turn of the century, extended over four acres. Its 3,000 inmates were housed 25 to a cabin of 7.6 by 9.1 metres (MMKP 829)

The closed compound

Forming part of a complex system of ultra-exploitation, this debasing form of housing epitomises the vulnerability of workers' housing to ideological manipulation. Classified as a 'total institution' by Ervin Goffman in his book *Asylums* - alongside the prison and the concentration camp - compound housing renders the most directly coercive form of workers' housing by a long way.14

The innovation of the compound concept of housing goes back to the 1880s and the diamond mines at Kimberley. Ostensibly intended to curb illicit trading in diamonds, the 'closed' compound in fact gave form to the ideology of the black migrant worker as a child in need of protection against 'temptations' of a new environment.15

The idea of the compound was completely to isolate black workers for the entire period of their contracts by housing them in barrack-like quarters - built around and facing a large open square - within a corrugated iron enclosure of ten feet high. An open space between the fence and the rooms fringing the courtyard made for easy patrolling of the complex by guards with specially trained dogs.

14 Goffman, E., *Asylums*, pp. xiii, 4-5: the author defines a total institution as 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life'.

15 Bozoli, B., *The political nature of a ruling class*, p. 72.

The De Beers West End compound, the flagship of the Kimberley compounds, housed some three thousand workers in all. Within the confines of this compound a kitchen, stores, a dispensary, ablutions and washing facilities were provided. Only one guarded entrance served the entire complex, and an underground passage gave the workers access to the mine shaft.

At the turn of the century there were no less than 17 compounds on the Diamond Fields, affording the complete control of mineowners over a black labour force more than eleven thousand strong. So alluring was this form of housing to other employers of black labour, that in 1903 a Witwatersrand mining commission - joined by the Rhodesian Native Commissioner at the time - was sent to study and report on the compound system at De Beers in Kimberley.16

The ensuing adaptation of the 'closed' compound to meet differing requirements elsewhere provokes a compelling analogy. In Rhodesia, where many mines were located in relatively remote areas, compounds came to reflect a compromise between the different forces making for 'closed' or 'open' regimes: a 'three-tier' system evolved, with short-term recruits housed in an inner square compound surrounded by the huts of the longer-term miners; separated from both these were the huts of the married semi-skilled workers and their families.17

On the Witwatersrand, however, due to mercantile pressure (among other things), compounds remained 'open'. The extensive use of this form of housing up and down the country placed the compound alongside the black township and black 'homeland' as one of the 'essential institutions' of the apartheid system.18

16 Sir P. Fitzpatrick at the annual meeting of shareholders held on 25 March 1903: supplement to the *South African Mines, Commerce and Industries*, 28 March 1903.


18 e.g. in Rex, J., 'The compound, the reserve, and the urban location: the essential institutions of Southern African labour exploitation', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1(4):4-17, 1974.
Kimberley and the early diamond fields are of further importance to this study - it was here that another salient application of housing for workers became institutionalised, the relevance of which is more than often neglected or even overlooked in contemporary studies on the history of labour in South Africa.  

By authorising in December 1888 the building of the village of Kenilworth at a cost not exceeding £20,000, De Beers Consolidated Mines inaugurated a new phase in the housing of white workers in South Africa. Commissioned and constructed in the wake of amalgamation of the mines, the new village rendered the company with a certain degree of control over its white labour force. Prior to amalgamation white workers had exhibited their bargaining strength when they successfully resisted the implementation by management of a new searching ordinance. From the mineowners' point of view a mining monopoly had become imperative to survive economically, so as to control not only the output on the mines, but also to control labour. As with black labour, it was to housing that mineowners looked to effect a measure of control over white labour, only this time in a subtle and far less obtrusive manner.

Kenilworth's red brick houses afforded to the white workers and their families far greater comfort and convenience at half the rent of any comparable dwelling in town. Transport to and from Kimberley presented no obstacle as this was adequately catered for by De Beers in the form of mule-drawn trams. An observer at the time alleged that white miners at Kenilworth were 'the political and social serfs of the company', because 'if they object to any terms imposed upon them by the company, they must quit not only their employment but their homes, and must leave Kimberley to find a means of living outside the clutches of the diamond monopoly'.

Kenilworth Village features prominently in mining literature of the 1890s, one article in a prominent mining journal hailing it as 'the completest model village' in the world. From the point of view of the architect and town planner, the fact that the building of Kenilworth coincided with the earliest 'garden city' developments in Great Britain makes the village even more remarkable.

Acquaintance with the housing innovations of nineteenth century Kimberley will greatly enhance the study of housing initiative in the South African Railways, for it is only when juxtaposed with other forms of workers' housing that the true significance of railway housing will emerge.

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19 e.g., Turrell, R.V., Capital and labour on the Kimberley diamond fields 1871-1890.
21 Hobson, J.A., The war in South Africa: its causes and effects, p. 239.
22 South African Mining Journal, 7 December 1895, p. 214; also Building News, 9 January 1891, p. 64. The factory-village of Port Sunlight was begun in 1888 by the Lever Brothers, while Cadbury's model village at Bournville was begun in 1895.
Railway housing

The significance to this study of housing provision in the South African Railways, the largest single employer of Afrikaners in urban areas for many years, lies in the role of that institution in supporting Afrikaner urbanisation and Afrikaner nationalism. Indeed, the Railway organisation's assistance in the provision or acquisition of dwellings for its white employees compares favourably with the overall contribution of local authorities in providing houses for whites in terms of state advances and loans since 1920. The Administration viewed with pride its 'rehabilitative function' in easing the adjustment to the urban way of life of newly proletarianised Afrikaners, and in later years took credit for having been 'the only Government Department which took the Government's white labour policy seriously and introduced white labour on a large scale'.

Railway involvement with the needy section of the white population goes back to the days of the Central South African Railways and the period of general reconstruction in the wake of the South African War, when, as a relief measure, a number of black labourers was replaced by white labourers.

By 1907, the year of responsible government in the Transvaal, the employment of white labourers - in lieu of black - on all new construction works and on maintenance works at stations and depots on open lines, was confirmed railway policy. At the time of amalgamation of the Railways in 1910, white labourers had come 'to be recognised as a group of staff forming an integral part of Railway organisation'.

With the event in 1924 of the coming to office of J.B.M. Hertzog, the Railways came to blaze the trail for his Pact Government's policy of 'civilised labour'. Aimed at assuaging the economic position of a growing number of poor whites, this policy gave preference to white workers over blacks in unskilled as well as skilled jobs, in spite of their greater cost to employers. The unmitigated drift into the new industrial centres of indigent and largely illiterate whites, most of whom were Afrikaners, was then viewed as South Africa's biggest social problem ever.

Provision of accommodation for railwaymen of necessity went hand in hand with railway development in South Africa. Indeed, many towns scattered throughout the country came into existence as humble 'railway camps' - towns like Touws River, Beaufort-West, De Aar and Nauwpoort in the Cape, Bethlehem and Kromstad in the Orange Free State, Newcastle in Natal, and Heidelberg, Machadodorp, Waterval-Boven and Komatipoort in the Transvaal, to name a few.

Small railway settlements in time developed into towns with a peculiar atmosphere of their own, for life here was redolent of activities connected with the railways. Dwellings were railway owned as a rule and built in approved style by the Railways, in whose hands also lay the responsibility of administering these towns. The practice of housing railwaymen and their families on the opposite side of the railway line to the town, or in areas which were in some way separated from the town, gave rise to the association of railwayfolk with 'living on the wrong side of the tracks', impelling the Railways after 1937 to purchase dispersed residential properties in different parts of the towns instead. It also instigated a resolution to substitute the term 'railway township' for 'railway camp' and to refrain from erecting rows of identical houses along monotonously straight and bare streets.

25 S.A.R., Report of Committee appointed to investigate the employment of unskilled European workers in the Railway service, par. 11.
27 Hertzog's National Party ruled from 1924 to 1933, first in a coalition with the Labour Party until 1929, then independently until 1933, when a new coalition was formed with Jan Smuts.
28 See for example S.A.R., Housing Commission, 1937: Report No. 6 (final), par. 54-62.
Providing suitable family accommodation for white labourers in regular employment was for many years regarded as prerequisite to the success of the Railways' white labour policy - quarters for this class of employee were accordingly provided free of charge.\(^{29}\) Perusal of housing provision for white railworkers imparts perhaps the most eloquent innovation in railway housing for the purpose of this inquiry, namely the portable railway 'model village'.

White pieceworkers employed on railway construction work were never allowed to bring their families on to the work. In the mid-1930s, however, with major railroad reconstruction works in the pipeline, want of a stable workforce housed in convenient proximity immediated the introduction of the Model Village system. Accommodating around 200 to 250 families in wood-and-iron houses on fenced-off plots, the typical model village also comprised communal bathrooms and wash houses, a hall, school, dispensary and so on.

Coupled with an elaborate health and welfare support system, Railway model villages were subsequently described as 'most useful centres for the pursuance of social rehabilitative measures'.\(^{30}\) A Railway Commission in like manner concluded that 'as a rehabilitation measure the model villages, in serving the multiple factors of providing work, the supervision of health, ensuring education and social uplift, and last, the instilling of a measure of discipline, have proved to be one of the most effective instruments which could have been utilised'.\(^{31}\)

In contrast, its largely laissez faire approach to the housing of black employees occasioned a commission of enquiry in 1921 to remark how the Railway organisation was the 'greatest sinner' among large employers in openly disregarding the legislation governing 'the housing, feeding and general treatment of native labourers'.\(^{32}\) The central thrust of black housing arrangements in the Railways took the form of compounds for 'single' men loosely modelled on those in use at the mines. Living conditions in the railway compounds were not of the best and evoked repeated criticism from various quarters. Married workers were expected to secure their own lodgings in municipal black townships, an arrangement which several municipalities strongly objected to in later years.

Though railway housing policy can in part be construed simply as an instrument of racial discrimination, this investigation is more concerned with reviewing housing initiative in the South African Railways in the light of the capitalist and white nationalist ideologies it had served. The contribution of black railway housing to this study is therefore of an ancillary nature - its inclusion seeks to inform rather than to compare.

\(^{29}\) See for example S.A.R., Annual Report of the General Manager, 1912, p. 75.


\(^{32}\) S.A.R., Report of the Native, Coloured and Indian Labour Committee, 1921, par. 21-3.
The absence of a general theory with regard to the working of ideology through design accounts for the somewhat heuristic approach adopted in the study. At one level the enquiry can be said to address the genesis of subsidised housing in relation to South Africa's racially divided society. Implicit use is thus made of several broad principles with respect to housing and the relationship thereof with the wider social system. Housing, for example, viewed as 'an aspect of the reproduction of labour power', while the means in which it is provided are assumed to be 'interlinked with the reproduction of the social relations of capitalism'. Housing is also viewed as 'an arena for social class conflicts and a locus for various forms of state intervention'.

The political and ideological features of present-day South African capitalism - the notions of 'race', 'nationality' and 'language group' used in expressing relations of domination and subordination - have powerful structural roots in the years during which the country's ruling classes were being formed. The enquiry therefore concerns, not notions of 'race', 'nationality' and 'language group' used in expressing relations of reproduction of the social relations of capitalism'. Housing is also viewed as 'an arena for social class conflicts and a locus for various forms of state intervention'.

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In recounting in the opening study of this thesis the unfolding of diamond mining
and the new relationships forged in South Africa’s first industrial community, use will
also be made of the impressive array of studies partly or entirely devoted to the subjects
of mining capital, labour and compounds, in particular the recent and exhaustive
analyses by Robert Turrell and William Worger.37 Existing literature does not,
however, deal with the planning and architecture of compounds in any comprehensive
way. In fact, no visual material could be found in any of these studies other than the
well-known photograph of the De Beers West End Compound (Figure 1.2, p. 6). It is
the intention in Part I not only to add a spatial dimension to this body of knowledge,
but also to evince the relevance of Kenilworth model village as a parallel institution to
the closed compound.

Use is made of visual material from a number of sources, chief among which a
collection of original working-drawings housed in the De Beers Consolidated Archive
in Kimberley (abbreviated DBA in source references). The drawings on compounds
and Kenilworth houses availed of are presented in the form of reconstructions.38

Informing the analysis in Part II will be the thoughts and schemes advanced on the
subject of housing in a great many official documents, notably the annual reports of the
General Manager and of the Railway Health Officer, the reports of various Railway
committees and commissions of enquiry dealing with housing, as well as journals like
the South African Railways Magazine. Reference will be made throughout to other
relevant reports which had a bearing on the development of Railway housing policy.

As in Part I, visual material forms a vital part of the enquiry into Railway housing.
The most important source utilised in this respect is the drawing collection housed in
the Plan Room of the Chief Civil Engineer at the South African Transport Services
Headquarters in Johannesburg (abbreviated SATS in source references). As before,
this material is presented in the form of reconstructions based on the original drawings.

Much of the photographic material used in both Parts I and II was selected from
the collections of a number of archives, notably the Cape Archives Depot in Cape Town
(CAD), the De Beers Consolidated Mines Archive (DBA) and the McGregor Museum
(MMKP) in Kimberley, the Central Archives Depot in Pretoria (PAD), as well as the
collection of the Museum and Photographical Section of the South African Transport
Services (SATS) in Johannesburg.

37 Which include Turrell, R.V., Capital and labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields, & Worger,
W., South Africa’s city of diamonds. Chibaro, Charles van Onselen’s study of mining labour in
Southern Rhodesia, was the pioneering study of the compound as an institution of ‘social control’. Another important contribution is that by Sean Moroney, ‘The development of the compound as a
38 These form part of a series of drawings, the numbers of which are preceded by the prefixes BY and
EY - full reference numbers accompany all reconstructions used in this study.

PART I - ROOTS OF INTERVENTION:
TWO EARLY EXAMPLES OF MINERS’ HOUSING

16
The early housing arrangements for workers at South Africa's diamond mines bear eloquent testimony to the vulnerability of mass housing to diverse forms of ideological intervention. Part I appraises two nineteenth-century innovations in the sphere of mineworkers' housing at Kimberley, viz. the closed compound and the model village of Kenilworth, the significance of which lay in their respective roles in the genesis of South Africa's racially divided social order.

Part I comprises four chapters, the first two of which establish a context in which intervention in the sphere of housing for black and white miners can be set. Chapter 2 commences by dealing in outline with life at the Kimberley diggings during the early 1870s. Chapter 3 continues to recount the industrialisation of diamond mining in the period leading to the collapse of the diamond market in 1882 and the concerted attempt by mining capital to salvage the paralysed Kimberley industry.

The remainder of Part I pursues the theme of reconstruction in more detail. Chapter 4 cogitates the preamble to the introduction of the closed compound, an innovation so lucrative to labour-intensive industrial proliferation that in Kimberley it had formed the crux of housing arrangements for African mineworkers for no less than ninety-two years.\(^1\) This radical housing system is shown from the mid-1880s onward to have facilitated the effective control, disciplining and coercion of black workers on the South African diamond mines. With other large employers of black labour following suit, compounds soon served 'to isolate, regiment and exploit the most vulnerable section of the working class' - the African working class - throughout southern Africa.\(^2\)

Chapter 5 completes the picture of labour coercion and acquiescence in Kimberley by exploring the underlying motives behind the construction by De Beers Consolidated Mines of the village of Kenilworth for its white employees. It hopes to divulge why more heed should be taken of this widely ignored parallel institution to the compound.

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**CHAPTER 2 - THE BEGINNINGS OF A MINING REVOLUTION**

It seems that it was the extraordinarily far-reaching and complex four-dimensional mining revolution at the turn of the century that constituted the major single historical determinant of South Africa's subsequent unique political and economic path.\(^3\)

The lustrous saga of diamonds in South African history has been told many times. Though tarnished by the recent obversion in South African historiography, the staggering progression from humble 'river diggings' on the banks of the Vaal River in the late 1860s to a highly centralised industry, said to have produced around ninety percent of the world output in diamonds before the turn of the century, never ceases to amaze.\(^4\)

The discovery in South Africa of diamonds (and subsequently gold) can be shown to have initiated the swift transformation of its predominantly agricultural society with a virtually non-existent economy. While the small-scale export of agricultural products and ship chandlering had represented an emerging 'infant capitalism' at the time, capitalism was still far from being firmly entrenched in the Cape Colony. It was only during the mining revolution of the 1890s and 1900s that the dominance of capital over the South African region 'rapidly and violently came into being', when the 'mighty imperial forces which owned or buttressed gold-mining wrought transformations in every corner of the region, in every sphere of the economy, in the nature and scope of the state, and in the form and content of ideology'.\(^5\)

Of the utmost significance to the mining revolution was, first and foremost, the resolute onslaught of mining capital on 'weakened and fragmented non-capitalist "black" modes of production'. Be that as it may, the mining revolution in South Africa had implied more than just 'a clash between weakened "black" systems and incoming imperial forces'. Two additional forces were fulfilling equally determinant roles in the creation of the modern industrialising South African system, hence the description of a 'four-dimensional' revolution. These were, of course, the forces of the Boer societies and of merchant capital.\(^6\)

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1. Kimberley's closed compounds were 'opened' in March 1977: Lipton, M., 'Kimberley case study'. *Optima*, 50(2)/3/120, 1980.
4. Reference is made elsewhere to the fundamental impact of a formidable Marxist school of thought on the writing of the region's history: vide supra, p. 14; Emden, P.H., *Randlords*, p. 61.
2.1. The 'dry diggings'

It was the discovery in 1870 of more diamonds at Du Toit’s Pan - a day’s journey from the banks of the Vaal River - that gave birth to the first 'dry diggings'. The resulting influx of people to the new diamond fields created what later was described as South Africa's first industrial community, from which there soon emerged a new competition between white and black in South Africa, not for land or capital but for a place in industry. It was here in the budding town of Kimberley that South Africa was confronted, for the first time, with the modern problems of capital.7

The findings at Du Toitspan rekindled the struggle for ownership which earlier the first river diggings had sallied forth. Actively contesting sovereignty over parts of the diamond region were the local Griqua and Tlaping people, the two independent Boer Republics and the Cape of Good Hope authorities. While the dispute continued, the diggings were being administered by a magistrate on behalf of the Orange Free State. In the end the disposition of the territory depended upon the award of a chosen arbitrator, Lieutenant-Governor Keate of Natal. His announcement in favour of the Griquas was followed by a request from Andries Waterboer, the Griqua leader, for imperial protection. Sir Henry Barkly, the governor of the Cape, wasted no time in annexing in October of 1871 for Britain the colony of Griqualand West, which included not only both the river and dry diggings, but a considerable area besides. Years of negotiations in the end resulted in Griqualand West being annexed to the Cape Colony in October 1880.8

Whereas British officials regarded the adding of Griqualand West to the British Empire without a shot being fired 'a triumph of diplomacy', Afrikaners viewed it as a 'crude imperialist grab'.9 Diggerfolk greeted the hoisting of the British flag at the Fields with mixed feelings - Britons among them were naturally delighted for the 'reign of the Boer' was over, but many others appear to have favoured Republican rule.10

Griqualand West was run by three temporary Commissioners during the first two years after annexation. A Lieutenant-Governor took charge early in 1873, but was sacked two years later and replaced by an Administrator. In 1880, upon annexation to the Cape Colony, a system of Civil Commissioners was introduced.11

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7 De Kiewiet, C.W., A history of South Africa, p. 89; life at the river diggings is described in Payton, C.A., The diamond diggings of South Africa, pp. 7-12; Williams, G.F., The diamond mines of South Africa, pp. 140-63; the diggings at Pniel and Klipdrift went into steady decline during the latter half of 1870: Worger, W.H., South Africa’s city of diamonds, pp. 12-3.
10 See for example Payton, C.A., op. cit., pp. 51-6; also Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 3.
DUTOITSPAN AND BULTFONTEIN

South Africa's 'city of diamonds' had its origin in the diggers' camps that came to nestle around the four mines of Dutoitspan, Bultfontein, De Beers and Kimberley. Merchant speculators were quick to buy from their Afrikaner owners the three neighbouring farms on which these were to be developed. The two farms where digging got under way first, Dorstfontein and Bultfontein, became the eventual property of the London and South African Exploration Company, 'the most profitable company ever formed to make money out of Kimberley diamonds'. An even richer property than the London Company estate turned out to be that of Vooruitzigt, the farm upon which both the De Beers and the Kimberley mines were to be developed. The Vooruitzigt estate was acquired by the Griqualand West government in 1875. The first of the diggers' camps, Dutoitspan, was situated on Dorstfontein Farm. Dubbed the 'City of the Pan', Dutoitspan in 1871 consisted of family wagons and solitary tents scattered around an assemblage of 'tents, marquees, and buildings of every possible material being charmingly grouped round the large open market square, from which streets, mostly of canvas, radiate in all directions'.

Every morning at seven produce of every kind, food, cattle and sheep from the surrounding farms were auctioned in the square. The camp in no time sported several large hotels, many stores, two churches, a hospital, a Theatre Royal, a number of billiard-rooms and numerous canteens. Henry Webb, later major shareholder in the London and South African Exploration Company, was the man responsible for the 'excellent plan' on which Dutoitspan was laid out. Dutoitspan was abutted by a second camp - smaller in size and more haphazard in appearance - in close proximity to the Bultfontein diggings where, early in 1871, the inroad of squatting prospectors had sparked off a rift with the owners of the farm. There was a proliferation of canteens scattered throughout the camps, all of which were doing a roaring trade. A brightly coloured flag on a tall pole outside indicated from afar the presence of a canteen within the maze of canvas. They were patronised by black and white, although black diggers were said in particular to have frequented those canteens on the fringes of the camps. A camp regulation that 'no liquors shall be supplied to any native without a written permission from his master' was universally evaded, Payton reports. Camp hotels served three hot meals per day. Typically a huge barn-like edifice, the camp hotel's only redeeming feature was a commodious dining-room and bar, the 'meander finishing' of which was hidden behind the 'magnificence' of a 'lofty gable end of wood facing the street'. Bedrooms were few and far between, with regular board and lodging prohibitively expensive. The only overnight visitor positively catered for, i.e. propitiated 'with four square yards of green-baize partition, an iron bedstead, and a mattress', was the diamond merchant. Slight wooden and green-baize partitioning formed tiny 'bedrooms' along the sides of the dining-room. General stores were also plentiful on the Fields. Constructed of corrugated iron, most stores traded in miscellanea ranging from digger's tools and ready-made clothing to preserved food and liquors. Their keepers often participated in diamond dealing. Churches of several denominations existed in the camps. Services were held in big tents. Schemes were launched towards raising funds for the erection of more dignified places of worship. General stores too were accommodated in large tents for some time.
VOORUITZIGT

The rise of the camps on Vooruitzigt Farm some four kilometres to the north-east was said to have been even more spectacular. When regular working was started here in May 1871, a very large diggers' population converged on the De Beers diggings. Two months later there was yet another rush of diggers, this time to Colesberg Kopje, a small hill two kilometres east from De Beers. Henceforth referring to the latter as 'Old Rush', swarms of prospectors staked out their claims at the location they named 'New Rush', which was to become the famous Kimberley Mine.

The organisation of operations in the diggings at Vooruitzigt had differed from those on the other two farms. An inspector of mines from the Orange Free State was able to survey both diamondiferous areas on Vooruitzigt Farm before it was fully rushed. Under his direction roadways were laid out across the diggings, thus providing for access from the edge of the excavations to claims at the centre. Working-claims at Vooruitzigt were neatly laid out between the parallel roadways in squares measuring approximately 9.5 by 9.5 metre (31 by 31 feet). The slipshod fashion in which claims was staked out on the other farms resulted in mayhem - as roadways were never allowed for, claimholders in the middle of the excavations were obligated repeatedly to cross the properties of others whilst removing excavated soil. 19

19 Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 17; on the early layout of Kimberley Mine, see Williams, G.F., op. cit., pp. 196-7; Reunert, T., Diamonds and gold in South Africa, pp. 24-5.

Early descriptions of the camps at Vooruitzigt reveal a less ordered approach. The labyrinthine tent town at New Rush was desperately cramped. 'An anti-climax ridiculous' is how Boyle experienced its huge square: the surrounding 'jumble of tent, and hole, and Kaffir shed, and cart, and tethered horse, and rubbish heap' came within arm's length of the 'neat back windows' of the 'warehouses ... pretty frame tents of "diamond koopers", neat canteens and luncheon bars' which enclosed the square. 20

Forming the heart of the 'picturesque medley of tents and marquees' of De Beers were stores and hotels closely grouped along the roadside. Payton's is undoubtedly a romanticised rendering of the atmosphere in the settlement in 1871. Describing it as 'rather ... aristocratic', he tells of 'well-dressed gentlemen, and well-dressed ladies too, ... cantering over the "veldt" on well-groomed horses', lending to the whole place a 'thoroughly "well-to-do" air'. And, recalls Payton, the English element in the camp predominated pleasingly over the Dutch or Boer' to boot. To outsiders struggling to eke out a living at the poorer diggings, De Beers was speedily becoming a bête noire. 21

In September 1871 the proprietors of Vooruitzigt announced in a Cape newspaper the public auctioning of stands in a 'New Township at De Beers'. 'It is scarcely necessary', the advertisement insisted, 'to point out the advantages that will accrue to possessors of Erven in this 'Township' which was to be 'eligibly situated on a gentle slope contiguous to the 'TWO RUSHES' where already diggers were 'yielding such LARGE FORTUNES'. 22

22 Cited in Boyle, F., op. cit., p. 114.
2.2. From canvas to corrugated iron

Up at a little before daybreak, call the Kafirs to light fire, cook breakfast, then off to the claim; back to the tent at midday for half an hour's rest, and a 'snack' of something cold; then back to work at the claim till five, cook and eat dinner; after which if the digger has done an honest day's work, hotels, billiards, and other dissipations will have no charms for him, and he will be glad to lie down, amuse himself with a little light reading and the never-failing pipe, and 'turn in' early, say nine or ten, to enjoy a thoroughly good night's rest.23

CAMP LIFE

Two Diggers' Committees, five representatives to each chosen by the prospectors in mass meeting, were at the helm of life in the camps. A set of rules and regulations was framed which all and sundry living and working in the camps had to abide by.24 It stipulated, among other things, that no-one could own more than two claims, and that owners of claims not worked for eight consecutive days would forfeit their property.

The Committees were also burdened with water provision, health and sanitation. Rainwater was collected in open dams built near the camps to see cattle, horses and mules through the dry season - smaller dams were set aside for washing. Wells were sunk and drinking-water distributed under direction of the committees. At Dutoitspan and Bultfontein each digger was entitled to two buckets of water per day at a monthly charge of 1s. Water from a private well at Dutoitspan was cleaner and dearer. Though new wells were sunk all the time, water was still sold by the bucket at New Rush in late 1871. Ablution was an activity no-one could freely indulge in - diggers were acquainted in 'the art of taking a thorough bath ... in half a bucketful of water', a ritual reserved for Sundays. Dutoitspan later acquired a 'small bathing establishment'.25

The bulk of general merchandise was transported by ox-wagon from Algoa Bay, an irksome journey of 700 kilometres taking anything from one to several months. A mule-wagon service set up in due course boasted a journey time of only fifteen days. Irksome Journey of 700 kilometres taking anything from one to several months. A mule-wagon service set up in due course boasted a journey time of only fifteen days. Ablution was an activity no-one could freely indulge in - diggers were acquainted with the 'art of taking a thorough bath ... in half a bucketful of water', a ritual reserved for Sundays. Dutoitspan later acquired a 'small bathing establishment'.25

That many newly-arrived diggers, particularly those from England or Europe, had found the climate at the Fields extremely trying is not surprising - not even the fancies of spring can quite conceal its characteristic extremes of blistering hot days and frosty nights. Summers in this arid region are notoriously hot and dusty, the thermometer frequently registering 100°F in the shade. Probably the biggest tribulation for most diggers was the unrelenting dust-storms of November, sometimes lasting up to several hours. Roaring winds swept wilfully through the camps, bringing with them the finest and most searching dust, forthwith penetrating every nook and cranny of the tent.30

25 Stench from the public 'latrines' (large open trenches at first) was dreadful at times and attracted thousands of flies: Payton, C.A., op. cit., pp. 16, 31, 35-6, 44, 153-4, 191-2, 197, 208.
26 Good forage for horses was costly too: ibid., pp. 62, 64, 152-5; Williams, op. cit., pp. 210-11.
28 Ibid., pp. 151, 161-4, 195.
29 Matthews, J.W., Incwadi Yami, p. 115; the dust was classed with 'plague, pestilence, and famine', and, if there is anything worse, with 'that also' in a local newspaper: Payton, C.A., op. cit., p. 15.
While the hot gusts of summer enveloped the camps in a cloud of dust, 'the stifling, oppressive, sultry heat' of a windless day rendered even the slightest exercise tiresome. From November to January the almost daily occurrence of violent thunderstorms made life even more insufferable. Towards the end of the afternoon 'lurid, coppery clouds' gathered to the windward - the vivid lightning and deafening thunder, and more often than not a barrage of hail or pelting rain, impelled one and all to scramble for shelter.31

The 'tempered heats of autumn' were followed by what Payton proclaims 'the really delightful weather of a South African winter', though even he had to accede that it could be very cold at the diggings, 'a kind of cold which I have felt more keenly than the hardest frosts in England'. In such weather the claims were deserted and the hotels and canteens jam-packed with diggers. There was the odd winter rain-storm too - spending a wintry night under drenched blankets with a howling wind tearing away at the fastenings of a flooded tent was a dismal experience by anyone's standards. Nights like these occasioned camp hotels to specialise in providing 'shake-downs' for washed-out, storm-beaten diggers. This by no means disdained service entailed a few blankets or antelope skins spread on the floor and table in the dining-room.32

Bell-shaped and square or oblong tents were the principal kinds of dwellings patronised by the diggers during the earliest years at the Fields. These could be bought ready-made from stores in the camps, or made to order locally by a tent-maker. A less costly alternative was to purchase the tent second-hand at the bi-weekly auction on the market. Being round and 'peculiarly liable to the attacks of the wind', bell-tents were the least popular: 'if a "young whirlwind" should chance to get inside a bell tent, away come pegs or fastenings, and up goes the canvas over the pole like a big umbrella turned inside out'.33

Tents square or rectangular in plan were far more convenient and easier to 'furnish' in a conventional manner, however spartan the dweller's goods and chattels. Holding the tent in position were two upright poles, one at each end, joined by a ridge pole. Adding stability to the structure were guy ropes taken from the spikes at the top of the poles and secured to posts implanted in the ground some four or five metres away, one on either side of the tent. Forming the 'walls' of the tent was a seam at about waist-height from the ground, from which lines were attached to 'strong upright posts ... of the same height as the seam', fixed in the ground a metre from the tent. The bottom-end of the 'walls' was fastened down by pegs 'driven deeply into the ground'.34

32 Ibid., pp. 31, 127, 149, 202-3, 214; after spending 3 days and nights of heavy rain in his tent, Payton remarks in a letter to home: 'Fancy sleeping in a puddle!'.
33 Ibid., pp. 42, 147.
Diggers soon learnt to keep clear of even the slightest depression in the ground when pitching a tent. A trench was dug around the tent and a ridge of earth heaped along the bottom of the tent to keep water out. On the inside a 'light skirking-board' lined a floor of clean gravel from the claims, nodules the size of marbles or smaller. Empty bottles were placed on the tent pole spikes in fear of lightning; spikes were also decorated with ornate knobs or balls. As regards the blazing summer sun, a "big "fly" or awning stretched over the tent, about a foot above it", was found 'very promotive of coolness inside the tent', as was a lining of green baize on the inside of the tent.35

Nothing connoted the temporary status of many diggers better than the interior of their canvas abodes. To most tenter no doubt the most versatile piece of 'furniture' was the traveller's portmanteau. Not only did it serve well as a dining-table or writing-desk, but two pushed together proved handy in dividing the tent into compartments if shared, or, with a straw mattress could act as a makeshift bed in lieu of the more common home-made wood and canvas stretcher. Old boxes, 'adorned with a piece of canvas as table-cloth', were also used to eat at, while fish-kegs or other small articles served the purpose of chairs. Lending 'a great air of barbaric luxury', were a few antelope skins spread over the tent-floor.36

Unlike the cluttered congestion of those at Bultfontein and Dutoitspan, the tents at Vooruitzigt were 'very comfortably arranged inside and out'. Here the typical digger's compound comprised a 'large well-furnished tent' located 'in the middle of a big enclosure, fenced in with thorn bushes, containing also a tent or "kraal" for the Kafirs, and a little corral for horses, mules, or cattle'. A 'good-sized' tree near the tent served as larder, 'its branches tastefully hung with legs of mutton and other joints of meat'.37

Prosperous diggerfolk in time betokened their good fortune by substituting a more pretentious timber-framed canvas or wooden house for the fragile tent. Affording more comfort, yet remaining demountable, portative, and easy to re-erect, both types could readily be moved to a new location or a different camp if the occupants so desired. The moving of timber-framed houses was a familiar sight in the first years at the Fields. Within moments of the watchword of 'new rush' being proclaimed, a frantic clambering ensued 'to strike tents, unscrew and disjoint wooden houses'. With each piece and plank numbered, little time was required 'to erect them in all their pristine grandeur, when and where required'.38

35 As were public buildings, a custom said to have boosted church-going after a diamond was picked up 'in church during prayer-time': ibid., pp. 29, 148-9, 198; Boyle, F., op. cit., p. 111.
38 FIGURE 2.6 The moving of canvas houses, a familiar spectacle in the diggers' camps of the early 1870s (after Allen, V., *Early Kimberley*, p. 27)

Assembled 'frame houses' of various sizes could be purchased in the camps. These were either built locally or were transported in pieces by ox-wagon from many colonial towns. A small canvas house comprised 'a square wooden framework with a pitched roof, the whole covered with canvas', measuring 3.6 by 2.4 m (12 x 8 foot). It vaunted a bolted door and neat windows 'bound with coloured braid or ribbands round the edge'.39 Besides serving as portable dwellings, wooden-framed canvas structures were utilised as churches, hospitals and hotels during these early years.40

Houses constructed entirely of wood were dearer, and came in sizes from 6.4 by 3.6 m to 7 by 4.8 m (21 x 12 to 23 x 16 foot). Its rigid structure made the use of glass windows possible, a luxury hitherto restricted to public buildings of a more permanent nature. Wholesale and retail stores as early as 1871 merchandised window-glass in sizes ranging from around 23 by 18 cm to 30 by 25 cm (9 x 7 to 12 x 10 inches).41

Some of the wooden houses had corrugated iron roofs, as did the gable-ended timber structures commonly used as stores, hotels, etc. By placing the sheeting a few inches away from the timber roof, the intervening space could be filled with reeds for thermal insulation, providing welcome relief from a blazing summer sun and a roof said 'to be hot enough to fry a beef steak or cook an omelet'.42 On a more ambitious scale was the sturdy wooden dwelling now reputed to be the oldest surviving house of Kimberley. Prefabricated in England, this small but pretentious cottage was brought from the coast by ox-wagon and erected at the Fields in 1877 (see Figure 2.8).

40 E.g., the first Diggers' Hospital and the Crown Hotel: Herbert, G., *op. cit.*, p. 126.
Diggers soon learnt to keep clear of even the slightest depression in the ground when pitching a tent. A trench was dug around the tent and a ridge of earth heaped along the bottom of the tent to keep water out. On the inside a 'light skirting-board' lined a floor of clean gravel from the claims, nodules the size of marbles or smaller. Empty bottles were placed on the tent pole spikes in fear of lightning; spikes were also decorated with ornate knobs or balls. As regards the blazing summer sun, a 'big "fly" or awning stretched over the tent, about a foot above it', was found 'very promotive of coolness inside the tent', as was a lining of green baize on the inside of the tent.

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35 As were public buildings, a custom said to have boosted church-going after a diamond was picked up 'in church during prayer-time': ibid., pp. 29, 148-9, 198; Boyle, F., op. cit., p. 111.
37 All workers, black and white, lived on their employers' encampments: ibid., pp. 138, 151.
38 'A rapid sketch of the ... diamond fields', supplement to the Diamond News and Vaal Advertiser, 3 June 1871, cited in Herbert, G., Pioneers of prefabrication, p. 127.
40 E.g., the first Diggers' Hospital and the Crown Hotel: Herbert, G., op. cit., p. 125.
41 Payton, C.A., op. cit., pp. 133-5, 150; Boyle, F., op. cit., p. 113; the buildings and stores on the New Rush square had 'glass in abundance set in the walls of plank and corrugated iron'.
42 Herbert, G., op. cit., p. 127.

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A 'MOST HIDEOUS' MATERIAL

With a population of around 50,000 people, some sixty per cent of whom were black, the camps at the dry diggings formed South Africa's second largest settlement by the end of 1871. Those on Vooruitzigt Farm were bestowed civic rights by proclamation on 5 June 1873. 'The encampment and town heretofore variously known as De Beers, New Rush, the Colesberg Kopje No. 2 or Vooruitzigt, shall henceforth be and be designated the town of Kimberley'. The appellation was in honour of the British Secretary for the Colonies, the Earl of Kimberley, who professed that he could neither pronounce nor spell 'Vooruitzigt', and that 'New Rush' was far too unbecoming for anything within the dominions of Queen Victoria.

Yet, despite the new-found status, there was not a single brick house in Kimberley until two years later. Substantial wood and brick houses were slow in making their appearance at the Fields - the region simply offered no timber suitable for building, and with water and firewood at a premium, the few bricks produced locally were sun-dried and of an inferior quality. Transporting conventional building material from the coast by ox-wagon was laborious and prohibitively expensive, hence the proliferation of lightweight constructions in the mining camps.

Corrugated iron was first exported to the Cape and Natal in the late 1840s - in Cape Town an 'iron-built' store was let in 1847 and a 'wood-and-iron villa' was said to have overlooked the bay of Durban in 1849. Notwithstanding an initial reluctance, the incorporation of corrugated iron in Cape architecture furnished its traditional style of house-building with the all-important verandah. Briskly finding its way to the Fields and further inland, the newfangled material inspired the muster of verandahs which characterised domestic architecture in South Africa well into the next century. Downright repugnant as it must have seemed to a connoisseur in Late Victorian taste, the advent of corrugated iron in South Africa had engendered, during the 1860s and 1870s, a vernacular style with a grace of its own, the so-called 'sinkplaatstyl'.

44 Emden, P.H., op. cit., p. 31; Doughty, O., op. cit., p. 97; Dutoitspan and Bultfontein were renamed Beaconsfield in 1883 (after Benjamin Disraeli). When in 1912 Kimberley was declared a city, it incorporated Beaconsfield: Allen, V., Early Kimberley, p. 24.
45 Around £30 per wagon-load: Herbert, G., op. cit., p. 12.
47 Or 'corrugated-iron-style'. Appropriation of corrugated iron to the vernacular culminated in the Windhoek 'Tintenpalast' in South West Africa; Saint Patrick's church at Batho in Bloemfontein is hailed by some as the Parthenon of the style: Bierman, B., Boukuns in Suid-Afrika, pp. 88-92.
Corrugated Kimbeerly

Corrugated iron was introduced at the diamond fields in the earliest days of digging - a half-a-dozen or so wood-and-iron structures were in existence in the camps by the end of 1870. As canvas made way for more permanent materials, corrugated iron grew in importance. By 1873 the straggling camp streets were lined with iron buildings of all shapes and sizes. Corrugated iron was king: it was used for almost every warehouse, store, hotel, office and house in Kimberley, from the unassuming residence of the first Lieutenant-Governor to the august ballroom erected by Sir David Harris.48

Kimberley had acquired an air of permanence without sacrificing the 'portability' of its buildings, i.e. they were still easy to dismantle, transport and re-erect elsewhere. It is not easy to ascertain whether or not the town's corrugated iron structures were completely prefabricated, but the proportion of wood-and-iron buildings made locally more likely than not increased as building material became more freely available towards the mid- and late 1870s.49

A number of the corrugated iron buildings in Kimberley were imported complete and ready for assembly from England, e.g. the petite St Martini consecrated in 1875. Prefabricated 'iron houses' were exported to the Fields from the workshops in London, Liverpool, Birmingham and Glasgow of companies such as Frederick Braby & Co. and Messrs. Morewood & Co. Buildings were prefabricated in South Africa too, in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban, and were traded in Kimberley throughout the 1870s, ranging from a one-roomed 3.6 by 4.6 m (12 x 15 foot) cottage to the more substantial family type with one large and two small rooms, a kitchen and verandah.50

But most of the wood-and-iron buildings at the Fields were probably site-built by local workmen since, as Gilbert Herbert points out in *Pioneers of prefabrication*, their construction required little technical skill or experience. Local merchants from as early as 1870 onward retailed galvanised iron sheeting brought overland from Port Elizabeth - by 1872 one local auctioneer alone disposed of 50,000 pounds of galvanised iron. With recourse to the whole range of elements and components of the wood-and-iron building - 'deals, flooring and ceiling boards, panel doors, window glass, galvanised iron sheeting and ridging' - local builders were able to erect from start to finish a small corrugated iron house in fourteen days. A handful of Kimberley's wood-and-iron buildings were architect-designed, one of which was the Harris ballroom.51

48 Herbert, G., *op. cit.*, pp. 129, 202n.30: the interior walls and ceiling of the ballroom were of richly patterned sheet metal.
50 Durban's merchants by 1859 already offered large quantities of imported galvanised corrugated iron sheets, 6 or 8 foot long, as well as guttering and ridge caps: *ibid.*, pp. 57, 129, 132-3; for a Braby and Co. advertisement: Baines, F.R.G.S., *Gold regions of South Africa*, p. 208.
51 Herbert, G., *op. cit.*, pp. 130-2, 202n.36.
FIGURE 2.10 St Martini, Kimberley's prefabricated wood-and-iron Lutheran church, imported from England in 1875, now re-erected at the Kimberley Open Mine Museum - its hessian-lined interior is lit through 'Gothic' windows with simulated leaded lights (after Herbert, G., Pioneers of prefabrication, p. 131)

FIGURE 2.11 An early example of a small prefabricated corrugated iron cottage with verandah. The men in front of the house are Cecil Rhodes (standing with umbrella), J.B. Robinson (hand in pocket) and Sidney Sheppard (seated), the Attorney-General of Griqualand West (CAD, E 290)

FIGURE 2.12 A later example of a site-built wood-and-iron house, Kimberley. The trellis-work verandah was characteristic of the houses that nestled around the Kimberley Mine after the mid-1870s (after Picton-Seymour, D., Victorian buildings in South Africa, p. 379)

FIGURE 2.13 Another of the pretty wood-and-iron dwellings which lined the edge of the Big Hole in the late 1870s (after Picton-Seymour, D., Victorian buildings in South Africa, p. 378)
The mid-1870s saw attempts to bring some propriety to the tortuous corrugated jungle into which Kimberley had grown. Pavements were added to principal streets, regular roads made in residential areas and gardening among residents fostered by the financing of street watering after 1874. Many wood-and-iron houses displayed newly added ornate verandahs shading the street facade (Figures 2.12 & 2.13). A start was also made in lining the corrugated iron walls of houses with the small sun-dried bricks made locally. Timber replaced the sagging canvas ceilings in many homes. As with the introduction of canvas houses earlier, such improvements - and the latest in building vogue - were particularly noticeable in those areas closest to Kimberley Mine. In 1875 a prominent diamond merchant, J.B. Robinson, became the owner of Kimberley's first ever brick house. The following year brought the proclamation of stricter sanitary regulations and the introduction of a brickmaking scheme aimed at encouraging the building of 'more substantially built homes' less susceptible to fire. The Municipality of Kimberley was founded in 1879.52

Not before the late 1880s did brick begin to challenge 'the ugly but convenient corrugated iron' used in residential building. Anthony Trollope, visiting the Fields in 1877, found Kimberley 'distasteful ... in the extreme': 'The town is built of corrugated iron ... It is probably the most hideous [material] that has yet come to man's hands'.53


Of course, corrugated iron also facilitated the contrivance in the mid-1880s of what later was described as 'the most striking sight at Kimberley, and one unique in the world', the closed compound.54 As will be shown in Chapter 5, even the new generation of compounds built in the town in 1903 was constructed of steel and corrugated iron.

FIGURE 2.17 St Cyprian's, Kimberley's elegant Anglican church, c. 1880, complete with its 'Gothic' traceried and clerestory windows, corrugated iron sheathing and fleche, was a prefabricated import from England and possibly a Braby church. The 1889 Illustrated Catalogue of Frederick Braby & Co. shows a similarly elaborate design for a cross-shaped plan (after MMKP 124).

FIGURE 2.18 The interior of St Cyprian's, Kimberley (after MMKP 2168 & 1017)
2.3. An intriguing tout ensemble

In the nineteenth century both African and Afrikaner societies were small-scale, closely knit communities, based on subsistence agriculture, with wealth and prestige concentrated on cattle. Neither had the capital nor the technical expertise necessary to develop the mineral wealth discovered in South Africa in the second half of the nineteenth century. For both, the problems of resistance and collaboration when confronted by the greater imperial power of Britain, rural impoverishment, the adaptation to an industrial environment, and the growth of nationalism, frequently with a strong religious, if not millenarian flavour, are the major themes of their twentieth-century history.55

A SOCIETY OF DIGGERS

Digger society at South Africa's early diamond fields formed an entertaining social hotchpotch. The interplay of race, class and modes of production in Kimberley was a portent of many ideological and political peculiarities of South African capitalism in the twentieth century, particularly in the articulation of its relations of domination and subordination in categories of nationality, language group or race.

Early portrayals of life at the Fields in the 1870s not only bring to light the contrasting lifestyles of the prosperous and the hapless digger, but also serve to animate the societal prejudices which confronted novices to the industrial environment of Kimberley, in particular those from a rural background.

Towns and cities in South Africa for many years were dominated by the stalwart urban culture of the country's English-speaking whites 'with their closer ties to a powerful metropole (sic) and its economic, technological and ideological resources'.56

Kimberley was no exception. That neither the Africans nor the Afrikaners at the Fields quite measured up to prevailing European notions of 'civilisation' is clear from the racist rhetoric surfacing in the writings of contemporaries like Payton, Boyle and others. The full meaning of such recurrent ideological imagery to policy-making in industry and to the housing of Kimberley's mineworkers will become evident in the ensuing chapters.

55 Marks, S., 'African and Afrikaner history', Journal of African History, 11(3):439, 1970: 'For both literacy meant the Bible, and in both the elite in the late nineteenth century was dominated by churchmen, later lawyers and teachers'.


The throngs of hopefuls arriving at the diggings were coming from far and wide, 'men of numerous nationalities, of every grade in the social scale, and every type of character and manners'. A large proportion of the white fortune-seekers hailed from the colonies of Natal and the Cape and from the two independent Boer Republics. Those from further afield came from 'every region of the civilised world' and included Englishmen, Irishmen, Australians, Americans, Californians, Indians, 'a good many Germans' and 'a sprinkling of Frenchmen, Italians, and Spaniards'.57

Having travelled to South Africa aboard a mail-steamer - a month-long passage from England - venturesome newcomers could approach the Fields from either Cape Town or Port Elizabeth. From the latter destination passengers with light baggage could elect to go up by coach in only five days. Those with heavier goods had to settle for a fifteen-day journey by mule-wagon. From Cape Town the traveller could cover the longer distance of just over 1,000 km in seven to nine days in a comfortable passenger wagon.58

According to Charles Payton most European diggers soon lost their 'most apparent national characteristics', thus merging with 'the great mass of English-speaking diggers'. Notwithstanding the rather 'nemo me impune lacesist' demeanour of some Natalians, Payton declares British-born colonists 'a very fine race of men' and classes them with English diggers at the Fields. 'An Englishman will get on very well among the colonists when he comes to know them, and succeeds in rubbing off some of their prejudices', he reassures his readers.59 Frederick Boyle, in describing luncheon in the dining room at the Benning and Martin's, confirms this view:

You will hear as good English there for the most part anywhere in the world, and delivered with the true gentlemanly accent. Noise enough and to spare there is, but of that pleasant sort which youth, and the consciousness of success well-earned, will amply excuse. Boers do not come here, and the poorer sort take luncheon at their tents or in the claim. Diamond digging is emphatically, up to this time, a 'gentleman's digging'. Long may it so continue.60


58 Travelling from Natal was a third option. Sir Charles Payton, who in 1871 spent 6 months at the Fields as journalist, recommended the Cape Town route - his was a wearisome fifty-day trek by bullock-wagon from Port Elizabeth (Algoa Bay): Payton, op. cit., pp. 61-84. See also Boyle, F., To the Cape for diamonds, pp. 1-28, 44-77: Frederick Boyle was another Englishman of some means who, in late 1871, tried his luck at the Fields for a few months.


60 Boyle, F., op. cit., p. 118.
'YOUR AVERAGE BOER'

But the Boer, the omnipresent, cordially detested by the English, surely I can find much to say about him. In the first place ... he is a "mean cuss". Most emphatically and thoroughly mean is your average Boer, with his stolid ignorance, his contempt for civilisation and refinement, living, though perchance a man of considerable wealth, in a way that would disgrace a farm labourer, in a barely furnished one-storied house, the floor plastered with cow dung, feeding like pigs. 61

Farmers from the Boer Republics were among the first to dig at Dutoitspan. They had brought with them their large families and their own African labourers. Unlike most European diggers, the 'Boer digger' had little expenses to begin with: 'he comes to the Fields, lives in his wagon, ... spends no money at all at the Fields, living on the stores he has brought with him'. 62

To many Afrikaners at the Fields - estimated to have made up at least one-third of colonial born diggers - diamond digging was for the most part an adventure providing a convenient means of supplementing their meagre existence on the farms: 'At seed-time and harvest and shearing, when hands are in request, the wanderer' - not unlike the African migrant worker - 'rots back to the farm, and does his work, and starts away again'. Living arrangements reflected the impermanence of their sojourn. Outspanning their oxen on the outskirts of the mining camps, 'Boer diggers' settled in 'lonely little camps ... consisting perhaps of a family wagon with two or three gipsy tents around, and little heaps of whitey soil; the whole encircled with a six inch ditch, and a fence, may be, of thorns'. Upon finally striking it lucky many Afrikaners left the diamond fields to plough their winnings back into the land. 63

'Such ugly women never were seen under a white skin', says Boyle of the wives of 'Dutch diggers'. He describes the costume of 'a wealthy boer's wife or daughter in West Griqualand or Free State' as follows: 'tossed upon' the head is a 'kapje (cappy), a hideous calico funnel, of which the coal-scuttle bonnet of our grandmothers was the refined and graceful model'; around the waist is hung 'a crinoline, home made, of monstrous girth in general' with 'a dirty cotton dress, patched, torn, buttonless, and unsewn' pitched over it, a pair of 'canoe-like shoes of untanned hide' beneath its 'ragged edge'. Ending his depiction of the typical 'Dutch digger' whose corduroy clothes were 'rotting gradually from his great limbs', Boyle espies: 'There is an odour of unwashedness about the man, about his house, that follows him a yard behind'. 64

'An intensely stupid race'

Who digs so cheaply, who risks so little capital, as he? ... he has with him not only his "vrouw" and "kinders", i.e., wife and children, but a lot of Kafirs, whom he has obtained in the interior at the wages of a cow, or 3l. per year ... See him dig - well, you can hardly call it digging; the brutal old patriarch will sit at the sorting-table all day with his pipe - perhaps allowing the "vrouw" to do likewise - while the half-naked Kafir boys (aye, and young girls, too), and his own children, from the long, pasty-jaced, half-idiotic lout of twenty, down to the little four-year-old, who can scarcely toddle, are all toiling hard under the broiling sun, picking, swilling, hauling, breaking and sifting. 65

61 Payton, C.A., op. cit., p. 106. 'It would be an unmerited insult to the Basuto Kaffir of the Hook to compare him with the boer who calls himself superior ...': Boyle, F., op. cit., pp. 218-9.


63 Boyle estimated that three quarters of Kimberley's diggers were colonial born: Boyle, F., op. cit., pp. 111, 368-9. There are striking parallels between the African and Afrikaner societies of the nineteenth century: vide supra, n. 56.

64 Boyle, F., op. cit., pp. 327-8.

65 Payton, C.A., op. cit., pp. 106-7, 190: 'Some of the deepest holes are made, and the largest heaps of stuff thrown out, by Dutchmen with large families'.

FIGURE 2.19 A typical Boer encampment on the outskirts of the mining camps in the early 1870s (after Allen, V., Early Kimberley, p. 5)
Afrikaans-speaking diggers were clearly seen to capitalise on an initial labour advantage, for their colonial and European counterparts were largely at the mercy of market forces. But their command of labour certainly was not the only remonstrance raised against them.

"The Boers are an intensely stupid race, but have a cunning withal", asserts Payton: "They have a very great animosity towards Englishmen, which, as they are too cowardly to show fight, now takes the form of cheating them on all possible occasions". He continues: "Proud indeed is the Boer who has performed a successful swindle on a "verdomd Engelschman"". 66

The bold insistence of many Afrikaners at the Fields to take nothing but silver in payment caused 'particular irritation amongst the storekeepers by the amount of silver they took out of the camp, small change being in great request and very scarce'. Others provoked storekeepers by selling from their wagons Cape Smoke, wine and other commodities 'at a little lower than store prices'. 67

The noisiness of the Afrikaners at night was a further source of aggravation to many diggers. 'Besides a very regular business of psalm singing, very edifying to them no doubt, but by no means gratifying to an English ear', explains Payton, 'they would have grand jollifications whenever one of their number found a big diamond - which was pretty often'. During these bacchanalia numerous crackers were let off and 'roers' and rifles fired. When camp notices forbidding 'the discharging of firearms within the precincts of the camp after sundown' failed to have the desired effect, police raids followed, finally putting an end to the late-night cacophony. 68

Other 'anecdotes of Boers' include what Payton calls 'occasional instances of temporary aberration of intellect' among Boer diggers, caused by large diamond finds, inspiring them to 'acts of unwonted liberality or lavishness'. He tells of a 'middle-aged Dutchman' who, at first sight of Dutoitspan's merry-go-round, promptly mounted one of its 'beautiful and piebald wooden horses' - to the amusement of onlookers, the man sternly refused to dismount till after sundown, 'having indulged his equestrian tastes to the tune of thirty shillings'. And recounting the initial bemusement at the working of the first rotary steam-engine at the diggings, Payton recalls how, when it blew off steam, the sight and sound became 'too much for uncivilised human nature', causing a 'regular "stampede" of Kafirs and Boers too'. 69

66 Ibid., pp. 107, 222: when Boer and Briton challenged one another to a fight, 'the police kept the ring'.
67 'Cape Smoke' was a cheap colonial brandy: ibid., pp. 107-8.
68 Ibid., p. 108: 'the noisy part of the business always took place late at night, after a Homeric repast had been eaten, and countless glasses of Boer brandy had been consumed by the men, and "kommetjes" of coffee by their fair and fat spouses'.

**OUR COLOURED LABOURERS**

Forming the majority of Africans on the Fields were the Pedi, Tsonga and South Sotho. The Pedi came from an area south of the Limpopo; the Tsonga, then known as 'Shangaan', came from the Gaza Empire in Mozambique; the South Sotho were the closest to Kimberley. Other Africans working on the Fields included the Natal Zulu, the Kalanga and those Ndebele who saw their way clear to embark on the long and treacherous journey south. Those closer to the Fields, like the Tswana, Griqua and Koranna, preferred not to work in the mines but in the camps, and migrated there with their dependents and cattle. 70

Migrant labour

Far and away the most singular characteristic of the early diamond industry was its voracious want of unskilled labour. Kimberley Mine alone was worked by as many as 10,000 Africans in 1872. Around 50,000 to 80,000 black migrant workers were going to and leaving Kimberley each year from 1871 to 1875. But while the diamond mines can be singled out as the prime instigator of black wage labour migration, the majority of Africans arriving at the early Fields were inured migrant workers - in the case of the Pedi, for example, wage labour on a migrant basis goes back as early as the 1840s.71

The autonomy in African movement between home and mine in the early days was a major source of aggravation to small and large claimowners alike. Employers not only had to contend with the inconvenience of seasonal migration, but also to abide with the clever wage-bargaining strategies employed by a highly fluctuating African labour force. Length of stay at the Fields typically reflected the distance travelled in reaching the mines: migrants from areas nearby stayed from two weeks to two months at a time; those who came several hundred miles remained for three to six months, though still opting for short contracts of one or two months. The perpetual shortage of black labour allowed Africans persistently to change employers in pursuit of higher wages and empowered them to dictate the terms of employment. Attempts to lower ruling wage rates were invariably met with desertion en masse.72

The high wages on offer in Kimberley were a prime incentive to migrant labour. During the early 1870s, for instance, African wages in Kimberley were 'at least half as much again as those paid in coastal towns in the Cape Colony and twice or more those ruling on farms'. Young men went to the mines primarily to earn cash for lobola (marriage payment), a plough, or more importantly, a gun. Military threats against the Pedi meant that, to the young male, working in the Cape for a year or so to earn cash to buy a gun became a fact of life. The opening of the Fields presented the likelihood of not only higher wages but an appreciably shorter journey.73

Kimberley was not slow to respond to this seemingly insatiable market for weapons - during the 15 months between April 1873 and June 1874 some 75,000 guns passed through the town's gun shops. It became southern Africa's principal gun-market, with its traders in 1875 carrying a stock of some 200,000 guns.74

73 Ibid., pp. 139-40.
75 Africans were indiscriminately spoken of as "nigger", and addressed as "boy", quite irrespective of age": Payton, C.A., op. cit., pp. 138-9.
76 Ibid., pp. 139-40.
General disregard by keepers of the so-called 'lower-class canteens' of the camp regulation prohibiting the supply of drink to African workers without their masters' authority, led to widespread alcohol abuse and the introduction of a night curfew: 'At ten a bugle sounds, which is the signal for all the natives to retire to their respective locations. An unfortunate darkey found in the "streets" after that hour is taken to "chokey", the slang name for our little prison, and receives fifteen lashes'.

'A Kafir does not generally wash either his clothes (?) or himself', Payton asserts elsewhere, 'and if you give him an old flannel shirt he will probably never take it off again till it falls to pieces'. Notwithstanding this general disregard for cleanliness and their habit of cooking and eating huge quantities of offal 'without being very particular as to cleaning it', Africans could be taught 'to perform some of the simpler operations of European cookery, to wash clothes, and otherwise "make themselves generally useful" around the master's tent and cooking-place. Payton further recommends that, in the claim, Africans should not be allowed to sort, 'both because it is throwing too much temptation in their way, and because they are very slow sorters'.

Such stereotypical conceptions of African workers are of great interest to the study as mining's ideologists in later years employed these ideas to justify the adoption by industry of radical strategies towards the obtaining and retention of African labour.

By far the most important issue raised by Payton is the notion that an African worker required 'the treatment of a big child, with no petting or spoiling, but plenty of scolding and occasional castigation if he is disobedient or lazy'. He elaborates:

A nigger is all very well as long as he is kept in his proper place, that is "kept down"; to treat him in the "man and a brother" style of the Exeter Hall philanthropists, is only to spoil him and to injure yourself. New comers (sic) to the colonies find this difficult to realise, thinking that kind treatment must succeed, but they soon get woefully undeceived. Of course I don't mean you should ill-use Kafirs, but keep them in their places: punish them when naughty, and never be familiar or laugh with them.

The raw, untutored, unclad Kafirs, fresh from their "kraals" up the mountains, are by far the best and most trustworthy workmen', continues Payton: 'Above all things, mistrust a Kafir who speaks English and wears trousers'.

The myth that contact with civilisation 'seems to be almost invariably pernicious and demoralising to the peculiar organisation of our Kafir friends' subsequently lent colour to the belief that as 'children' black workers required some form of aegis from the temptations of a new environment. On the subject of 'the vanished influence of the white man upon the savages', Sir Lionel Phillips is quoted by Oswald Doughty as recalling the days when, to the African 'every white man was an inkoos - a chief'. And, writing in 1899, J.P. Fitzpatrick echoes what he labels 'South African views upon the native question', i.e. 'that the natives are to all intents and purposes a race of children, and should be treated as such'.

Early writers like Payton derived great pleasure from describing African notions of dress. Fascination with traditional garb and headgear aside, it had been their inclination to assume different articles of European attire which was found so amusing. Yams abounded, ranging from a 'boy' who was seen wearing only the one leg of a pair of trousers, to another who was 'walking about most complacently, dressed in a hat, an old paper collar, and a courier bag, not a rag else, barring the mutya'.83

Those 'town Kafirs' better acquainted with European manners were regarded with misgiving: 'Educated, and consequently fully-clad, natives are looked upon with distrust'. Groups of 'darkie swells', male and female, were said to have paraded the streets on Sundays, dressed in 'all the colours of the rainbow, and a dozen more'. In fact, the flamboyant behaviour of 'darkie swells' or 'swell niggers' had earned them the rancour of white diggerfolk, for such flashiness was seen to betoken indulgence in IDB (illicit diamond buying) in some form or another.

Early writings on the diamond diggings reflect the underpinnings of the ideological equation of African workers with criminals subsequently sanctioned by the rule of law and institutionalised by the introduction of the closed compound. White diggers whose 'dazzling dreams of Golconda' were dashed by the harsh realities of life at the Fields early on decided that the root of their misfortune lay with black labour. Ever increasing wages and the 'ancient grievance of Kaffir theft' provided ready-made mitigations for their lack of success. Kimberley's white diggers believed all blacks to be 'brothers' happily conspiring 'to defraud white masters of the fruits of exploitation', even though evidence suggested that such systematic theft of diamonds was unlikely.
Of the numerous references to instances of 'Kafir theft', Payton's reaction to
rumours of Africans at Dutoitspan working their own claims and of a canteen-keeper's
underhand dealings with an African worker is most illuminating:

if it is a fact that under the new government "niggers" are allowed to work for
themselves, this is indeed a grave abuse, and one against which every digger, be he
Boer, colonist, or Englishman, will join in protesting. Our only security against
constant robbery by our servants, was the difficulty they found in disposing of the
diamonds which they could not legally hold; and the fact that if some rascally little
canteen keeper was unscrupulous enough to take a diamond offered to him by a
native, he was generally also cunning and bold enough to obtain it for a mere trifle,
or even to frighten the felonious darkey out of it for nothing. But if we are to have
the utterly impracticable doctrine of black and white equality proclaimed, and if
niggers can dig for themselves, and sell diamonds unquestioned, the employment
of native labour becomes practically useless.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{86} Payton, C.A., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 160; black claimownership was held out as a mere smoke-screen for
IDB: \textit{vide infra}, p. 59.

CHAPTER 3 - THE INDUSTRIALISATION OF DIAMOND DIGGING

Getting to the bottom of the Kimberley housing innovations investigated in Chapters 4
and 5 requires some apprehension of the growing pains of the industry during the first
boom-slump cycle of competitive diamond mining on the Fields, 1877-1885. The
overview of the eras of smallholding and of capital that follows essays to provide such
a frame of reference by recounting the difficulties encountered as claims were being dug
deeper and deeper, and the contrivances pioneered to cope therewith. An attempt is
made throughout to balance the unfolding of competitive digging against the social
undercurrents within and the response of digger society to that process.

3.1. The era of smallholding, 1870-1876

Inchoative digging practices in Kimberley were largely intuitional and in the long run
often damaging. Diggers in one mine learned from the costly blunders of those in
another.

An early production unit consisted of a white digger with a white assistant and four
or more Africans. Working the claim was a back-breaking undertaking at best. The
arduous tasks of excavating with pick and shovel, and of separating through a series of
sieves the bearing from non-bearing soil, were executed by black workers. The white
partners went Dutch on working expenses and were responsible for the supervising and
the systematic searching through residue at the sorting-table. Screened from the
scorching sun by means of a crude canvas canopy, the 'panting sorter' wore goggles to
protect his eyes from the ceaseless cloud of dust set forth by his actions. His was an
unpleasant and highly delicate chore requiring infinite patience and vigilance: 'A man
may dig and sift in vain, if the sorter be incapable or untrustworthy'.\textsuperscript{1}

While at first most activities associated with the process of diamond mining were all
performed within the confines of the claim, it soon became desirable to work every inch
of the property and sorting-tables found their way to locations outside. Canny means
were devised to clear away debris mounds and to haul fresh soil from the claim.
'Benches' or terraces were cut in the sides of the claim; on each was posted an African
who shovelled to the terrace above the ground thrown to him from below. Upon
reaching the surface, a fourth worker conveyed the treasured 'yellow ground' to the

\textsuperscript{1} Payton, C.A., \textit{The diamond diggings of South Africa}, pp. 16, 139, 194, 226; Boyle, F., \textit{To the
Cape for diamonds}, pp. 125-7, 130.
digger's compound - in sacks, buckets, wheelbarrows or even the odd cart - where it was dry-sorted by hand. As the claims grew yet deeper, benches proved impracticable and was replaced by a crude hoisting system: 'a post with a pulley attached was driven firmly into the road and the ground drawn up in buckets of either hide or iron, whence it was tossed into carts drawn by horses or oxen'.

The fact that diamonds were concentrated only in relatively small areas, over and above the familiar scramble of staking out claims near a new 'find', fostered fierce competition for claims. The total area covered by claims as a matter of course exceeded by far that of the diamond-yielding ground, the extent of which was only some 70 acres in total. After being consolidated by purchase, however, the claims in all four mines comprised around 136 acres. Competition for claims were particularly severe in the Kimberley pit, the bounteous yield of which had made it the richest mine in the world.

By 1872 the mine's 470 original claims had fragmented into 1,600 to 1,800 separate holdings or 'quarter claims' which were to remain the basic units of production in the mine until the mid-1870s.

Exuberant claim prices put claimownership beyond the reach of the run-of-the-mill digger - within the first three months of digging, claim prices in Kimberley Mine rose from £100 to £2,000. The only newcomers to come by good quarter claims were those able to muster up substantial sums of money, e.g. 'the young sons of aristocrats or other well-to-do men of England'. Incomers from the colonies or the Boer republics could either acquire cheaper holdings at De Beers or join those working the poor mines of Dutoitspan and Bultfontein. The scanty output of the latter earned it the name of 'the poor man's digging', the pit favoured by 'those colonial people of the poorer classes'.

Comments Frederick Boyle: 'The poor cannot live, but the rich is growing richer'.

WORKING KIMBERLEY MINE

The opening of Kimberley Mine proceeded far more briskly than the development of its older sister mines on account of its superior output - it had some 1,600 production units operating at a time when the other three mines were still relatively unworked. Nowhere on the Fields were the problems of digging at ever-increasing depths more tangible, or the pioneering countermeasures of the diggers more astute, than in Kimberley Mine.

Unhappily the ease of egress afforded by the system of fourteen reserved roads - the pride of the New Rush - was short-lived. Impetuously working the sides of their claims, diggers undercut the roadways and turned the mine into a death trap: 'Roads were patched together with planks, as narrow as seven feet in some parts and towering 50 to 60 feet above the claims beneath. Falling carts and lumps of ground from the roadways became daily hazards'.

Digging was becoming more cumbersome and perilous, and to an increasing extent too extravagant for the ordinary digger. The incommodious depths of claims - between fifty and eighty feet in the beginning of 1872 - necessitated the employment of more and more workers. By now the much harder layer of 'blue ground' had been reached in many claims, further increasing the dependence of diggers on black labour. It was not uncommon for one digger to have had twenty Africans in his service.

Towards the end of 1872 it became impossible to arrest the caving in of the mine's roadways any longer and by September all its roadways had slipped into the pits. The mine now consisted of a rough jumble of terraces in an 'open, oval quarry, about a thousand feet in length and six hundred feet in extreme width'. Falling reef not only posed a threat to diggers in the claims, but encumbered them with the task of removing the fallen ground. With no access to the centre of the pit, the hoisting system could served only those working the outer tier of claims.

Flooding began to handicap production as digging approached the water-table. A massive downpour early in 1874 completely flooded the mine - deep claims remained submerged for months while pumping equipment toiled with the accumulation of water. What is more, weakened by the flooding, the north face of the mine foundered and slid into the claims, rendering at least half of the pit unworkable.

Earlier, in 1873, a private steam tramway began operating in part of the mine - those within reach could have their soil conveyed to the surface at a fixed charge. But, foreseeing the monopoly power this would confer on its owner, diggers improvised an adroit haulage system to allow those in centre claims to continue independently. It took the form of timber stagings, carrying three or four platforms, on the rim of the mine. Buckets on overhead runners were drawn along stationary wires from the claims below by means of hauling ropes and hand-wound windlasses, making the mine seem like 'a yawning pit over which some Titanic spider had woven its web'.

6 Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 19-20; in the treacherous yellow ground an excavation of 50 feet deep was quite a feat: Williams, G.F., op. cit., pp. 198-9, 220.
7 Williams, G.F., op. cit., p. 223.
8 Windlasses were subsequently used in lieu of posts and pulleys: Matthews, J.W., op. cit., p. 178.
At the surface the buckets were emptied into chutes which carried the 'blue' into bags. Carted to depositing floors, the lumps of soil were laid out to decompose for at least a month before processed for diamonds. A thousand or so windlasses on the stagings in 1874 permitted 10,000 men to work in a pit then two hundred feet deep in places.11

Horse-power was soon substituted for hand-tackle in haulage. In mid-1874 horse whims and whips became the vogue. A large horizontal wheel of timber - some 6m in diameter - set up near the edge of the mine, the whim cleared the ground by 3m to allow a horse or mule to walk round and round in a modified circular treadmill underneath. A wire went round the revolving wheel down into the mine where the 'blue', loosened by dynamite, was loaded into buckets or tubs and hauled up to the surface platform.12

The use of rotary washing machines ousted dry-sorting as the method of winning diamonds from the blue after 1874. Washing enabled the uncovering of smaller stones, and gave rise to the practice of debris-washing, i.e. washing the tailings of dry-sorted soil, thus providing some form of income to the growing number of unemployed.13

11 Kimberley blue took 1 to 4 months to weather, some De Beers blue up to a year: Turrell, R.V., *op. cit.*, p. 12; Williams, G.F., *op cit.*, pp. 224-8.
A zealously guarded aspect of early life in the camps was the foursquare belief in 'diggers' democracy', the bastions of which were the Diggers' Committees. It hinged on the enterprise of the small-scale producer and was exclusively European, echoing notions of its antecedents in Australia and Canada. The Committees accordingly took a strong stand against the growth of monopoly in the claims.

Safeguarding smallholding

Election to the Committees betokened the tenet of smallholding, as did the regulations imposed under their regimes: representatives were elected democratically, with each digger granted one vote irrespective of the number or value of the claims he possessed, and individuals were restricted from holding more than two claims. The 'jumping' rule was another measure aimed at stifling the sprouting of large-scale claimownership: when not worked for eight (later three) days running, a claim was liable to be 'jumped' or taken over by another digger. Besides preventing speculators from purchasing and then holding claims for sale in an improved market, the principle of 'jumping' promoted the uniform working of the pits.14

Small-scale production became beset with problems as claims were dug deeper - the exorbitant prices of claims, reef falls, flooding and the need for more labour made diamond digging far too expensive for the self-supporting digger. Their good fortune having evaporated, many diggers sold their claims and became shareworkers instead.

The working 'on shares' of claims appears to have been quite a common practice in Kimberley Mine by late 1871, though it is not known exactly when the system was first introduced. Certainly Payton was no stranger to such arrangements: 'No one who is willing to work ... need fear poverty; for even should he exhaust his own little resources before he finds anything remunerative in his claim, he will be sure to find plenty of chances of working good claims for richer diggers "on shares".'15

Shareworking benefited both owner and shareworker. To some owners it afforded the opportunity of leaving the Fields for short periods of time without forfeiting their claims. To others it rendered the means of bypassing the two-claim rule: a 'capitalist' wishing 'to buy several claims on a rich kopje' simply furnished a shareworker with capital to acquire a licence; the shareworker, in return, using his own labourers and equipment, worked the property, planned production and sold diamonds for a fixed proportion of up to 90 per cent of the net profit.16

Shareworking was regarded with warm approbation by many whites. It granted them a measure of respectability - although they did not own their claims, shareworkers nonetheless referred to themselves as 'diggers'. The system allowed those unable to meet the upsurge in claim prices a foothold in Kimberley Mine and enabled them to participate in its riches. It likewise shielded the luckless digger from having to resort to wage labour and from 'the ever present possibility of depression into the ranks of the proletariat'. By the mid-1870s shareworkers outnumbered claimholders.17

A great deal of animosity towards the natives existed about this period. Part of this feeling was originated, I think, from many white men not possessed of claims being jealous of their black brethren digging at Du Toit's Pan and Bultfontein, while the facility for dealing in stolen diamonds, afforded by their possessing a digger's licence, was also a factor in the ill-will felt and expressed.18

African diggers, African labour and the law

One Committee rule abolished upon annexation was that denying 'coloured persons of more than one fourth black blood' the right to dig. The full extent of black ownership is unclear, but it is known that there were 47 black claimholders in the Bultfontein and Duotoitpan mines in 1872; and at least 120 of the 757 holders of the combined total of 1,243 claims in all four mines in 1874 were Africans, Indians and 'persons of colour', all of whom were in the 'poor man's digging' of Bultfontein. By 1879 there were just 20 Africans still working their own claims in these two mines. The last African to hold a claim in the Kimberley mines was Gwayi Tyamzashe, in 1885.19

Black claimownership did not go unchallenged for long. Regarding the statutes of the colony inimical to their interests, white diggers in March 1872 presented the British Civil Commissioners with a memorial enumerating a set of rules they wished made law. It included a demand that black digging licences should be granted only when supported by fifty white claimholders.20 White diggers exhorted discrimination in the right to dig as a safeguard against diamond theft. They believed black claimowners to participate in ID B (illicit diamond buying) - being entitled to sell diamonds, it was argued, black diggers conspired to act as fronts for the fencing of stolen stones.21

21 A court case exposed the practice whereby illicit dealers partnered black claimowners to acquire a 'legal channel through which to deal stolen diamonds': Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 50-1.
More importantly, the 'Memorial of the Residents of Colesberg Copje (Kimberley)' required the state to regulate every aspect of the life of African workers. Deserting workers played havoc with the Kimberley labour market, and behind every desertion diggers saw one thing only - diamond theft. As will be recalled, diggers needed little encouragement in conjuring up an African conspiracy to wholesale diamond theft. Those disgruntled with the hitherto indecisive official approach to the problem of theft had already begun taking it upon themselves to 'discipline' those suspected of stealing diamonds. Under headings such as 'A new way of punishing natives', lurid cases were coming to light in the local press of suspected thieves being brutally punished by their masters, sometimes even beaten to death.\(^{22}\)

The diggers themselves perpetuated the problem of desertion in several ways, one of which was by their competing for African labour by offering higher than average wages. Diggers as a rule could ill afford not to work the claims, even for short periods of time, hence the failure of combined wage reductions. Those left with no labour as a consequence of a concerted reduction after a while had no alternative but to wheedle away a neighbour's workers with higher wages.\(^{23}\)

Non-payment of wages was another way in which diggers exacerbated the problem of desertion. African wages were initially rendered both in cash and kind: half the weekly wage was paid out in cash and the balance in the form of food. Default of the cash component of the wage - always the first to suffer during a bad patch - invariably led to desertion, as did the occasional failure to honour the kind component.\(^{24}\)

But preferring to turn a blind eye to their contribution to the problem of desertion, Kimberley's diggers over the course of the next few months brought more pressure to bear on the state. When their vociferations at mass rallies failed to produce the desired result, a mob of unruly diggers went on the rampage. Black claimowners and those suspected of IDB (mainly canteen-keepers) were subjected to tent-burning, kicking and flogging. Arrests followed a rowdy gathering of diggers on Market Square during which the government was summoned to 'make such modifications of the present unsuitable state of the laws as will prevent the thefts of diamonds'.\(^{25}\)

The Commissioners finally capitulated. A proclamation in July suspended black digging licences forthwith and embraced all the demands of the memorial. Two weeks later, though, it was ruled invalid and replaced with Proclamation 14 of 1872 by the Cape Governor. Although reinstating the suspended licences, Sir Henry Barkly's new proclamation nonetheless contained all the 'concessions' of the former, only it made no mention of race and referred to 'servants' instead. 'In order to make the proclamation palatable to the home authorities', observes John Smalberger, 'the racial implication of prohibiting the issue of licences to black diggers was camouflaged by a clause requiring all claimholders to obtain a certificate of good character from a magistrate or justice of the peace, who was likely to be sympathetic to white diggers' wishes.'\(^{26}\)

Proclamation 14 also gave countenance to the connection between desertion and theft. It laid down the registration of all 'servants' at a registry office and the carrying by every 'servant' of a pass signed by his master, a magistrate or a justice of the peace. Defiance of the latter was subject to a fine of up to £5, imprisonment 'with or without hard labour and with or without spare diet' for up to 3 months or 'corporal punishment in any number of lashes not exceeding twenty-five'. Masters were empowered at any time to search the person, residence, or property of their 'servants' (and to assume diamonds thus found to be stolen). Also brought in force were new penalties for diamond theft of up to fifty lashes and twelve months' hard labour. Though ostensibly still colour-blind, the law in practice applied exclusively to 'natives'.\(^{27}\)

Writing in 1872, Frederick Boyle remarked how 'very few subjects' there were about which Kimberley's diggers felt unanimously and how one of the 'simple axioms' of the day concerned the government and its 'stupid and malignant' regulations. The state having bowed to their almost every wish in the form of Proclamation 14 must all the more have signified a cognitive victory to white diggers. Asserts John Smalberger: 'Once white diggers learned that by threat and force they could gain their ends - the subjection of the black worker - they used the same means over and over again.'\(^{28}\)

STATE INTERVENTION AND THE BLACK FLAG REVOLT

The growing organisational and technological perplexities of diamond mining, coupled with the first major collapse of the diamond market, plunged the Kimberley industry into gloom late in 1873, causing wholesale indigence among the town's white residents and starvation among many of its black. Population figures reflect the impact of this depression: by the end of 1873 the white citizenry of Kimberley had dropped to just 7,000, less than half the number of two years earlier, with its black amounting to only 10,000, one-third its earlier size.\(^{29}\)


\(^{24}\) In 1872 drought in surrounding areas foiled the long-distance transport by ox-wagon of food from the granary districts to the Fields - 5,000 men set off for home when offered horse forage for food: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 56-7.


\(^{26}\) Smalberger, J.M., op. cit., pp. 419, 430-4; Matthews, J.W., op. cit., pp. 209-10

\(^{27}\) Proclamation 14 laid the basis of South Africa's opprobrious pass-law system: Smalberger, J., op. cit., pp. 432-5; Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 116; the 'Registrar of Servants' was later changed to 'Registrar of Natives': Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 28.


Mindful of their earlier victory, Kimberley’s beleaguered diggers turned to the state for remedy. But the enthusiasm with which they in January 1873 had welcomed the new Governor of Griqualand West quickly dissipated. Richard Southey found himself unable to assuage the myriad of conflicting demands emanating from smallholders, shareworkers, aspiring monopolists, merchants and landowners. His administration’s timidity in tackling the crisis did not redound to his credit either.

The eventual strategy embarked upon by the state aimed to serve its own interests, notably the generation of revenue. Though not opposed to smallholding, Government acknowledged the desperate need to expand mining operations. Hostile to non-colonial monopolisation of the industry, it opted to fillip colonial accumulation in the mines instead, thereby incurring the ire of smallholders and shareworkers alike.30

Smallworkers condemned Southey’s 1874 Mining Bill for its removal of the chief obstacles to the consolidation of claims. It parcelised the ‘jumping rule’ and substituted Mining Boards for the Diggers’ Committees, members to which were elected by a system of loaded votes - holders of three or more claims had a maximum of three votes, while those owning quarter claims or less were restricted to a single vote. The Boards were at liberty initially to impose their own limitations on claimownership, but no sooner had plans for the floating of a large London company to work Kimberley Mine as a single unit became known than a ten-claim restriction was inserted into the law.31

Shareworkers for their part were enraged by the new government’s attitude towards shareworking. Often having found their claims sold from under their feet without notification, or their services suspended should the owner decide to step in and work a proven claim himself, shareworkers took to obscuring their true finds and disposed of undisclosed stones illegally. The retort by claimowners - to contract shareworkers as servants - was taken one step further in a new ordinance in 1874. By defining their ways of regaining control of mining and camp affairs. Fearing the constitution of an alternative government, Southey set about crippling any venture aimed at reinserting tenets of ‘diggers’ democracy’. Such was the case of the Committee of Public Safety founded in August 1874. Created to fill the vacuum left by the demise of the old Vigilance Committee, its ‘deliberately provocative’ name was intended to strike ‘revolutionary terror’ into the government. Refusing to authorise the existence of the Committee, Southey proceeded with ‘preparations to meet a riot’. Unperturbed, the Committee went ahead in preparing a monster petition to the Queen.37

Throwing down the gauntlet
The antipathy of Kimberley’s diggers towards the authorities led them openly to seek ways of regaining control of mining and camp affairs. Fearing the constitution of an alternative government, Southey set about crippling any venture aimed at reinserting tenets of ‘diggers’ democracy’. Such was the case of the Committee of Public Safety founded in August 1874. Created to fill the vacuum left by the demise of the old Vigilance Committee, its ‘deliberately provocative’ name was intended to strike ‘revolutionary terror’ into the government. Refusing to authorise the existence of the Committee, Southey proceeded with ‘preparations to meet a riot’. Unperturbed, the Committee went ahead in preparing a monster petition to the Queen.37

30 In 1874 the bulk of state revenue derived from licence fees levied on merchants and claimholders: ibid., pp. 27-8.
31 The plan was sponsored by William Hall, one of the largest claimholders in Kimberley Mine: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 35-6, 63.
32 Ibid., pp. 36, 51-2.
34 Black wage rates were forced up from 10s. to 25s. per week: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 53, 55.
35 Ibid.
36 The two diggers picked out for police attention played leading roles in the Rebellion later that year: ibid., p. 55.
37 The Frontier Armed and Mounted Police was called in and a spy was assigned to report on the Committee’s activities: ibid., pp. 36-7.
FIGURE 3.4 Detail of a typical diamond dealer's office in Kimberley, 1873. In contrast, the only business equipment of the kopje-walloper was 'a pair of top boots, a courier bag and half-a-crown'.38 (after Allen, V., Early Kimberley, p. 22)

Providing added momentum to the turning tide was the Diamond Dealers Ordinance of November 1874, the chief purpose of which was construed as the elimination of the so-called kopje-wallopers or small-scale diamond dealers. The revolutionary threat of the Committee of Public Safety - that a storm was brewing which would 'shake the present government to its very foundations' - was duly reported to Southey by the specially assigned police spy.39

In late 1874 the government was presented with a bill of demands known as the 'cat-o-nine-tails' by the newly formed Defence League and Protection Association. In the new year the issue of rent for dwelling stands took on new proportions with a court ruling that landlords could raise rents as they pleased. Diggers resolved to resist rent increases. At a large meeting on 3 March, diggers were egged on to protect themselves from 'injustice' and to take up arms 'in the name of heaven and your country'.40

The Diggers’ Protection Association was formed ten days later. Organised on a military basis, it comprised seven companies of men. Some 800 men were under arms before the end of April, with 400 waiting to be outfitted. Two Armstrong guns were en route from Port Elizabeth. Affirmation of the Association's objective to usurp the coercive functions of government had come earlier in the form of a Manifesto alleging that 'the rights, property and liberty of the diggers' were jeopardised by the presence and inadequate policing of a large number of Africans who were 'not gaining their living by honest labour'. The Association avowed to seek the security of Europeans.41

Governor Southey retaliated by sending for reinforcements, only to telegraph Cape Town soon afterwards negating his request for troops. What he was up against, the Governor decided, was not a rabble of angry diggers, but a conspiracy of capitalists - the only solution was for the state to purchase Vooruitzigt Farm. While the transaction was being negotiated, the camps were being patrolled by Association men.42

It was the conviction of a prominent Associationist on an illegal arms deal which brought on the formal declaration of rebellion on 12 April 1875. When after the trial the convicted man was marched to the jail under police escort, they were challenged by a mob of armed men. Bloodshed was eschewed when an agreement was mediated for his release on bail. On the same afternoon, away from the confrontation, the black flag of anarchy was hoisted on a whim at the edge of Kimberley Mine. Southey responded the next morning by declaring a rebellion 'of certain evil disposed persons' against 'Her Majesty the Queen'.43

After Sir Henry Barkly was persuaded to grant amnesty to the rebels - subject to their disarming - the Association was dissolved in May 1875. An apprehensive calm prevailed as rebels and loyalists waited for the arrival of the military column from Cape Town. On 1 July the rebel leaders, who were excluded from the general pardon, were arrested. After more than two months of open rebellion, intervention of the imperial state thus re-established the authority of the Griqualand West government.44

40 The Irishman Alfred Aylward - who earlier took up the cudgels for shareworkers - was the moving force behind the Defence League; for the list of nine demands: ibid., pp. 39-40.
42 The rent issue had combined capitalist and digger opposition: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 41-2.
43 For more details on these events: ibid., pp. 43-4; Roberts, B., op. cit., pp. 45-6.
3.2. The dawning of a new era

Those tumultuous months of 1875 had precipitated a period of rapid transition at the Fields: thenceforth emerging was a class of mineowners drawn mainly from the ranks of diggers, merchants and diamond merchants. Coming into being was a new order more amenable to the needs of capital accumulation. Such was the thrust thereof, by the turn of the decade - in the richer mines at least - the transformation of small-scale diggers and shareworkers into overseers and managers was complete. Presiding over the budding industrial order was Major W.O. Lanyon, successor to Richard Southey. Appointed in November 1875, he was instructed 'to clear up the land problems of Griqualand West and prepare the way for annexation of the Province to the Cape'.

A NEW MODE OF PRODUCTION

The change of administration did not expedite an industrial mode of working forthwith - the ten-claim limitation was to remain on the statute book for another year. The sluggish diamond market further arrested speculation while the exceedingly high claim evaluations of Kimberley Mine, the assessed value of which had increased twofold between 1875 and 1876, was proving a deterrent to would-be investors from the outside.

Likewise forestalling the transition to full-blown industrial production was the second collapse of the European diamond market - carat prices plummeted by 30 to 40 per cent in March 1876. A month or so later a combined effort by diggers to enforce a 50 per cent wage reduction resulted in mass desertion: within months Africans effected an inordinate wage rise of some 25 per cent higher than before the cut. The cost of black labour - the largest single factor in production costs - was still well out of hand.

During the ensuing depression Kimberley’s population was halved and property values sliced by as much as 1,000 per cent. The calling in of bank-loans in July 1876 making ends meet - a month or so later nearly half of the town’s miners had abandoned the pits. With claims for the picking, a number of local industrialists began propounding major schemes aimed at monopolising production in Kimberley Mine.

It was the imminent formation of one such company - the Diamond Fields Association - that spurred Lanyon to abrogate the ten-claim clause in November 1876. Also in the offing was the floating of a rival company though, in the end, neither project got off the ground. Realising the urgent need for outside capital to put Kimberley’s anaemic industry on a solid financial footing, Lanyon reconstituted the Mining Boards giving greater weight to large claimowners. These measures prompted London’s leading importer of diamonds, Jules Porges, to spend £90,000 in claim purchases at the Fields in early 1877.

With revenue from the mines crucial to its first prerogative of balancing the books, the government remained quietly apprehensive of the implications a new mode of production on the finances of Griqualand West. Though Lanyon’s was the first administration not to have a deficit, his successor in 1879, Sir Charles Warren, was painfully aware that ‘1,200 smallholders in a mine paid six to eight times the revenue of a monopoly company’.

Rescission of the ten-claim law foretokened the era of capital. The attending influx of British and foreign capital into the mines - for investment in claims and machinery - had profound financial implications for the persisting independent digger: the initial layout of anyone hoping to make a success at diamond mining was now at least £1,000 (but more likely £5,000), a far cry from the £200 to £500 deemed sufficient in 1872.

While the infusion of foreign capital had set off a flurry of transactions as wealthy merchants went about increasing their holdings, the on-going pattern of concentrating claimownership proceeded apace. Kimberley Mine - owned by over 1,600 individuals in 1872 - had 300 owners in 1877, of which fewer than 20 owned more than half the mine. By 1880 the majority of its claims was in the hands of 12 private companies. Even in the poorer mines production units commonly comprised blocks of ten claims or more by the end of 1877.

While fallen reef or accumulated water commonly caused the forced sale of claims, the contribution of Lanyon’s reconstituted Mining Boards must not be overlooked. In Kimberley Mine, where its board was charged with the removal of fallen reef and floodwater (and the bill was footed collectively by claimholders in the form of levies), making ends meet - a month or so later nearly half of the town’s miners had abandoned the pits. With claims for the picking, a number of local industrialists began propounding major schemes aimed at monopolising production in Kimberley Mine.

45 Southey was dismissed 2 months after the Rebellion: ibid., pp. 72-4.
46 Its rise in value, from £528,700 in 1875 to £1,030,000 in 1876, was due to the period of rapid speculation in claims that followed the state purchase of Vooruitzigt: ibid., p. 79; Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 35n.58.
Claim consolidation generated an upsurge in production in Kimberley Mine. By 1879 the average rate of profit of its companies was restored to a sizeable 30 per cent, due in no small measure to the proliferation of steam machinery in the mine.\textsuperscript{54} Diamond mining had once again become a viable undertaking, even though carat prices were still only two-thirds of those in the early 1870s. But, although having put the Kimberley industry on a firmer footing by 1879, the transition to capitalist production was yet to resolve the tenacious problems of capital, technology and labour which had led to its introduction.

BOOM AND COLLAPSE

Kimberley's owners confronted the problem of capital by going public. Seeking to lure investment capital to the industry, they embarked on a promotional venture in 1880 aimed at profiting producer and investor, viz. the floating of joint-stock companies.

The first company to go public, the Cape Diamond Mining Company, was floated in Port Elizabeth in 1879. But it was the first floating in Europe of a joint-stock Kimberley company under Jules Porges which early in 1880 provided the impetus for the expeditious transition from private to public mining: the Paris-based Compagnie Française des Mines de Diamants du Cap thus became the largest mining operation on the Fields.\textsuperscript{55}

Claim prices rose steeply in all four mines, but it was in the poorer pits where the financial leap-frogging was most palpable. Whereas between 1876 and the climax of the 'share mania' in 1881, the value of Kimberley Mine had risen threefold and that of De Beers sevenfold, the value of the mines of Dutoitspan and Bulfontein had increased 60 and 50 times respectively. By the end of 1880 there were 10 joint-stock companies in Kimberley Mine alone. One year later the four Kimberley mines brandished no less than 71 companies with a nominal capital of £9,658,960.\textsuperscript{56}

The forming of these joint-stock companies initiated a period of frantic speculation which reached fever pitch in the first six months of 1881. In February of that year the Royal Stock Exchange was opened in Kimberley. Competition for the limited numbers of shares available to the public was fierce. As more capital flowed in from the Cape Town and Port Elizabeth merchants and bankers, stock were trading at premiums ranging from 25 to 300 per cent.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{54} There were 306 steam engines operating in the mine by 1881 (as to 16 in 1877): Turrell, R.V., \textit{Capital and labour on the Kimberley diamond fields}, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 81-2; Worger, W.H., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{56} Turrell, R.V., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 82, 105-7.
So pungent was the new-found confidence in Kimberley's speculative enterprise that its debilitated basis remained completely abstruse. Not only did it fail to attract sufficient outside investment capital, in particular from Europe, but the companies were being floated with exceedingly high values placed on claims. The trend of overvaluation was aggravated by the 'game of catching premiums', i.e. the indifferent forcing up to premiums of shares 'on the backs of their betters'. Local promoters completed the vicious circle by their partaking in speculation - to secure a quick profit, everything they had were invested in a single company to boost its share prices. Rather than being laid out to expand production, profits were reinvested in new speculative ventures.58

When in April 1881 local banks refused to accept diamond mining company scrip as collateral for loans, Kimberley's speculative bubble burst. With local capital firmly tied up in industry and that of Europe unserved, the hitherto inflationary cycle made way for a momentous spiralling depression. Holders stampeded to sell their shares, often for half the face value or less. Share prices deteriorated so acutely that the share market became stagnant, thereby locking the economies of Griqualand West and the Cape together in recession.59

To crown it all, the price of rough diamonds in the London market fell by 42 per cent between 1882 and 1885 and cut the enormous wealth of close to £2.5 million produced by the Kimberley mines in 1882 down to an all-time low of £2.25 million: This collapse led to the liquidation of 30 of the 71 joint-stock mining companies, most of them in the poorer mines of Bulfontein and Dutoitspan, and the reduction of the total capitalisation of the mines from £9.6 million to 7.8 million.60

Kimberley's diggers from the earliest days had found themselves unable to accord their rate of production with the highly volatile European market - the greater the number of diamonds mined, it seemed, the more ephemeral profit became. Unable to survive lower profit margins, smallholding had made way for larger individual capitalists, who in turn were succeeded by private companies and later by public joint-stock enterprises. But these shake-outs in the long term failed to put the industry on a sound footing. Independent company-based mining operations had in effect recreated the quandary of smallholding, only on a far bigger scale. During the extended depression of 1882-85 the enduring problems of capital, technology and labour became more profound than ever before.

3.3. Reappraisal and reorganisation of capital

Over and above its prostrating local capital resources, the 'share mania' of 1881 had critically hamstrung the production capacity of many of the new joint-stock companies. Only around 10 per cent of the total capital of the companies floated were set aside for investment into production, most of which was promptly expended on new machinery - the bulk of subscribed capital was recycled into further speculation. When the bottom fell out of the share market, therefore, few companies had recourse to capital reserves of any substance: neither its mining board nor the companies in Kimberley Mine were able in 1881 to summon up the capital needed for urgent reef-removal work at a time when two-thirds of its claims were covered by fallen reef and three loads of 'dead' ground were being taken out to every load of blue extracted. The dangerous working practices and wholesale abuse of machinery in the mine had made digging there far more dangerous than before.61

AMALGAMATION

During the depression which importuned mine and town after 1881, mineowners came to realise that the only way forward was to renew foreign investment in the mines. Unwilling to forgo their controlling position in the industry, local producers envisaged amalgamation as holding the key to their attracting substantial overseas capital without forfeiting their control. Amalgamation foreshadowed the rationalisation of diamond production on the Fields. Under a single giant corporation, or four large combinations for each of the mines, the output and price of diamonds - not to mention the price of labour - could be properly regulated, and with outside capital more powerful machinery could be installed and working costs further curtailed.62

Amalgamation schemes proliferated during the depression of 1882-85. Among the major proposals tendered, none of which were brought to fruition, were two proposals for Dutoitspan Mine - the 1883 Rothschild and the 1885 Standard Bank schemes - and an ambitious project for total unification of all four mines, the 1886 Comptoir d'Escompte de Paris scheme.63 Of particular relevance to this study is the first major scheme to have been promoted, the Erlanger scheme, which has been described as 'the first detailed proposal to link closed compounds and underground mining to a greater yield and profitability'.64

64 Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 207.
The Erlanger scheme

Initiated in March 1882 by Cecil Rhodes and his partners in the De Beers Diamond Mining Company, the Erlanger scheme proposed the amalgamation of De Beers Mine. Reworking the current ideas on mining technology and African labour, the plan hinged on two key features: first, the substituting of systematic underground mining for open-cast, and secondly, the incarceration of African labourers in their barracks.65

By erecting four giant hauling machines to work in combination with a shaft and tunnel system, Rhodes anticipated to 'reduce the number of 2,000 boys at present employed to 1,500'. To obviate competition for labour, the Company was to enter into 'a contract with all the Kaffir Chiefs for a constant supply of boys for the Company only'. Depots for feeding and lodging Company recruits only were to be established along the route to the Fields. By purposing to build 'barracks for lodging the boys', Rhodes aimed to prevent diamond theft by extending Company control of its workers:

At seven o’clock in the morning the boys should be down in the Mine, return for dinner, go to the Mine again till 6 p.m. On their return they would be searched (for the first time that day) by the overseers and gatekeeper. Each journey between the barracks and the Mine would be performed by the boys marching in columns. After supper or after being searched the boys would be at liberty to go into town until 9 p.m. This plan would prevent the stealing of diamonds which prevails to such an extent that it is estimated 25% of the total are stolen.66

Rhodes thus hoped to effect a 27 per cent saving in the working costs of the mine and a 435 per cent increase in the net yield of the amalgamated companies and claimholders. Consolidation of management and a substantial reduction in the number of expensive Europeans in the company’s employ alone were expected to contribute thirty per cent of the total estimated savings. Compounding was reckoned to permit the forking back of at least half the black wages paid by the sale of goods to Africans while locked up.67

Despite the promising long-term prospects of a switch-over to underground mining, an instalment of £500,000 was needed forthwith to pay for its introduction. But after having procured the financial backing of Baron Erlanger, a City merchant banker, Rhodes’ scheme miscarried on the issue of valuation of the other companies in the mine. His being at loggerheads with the baron dealt the final blow.68

Partial amalgamation

The ever-increasing competitive interest in amalgamation and consolidation after 1881 heralded a new phase in diamond mining - small joint-stock enterprises were now giving way to greater agglomerations.

Pursuing a process of partial amalgamation through consolidation policies of their own design were the Kimberley Central and the De Beers Diamond Mining Companies, the two companies which had emerged as the two most likely nuclei for a diamond mining monopoly. Having come to dominate operations in their respective mines during the 1881 ‘share mania’, both companies set about ‘crushing smaller companies by “swamping them with production”’.69

The precept pursued by the two companies, contends William Worger, was ‘more than often one of forced takeovers rather than of mutually agreed upon combinations’. Instrumental to the process of involuntary consolidation of claims were the mining boards. Rhodes, as a Kimberley representative in the Cape Parliament in 1883, had secured the annulment of the old rule that, whatever the size of its holdings, a company could have no more than one representative on a board. With franchise based on property qualification, the Kimberley Central and De Beers companies gained total control of their respective mining boards. By manipulating water- and reef-removal operations, they were able to drive small operations into near-bankruptcy and forced amalgamation, or alternatively into liquidation so as to come by their holdings.70

By early 1884 the Kimberley Central and De Beers had managed to stamp out all serious opposition in their respective mines, thus rendering harmless any combination against their authority.71

The Kimberley Central

The purpose of amalgamation was the pursuit of monopoly profits and the reduction of the output of diamonds, but in the amalgamation struggle the desired goal was reached on the basis of fierce competition for expanded production through a rapid development of underground mining. The competition in underground caverns determined the positions companies took up in board rooms in Kimberley, London and Paris.72

66 Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 150; these proposals are reminiscent of earlier ideas: vide infra, p. 91.
68 Acceding companies were to receive half the assessment value of their property in cash and the other half in scrip in the unified company: ibid.; Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 207.
69 Both companies were cushioned against the dilemmas which had debilitating smaller enterprises by virtue of their size and their access to substantial capital resources: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 211.
70 Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 56-7; mining boards were used in much the same way in the late 1870s: vide supra, p. 67.
71 Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 58.
Kimberley Mine had always been the richest pit at the Fields, a superiority expected to be bolstered by full-scale underground working and ultimately amalgamation. Though its contribution to total diamond output had fallen from 41 per cent in 1883 to 23 per cent in 1885, each load excavated from the Kimberley pit during the latter year still yielded more carats than the other three mines combined. An amalgamated Kimberley Mine would pose a formidable threat to the companies in the poorer mines.\textsuperscript{73}

In the short term, however, the mine was faced with the provocation of having to transform first, by trial and error, from open-cast to underground operations. Reef falls at the end of 1883 and early in 1884 had left no more than 50 of its 460 claims workable, forcing reef-removal to be given priority over the extracting of blue. In comparison, having encountered no critical reef problems before 1885, De Beers Mine showed a 17 per cent increase in output between 1883 and 1884.\textsuperscript{74}

Nothing underlines better the taxing role of companies in Kimberley Mine in the pioneering of deep-level mining methods than the poor financial performance of the Central. Having begun with exploratory shafts and tunnels in 1882/3, the company went into the red early in 1884 the first time in its history. It continued to sink deeper into debt during 1885, despite lowering wages and tightening labour discipline - in contrast the De Beers Company was boasting a better return for the second year running.\textsuperscript{75}

The collapse in September 1884 of the Central’s underground works intensified the race for a viable underground mining system. Spurred on by the endeavours of its major competitors in the mine - the Compagnie Française and the Standard - the Central managed to beat them into getting a new full-scale underground system operative by the end of 1885. Two years on the Kimberley Central not only had repaid its debts and declared a dividend of 34.5 per cent, but had absorbed the Standard Company.\textsuperscript{76}

The Central now owned all of Kimberley Mine but for the ninety claims belonging to the Compagnie Française. Not wishing to get embroiled in a baneful battle, the Central’s directors as early as 1882 had tried to buy the Compagnie, but to no avail. When fresh attempts to negotiate an amicable settlement came to nought early in 1885, the Kimberley Central set about augmenting its position by acquiring strategically relevant properties in the pit. The Compagnie responded in kind, kindling a bidding war that lasted into 1887.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{73} In 1885 a single load from Kimberley yielded 1.5 carats in comparison with only 0.9 carats in De Beers Mine, 0.3 in Bulfontein and 0.2 in Dutoitspan: Worger, W.H., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 60, 61 n.143.

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 58; Williams, G.F., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 242-4.

\textsuperscript{75} Turrell, R.V., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 150-1, 211; Worger, W.H., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 59.

\textsuperscript{76} Earlier the Standard had absorbed the Barnato Company: Turrell, R.V., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 151, 220-1.

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 206, 217; Worger, W.H., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 61; Williams, G.F., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 281.
The turn of events after 1885 bore down heavily on the cohesion of the De Beers directors. An avalanche of nearly five million cubic feet of reef early in 1885 forced a six month stoppage, spelling out the irrationality of continuing with open-cast working. But the company lagged behind in the switch-over to underground mining: when in 1885 the Central’s hauling capacity was 3,000 loads per 24 hour day, De Beers hauled only 1,200. Two years later, though, upon having instituted a modified version of the Central’s underground system, De Beers managed 3,000 loads per day. This tenacious ‘pursuit of quantity’ aroused a great deal of criticism: in February 1887 an inspector of the Standard Bank denounced the ‘reckless disregard’ for human life and warned that sooner or later De Beers will ‘pay dearly for its present hand to mouth policy’.80

After having completed the amalgamation of De Beers in June 1887, Cecil Rhodes and his colleagues turned their attention to Kimberley Mine. Production in De Beers Mine was pushed to the limit as they tried keeping pace not just with the Central but with Kimberley Mine as a whole. Their impetuosity terminated in disaster when, in July 1888, a third of the De Beers men working below surface at the time perished in a fire. A month earlier output in De Beers had reached 6,000 loads per day.81

FIGURE 3.8 The De Beers shaft fire of 12 July 1888 during which 202 men lost their lives (Allen, V., Early Kimberley, p. 114)

De Beers Consolidated Mines

With unification of De Beers Mine in 1887, the final battle lines in the ensuing tussle for monopoly control of the Kimberley diamond mines were drawn.

The standard history of this leviathan struggle between Cecil Rhodes in De Beers and Barney Barnato, who held a controlling interest in the Kimberley Central, gives prominence to the clever manoeuvre whereby Rhodes obtained a one-fifth share in Kimberley Mine: Rhodes is said to have placed a ‘Trojan horse in the enemy camp’ through the purchase and resale of the Compagnie Française to the Central.82 The ensuing battle of attrition in production engendered a collapse in carat prices, turning the share markets into the next battleground. From the tug-of-war for share control which got under way in October 1887, Rhodes emerged the victor with the formation in March 1888 of De Beers Consolidated Mines to absorb both the Central and De Beers. During this time, Rhodes is said repeatedly to have offered to buy off his opponent, but only in March 1888, when Rhodes and his allies gained a controlling share of Central stock, did Barnato capitulate.

Robert Turrell’s re-interpretation of the amalgamation saga, however, upturns the personalised chronicles of South African historians on the battle between Rhodes and Barnato. Turrell argues that Barnato had thrown in his lot with De Beers long before March 1888 and describes his election to Parliament and to the Kimberley Club in 1888 as ‘seals of respectability and essential window-dressing for the formation of the monopoly company’.83 According to Turrell the struggle for that reason had been not over the control of the mines but over the powers to be given to De Beers Consolidated - the touchstone of Barnato’s co-operation had been the proposal for Life Governors, the men who were to receive all the profit after a 36 per cent (originally 30 per cent) dividend had been distributed to shareholders. Arguing that the Central came out of the amalgamation struggle with a much better deal than De Beers, Turrell concludes: ‘If anybody laughed all the way to the bank at the time it was Barnato Brothers...’84

De Beers Consolidated Mines acquired legal ownership of Kimberley Mine in July 1889 - by September all four mines were in its possession.85

82 The Central owned all of Kimberley Mine but the 90 Compagnie claims: Chivers, H.A., The Story of De Beers; Roberts, B., The diamond magnates; Flint, J., Cecil Rhodes.
83 It was Baring-Gould, the Central’s Chairman, who fought for a better deal for his shareholders and thence was denied the profits of the fifth Life Governorship. The secret and expensive ‘squaring’ of Barnato is said to have taken place in November 1887: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 222.
84 Life governorship was one of the most controversial aspects of De Beers Consolidated - the Life Governors were Barney Barnato (6685 shares), Cecil Rhodes, Alfred Beit, and Frederick Stow (4439 shares each). Between them the Life Governors received £857,457 for the years from 1896 (1st distribution) to 1901; their special rights were redeemed only in 1902: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 211-25, 227; Emden, P.H., Randlords, pp. 260-1.
85 For more details: Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 246f.
FIGURE 3.10 The second Kimberley Club, c. 1886, where there were more millionaires per square foot than any other place in the world. Like its predecessor, the second club building was destroyed by fire, in 1895 (MMKP 4299)

FIGURE 3.11 A group of De Beers directors: Cecil Rhodes and Barney Barnato are seated with legs crossed (Roberts, B., The diamond magnate, between pp. 86 & 87)
African labour was shown in the foregoing chapter to have remained a vexed question - from the employers' point of view - throughout the systematic industrialisation of the Fields. Every new crisis seems to have rekindled the labour debate, whetting as it did the desire of employers for total control over the African workforce. The enduring shortage of cheap black labour was widely acknowledged as a chief contributor to the vicissitude of diamond mining.

It will be recalled how early Griqualand West legislation reflected the association of diamond theft with desertion. Although the ideological equation of African workers with criminals can be said to have found spatial expression in the pioneering in 1885 of the closed compound, the common interpretation that this contrivance was conceived purely as a measure to thwart diamond theft and the IDB trade (Illicit Diamond Buying) is too simplistic. As Robert Turrell explains: 'The reasons for its introduction are not to be found in the growth of IDB but in the structural conditions of capital accumulation in the mining industry itself'.

Twice during the first decade of digging did over-production cause the collapse of the European diamond market around which the Kimberley industry revolved. The industrial transformation of diamond digging after 1876 failed to invigorate the element of profit so eagerly pursued by mining capitalists. Their ongoing ineptitude in bridling production led to the third major collapse of the diamond market in 1882. As expanded production was seen to worsen the downward fluctuation in carat prices, mineowners decided to raise the rate of profit through centralising capital and stepping up labour productivity (rather than eliminating diamond theft). It was in this process that housing became 'the most important site for the organisation and control of the labour force'.

An outline of the reorganisation of capital after the third disintegration of the diamond market concluded the discussion in Chapter 3 of the industrialisation of the diamond mines. Chapter 4 looks at the attempts after 1876 to create a black workforce more compatible with the requirements of the new industry, and more particularly at the reorganisation of African labour following the 1882 collapse. Actively abetted by the colonial state, this continuing quest of Kimberley's industrialists for control over the supply of African labour and for command of the worker in and outside the work-place culminated in the introduction of closed compounds in 1885 and 1886.

4.1. Securing control over the supply of African labour

The era of capital hatched not only a new mode of production at the Fields but also a fresh rapport between industry and state on the 'labour question'. The buoying by the colonial state of employers' efforts to control the supply of African labour to the Fields stemmed from its considerable financial interest in the diamond industry as 'proprietor' of Vooruitzigt Farm. Bearing out this coincidence of interest with regard to African labour are the findings of a commission set up by Major Owen Lanyon in 1876 'to enquire into and report upon the supply and demand for native labour'.

The 'Commission upon the Griqualand West labour problem'

The Labour Commission's investigation dominated public affairs in Kimberley during the early months of 1876 as large numbers of employers made their needs known. Published in May, the gist of its report pertained to the formation of an impressive administrative structure to control the supply of labour to the Fields. Acknowledging that high wages were by far the best means of attracting labour to the mines, the commissioners advised that no legislative controls be instituted as to the rate of wages. Besides purposing severe penalties for those who prevailed on workers to desert, they emphasised the need for a strictly enforced vagrancy law if better charge was to be attained of Africans in the camps.

More importantly, the Commission proposed state aid to secure the safe passage of migrants to the Fields. It propounded the establishment of state agencies in the labour supplying chiefdoms and the setting up of depots along major migration routes to provide food, shelter and security. It further recommended the centralisation of labour supply through the creation of an institution to serve as the sole distributor of African labour in Kimberley. By ameliorating employer competition for labour, this labour depot was meant to halt the upward spiralling of black wage rates.

The central labour depot was to be run by a superintendent whose chief task was to contract all newly arrived African migrants to the Fields. It was also sanctioned to employ compulsorily those 'who at the end of 5 days sojourn at a depot are unable to obtain employment', lest their turning out of the depot would lead to vagrancy and crime. Such compulsion was seen as 'absolute liberty' compared to 'tyrannical' chiefly rule.

2 Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 46.
3 Worger, W.H., South Africa's city of diamonds, pp. 120-1.
5 Essentially 'an institution of forced labour': Turrell, R.V., Capital and labour on the Kimberley diamond fields, p. 90. Workers would thus be prevented from holding out for higher wages.
STATE ‘RECRUITMENT’ OF AFRICAN LABOUR

Major structural changes in the Kimberley industry after 1876 eventuated in larger production units and made employers more dependent upon a cheap, reliable and well-disciplined African workforce than ever before. Hopes for a legally enshrined system of labour supply were dashed when the attempt to furnish the Labour Commission’s counsel with a legal basis foundered on the continued reprobation by the Colonial Office of racially discriminatory laws. A non-compulsory central depot was established instead, but failed to satisfy those coveting colonial control of labour provision.

Employers saw their frustration compounded by the unsuccessful attempt in June to lower African wages. Heartened by the findings of the Commission and by a sizable increase during the first months of 1876 in the supply of workers from areas close to the Fields, they had conspired to halve wages as they began feeling the pinch of the depressed European diamond market. The ensuing exodus of Africans, worsened by the commandeering by the Pedi chief of his men to join in the war against the Boers, within weeks had halved the Kimberley workforce. Two months later the number of men arriving to work had fallen by 80 per cent. What was to have been a year of increase during the first months of 1876 in the supply of workers from areas close to the Fields, they had conspired to halve wages as they began feeling the pinch of the depressed European diamond market. The ensuing exodus of Africans, worsened by the commandeering by the Pedi chief of his men to join in the war against the Boers, within weeks had halved the Kimberley workforce. Two months later the number of men arriving to work had fallen by 80 per cent. What was to have been a year of

Determined to secure a regular supply of cheaper labour, employers turned their attention to recruiting. Until then most Africans working on the mines were ‘recruited’ by means of a practice known as ‘touting’. Migrants making their way to the Fields were intercepted by touts either on the outskirts of Kimberley or at towns as distant as Christiana and Potchefstroom in the Transvaal. Engaged on the spot or offered food and protection for the remainder of the journey, their capacity to labour was then sold to diggers at labour auctions on Kimberley Market Square.

By the early 1880s it was not unusual for a mining company to send out its own recruiter - even the small Birbeck Company sent an agent to the Transvaal in 1881. Other companies employed the services of private recruiting agents - the Kimberley Central forged long-term links with Arthur Shepstone, a Natal railway labour agent, who recruited as far as Inhambane in Mozambique. But even these arrangements were found lacking: although recruits were engaged at lower rates of pay and for longer periods of contract, once in Kimberley ‘they readily ascertained the true state of affairs, broke their contracts, and sought work with higher-paying employers’.

The colonial state came under increasing pressure to sponsor recruitment ventures in view of the preference of many African chiefs for government-negotiated terms of recruitment. Keen though it was to establish a stable labour supply to the Kimberley mines, the Griqualand West administration was loath to formal involvement in labour recruitment. Only once did Lanyon ignore the general policy of his government which viewed labour recruiting as outside the state’s legitimate function.

In contrast, the Cape government had its own labour recruiting officer since 1873 - his early recruiting endeavours at the Fields caused an uproar in Kimberley. In Natal a tax was imposed on Africans working outside the colony in an attempt to stem the tide of labour to the mines. Kimberley’s chagrin at having to compete with the colonies for labour was aggravated by the unavailing recruiting missions of the late 1870s to the north and to the Transvaal. The hut-tax used in the colonies and the republics to propel Africans into partaking in wage labour was not exacted in Griqualand West either.

The extension after 1876 of white control over the labour-supplying hinterland and the imposition in 1879 of a hut-tax in Griqualand West brought little relief. Imperial intervention was increasingly viewed as the only solution to the problems of labour at the diamond fields and in the colonies. The harassment of African migrants on their way through the Boer republics was long seen as seriously sapping the flow of labour to the south. Those passing through were not only forced to pay a cash tax, but were often thrashed and flogged, or arrested if carrying a gun. Subjugation of Boer and African polities would dispose of many constraints on African participation in wage labour and promised to open up vast new reservoirs of labour.

Staunch support for an expansionist policy came from Shepstone, Secretary of Native Affairs in Natal, who played an important role in the late 1870s in helping to formulate Lord Carnarvon’s scheme to confederate the Boer states and British colonies. Confederation would permit the establishment of a ‘uniform native policy’ for southern Africa, a colonial dream so beguiling that, when diplomacy failed, the imperial state espoused to dragoon its way forward. The Transvaal was annexed in April 1877 and a series of wars in the late 1870s destroyed the economic and political autonomy of the Pedi and the Zulu, the two most powerful black states in the subcontinent.

1 Lanyon’s 1876 Labour Ordinance used 'native' in lieu of 'servant': Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 121.
2 Of at least 25 per cent higher than before the cut: ibid., pp. 33, 92-3; vide supra, p. 66; on the Sekukhumu/Burgers war of 1876: Davenport, T.R.H., South Africa: a modern history, p. 159.
7 Carnarvon was British Colonial Secretary at the time: Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 97-8.
MINING CAPITAL AND THE SUPPLY OF LABOUR

Although the periodic outbursts of war adversely affected the supply of labour to Kimberley, cessation of most hostilities by 1880 did not bring major relief. African labour was still not forthcoming from the colonies as officials there sought to retain their resources for local industry instead. The dire annual black death-rate at the Fields further dissuaded migrants from offering their labour at the mines. A disquieting 80 persons per thousand head of population by the end of the 1870s, Kimberley's African death-rate exceeded by far the death-rate of Calcutta, 'the city popularly viewed at the time as the most unhealthy in the British Empire'.

Following his appointment in 1879 as Administrator of the conquered territory of the Transvaal, a loyal Colonel Lanyon axed the transit taxes previously levied on south-bound workers and stepped up the collection of hut-tax. From September to the end of 1880 he sent 12,000 Africans to Kimberley. These neighbourly gestures came to an abrupt end in 1881 with the regaining of independence in the Transvaal.

Companies struggling to make amends for dwindling carat prices towards the end of 1881 caused an upsurge in the demand for labour. Though more Africans were working in the mines during 1881-82 than ever before, employer complaints at high wages and labour shortages had never been more profuse. African workers were still able to dictate the terms of their employment: in the aftermath of the 'share mania' black wages rose to higher levels than ever before, up to £2 or more per week.

As the depression deepened, however, thousands of workers were laid off - Figure 4.1 evinces the ebb in the demand of labour. Figure 4.2 illustrates the tendency among employers after 1883 to rehire labourers on completion of their contracts rather than engaging novices. They were able at the same time to trim wage rates by as much as fifty per cent due to the relative surplus and reduced turnover of African labour.

Despite the apparent inversion in the labour situation at the time of the depression, the Kimberley mineowners remained acutely aware of their inability to control African movement to and from the Fields. The lengths to which they were prepared to go in safeguarding their investments were laid bare during the smallpox epidemic of 1883/84.

... a bulbous disease of the skin allied to pemphigus

The vilely inadequate hospital facilities for African workers in Kimberley in the early 1880s was one of many factors which had a bearing on the town's staggering black death-rate. Many white employers were averse to sending sick labourers for treatment. Fomenting a controversy far more opprobrious than the prevailing practice of carting off the sick to jail as vagrants, however, was the outbreak of smallpox in late 1883.

Prompt action by Kimberley mineowners warded off the spreading of smallpox from the Cape Peninsula in 1882. An officially unauthorised fumigation station was set up on the spot where the main transport roads from the Cape converged. For fourteen months it facilitated the vaccination and subjection to quarantine of all visitors to the Fields. The eventual bill of over £100,000 was footed by the mining companies.

15 Calcutta's annual death-rate was 52/1,000 and that of London 23/1,000: ibid., pp. 98-100.
16 Lanyon collected £33,690 in hut-tax within a year of his appointment (as against the Boers' £1,427 for 1876): ibid., pp. 99, 100n.88; Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 92.
18 30,000 workers were judged too few in 1882; 5,000 were deemed too many in 1883: ibid., p. 102.
19 The 'Native Ward' of Kimberley Hospital operated 'in defiance of all sanitary laws': ibid., p. 100.
20 Sauer, H., Ex Africa, pp. 37-9, 42: according to Hans Sauer, the doctor who took charge of the station, Cecil Rhodes had been the moving force behind these emergency measures.
Late in 1883, not long after the Cape had received a clean bill of health, a group of migrants from Mozambique was intercepted and isolated at Felsteads Farm, nine miles from Kimberley, on suspicion of suffering from smallpox. But an official visit by a team of six doctors to the quarantine station in November was followed by a statement in which was declared that it was not smallpox but ‘a bulbous disease of the skin allied to pemphigus’. Quick to endorse the claim, industrialists chose to ignore the diagnosis of smallpox by three of the doctors and had copies of the notice signed by the three ‘pemphigus’ doctors distributed in the streets.21

Insisting that the disease afflicting their workers was non-contagious and peculiar to Africans, the mineowners for months tried to allay public fears despite independent confirmation to the contrary. Their importunity was seen by one observer as a product of the fear that, ‘if the arrival of smallpox became common knowledge in the town, the native workers in the diamond mines would pack up and depart en bloc, with the result that not only Griqualand West but the whole of South Africa would be ruined’.22 When smallpox cropped up in the barracks, healthy and sick workers under the care of the ‘pemphigus men’ remained cooped up together on company premises. Reaching epidemic proportions, the disease soon affected the town. Only then were quarantine measures imposed and the necessary steps taken to care for the sick. The total of 700 fatal cases recorded in the 16 months from October 1883 to January 1885, as Robert Turrell points out, seems dubious when compared to that of 4,000 for Cape Town in a matter of a few months and without a public row over the nature of the disease.23

In the end the epidemic had little impact on labour supply to the mines - more ‘new hands’ were contracted in 1884 than in 1883.24

Consolidating control
Annexation of Griqualand West to the Cape in 1880 provided Kimberley industrialists with a new forum for furthering their remedies for the labour problems of the diamond mines. Cecil Rhodes is said to have been largely responsible for the annexation in 1884 of the territory which became known as British Bechuanaland - a firm exponent of the ‘great colonial dream’, he was interested in Tswana labour, not land. By granting white claims to this tract of land, a land commission in 1886 left the Thlaping and Rolong peoples with legal title to less than ten per cent of the land they occupied before seizure thereof in 1883 by Boer mercenaries.25

Measures seeking to coerce Africans into wage labour accompanied the continuing dispossession of black land. A hut-tax payable in ‘sterling coin’ only was imposed by the new administrators of British Bechuanaland in 1886. By 1888 hut-tax in British Zululand connoted more than a tax on every ‘hut’ except cooking huts - it entailed a tax on every wife, whatever or not she possessed a hut of her own.26

Black producers saw their market options evaporate with the opening in November 1885 of the Cape-to-Kimberley railway, a project in which Cecil Rhodes again had taken a leading role. Bringing to the Fields cheaper Cape coal and American grain, the rail link incapacitated the wood trade of British Bechuanaland and completely enervated the once successful agricultural producers of Basutoland.27

Full-scale company recruitment
The three largest mining companies on the Fields were all actively recruiting labour by the mid-1880s, preferring to contract recruited labourers rather than engaging those arriving at the mines under own steam. By the end of 1886, reports William Worger, their workforces consisted ‘almost entirely of recruited men’.28

22 Sauer, H., op. cit., p. 74: Sauer, acting for the Cape Government, also diagnosed smallpox.
23 A total of 2,311 cases were recorded in Kimberley; the mortality rate from African cases was 35 per cent, that of the remainder only 12 per cent: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 139.
Recruitment either took the form of direct negotiations with African paramounts, or involved the services of a labour agent. The Compagnie Française used the services of a former police superintendent from Durban who earlier supplied Kimberley jail with recruited Zulu prison guards; the Kimberley Central continued its association with a former police superintendent from Durban who earlier supplied Kimberley jail with outside the work-place: in 1882, for example, the Central's manager was forced twice to make arrangements with the chiefs of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and the Transvaal for a continuous supply of labour.29 Significantly, it was on recruited labour alone that all three companies chose to close their compounds in 1885 and 1886.

The instigation of full-scale labour recruitment permitted mineowners for the first time to dictate the terms of employment. Attempts to tie workers down to a single employer for longer periods of time were an essential ingredient of recruitment policy. To cite an early instance, a one-year contract period was a key feature of the Central's recruiting arrangements in late 1881 for labour from Inhombane. Recruited workers in the service of De Beers as late as 1902 served longer contracts - of six or even twelve months - than those who had gone to Kimberley of their own accord.30

Early recruiting suffered in the lack of company control over workers within and outside the work-place: in 1882, for example, the Central's manager was forced twice to raise black wages to retain his workers.31 By 1885, however, the Kimberley labour market was a virtual monopoly under the control of three companies. Recruitment was now paralleled by a formidable set of controls embracing almost every aspect of the lives of the town's African workers - section 4.2 examines how this was accomplished.

Recruited labour continued to form a significant portion of the African workforce at the mines long after the depression of 1882-85. Even after monopolising the local labour market, De Beers Consolidated Mines still found it necessary from time to time to recruit 'new hands'. This was largely due to the Witwatersrand taking over as the centre of the regional labour market during the 1890s.32 De Beers periodically reverted to extensive recruitment in times of severe labour shortages. During the labour crisis in the aftermath of the South African War, for instance, the company's labour agents were actively recruiting as far north as Northern Rhodesia. Of the close to 50,000 men contracted by De Beers throughout 1905, some 40 per cent were recruited; eight years later recruited labour still made up at least 10 per cent of its African workforce.33

4.2. Extending control to the work-place and beyond

Securing a constant supply of African labour to the Fields was only half the battle: the protracted struggle for the command of labour in the work-place and in the town was as profound as that taking place beyond the urban limits. A brief look at the barn of ideas on labour control championed in Kimberley after 1876 precedes a discussion of mining capital's renewed bid after 1881 to extend the compass of the law to include every facet of the day-to-day existence of African mineworkers.

THE LETTER OF THE LAW

In his capacity as Administrator of Griqualand West, Major Lanyon harnessed to great effect the agencies of the state in regulating various aspects of the labour market, his failure to set in motion the regulatory machinery propounded in 1876 notwithstanding.

Responding to complaints of labour shortfalls during the attempt in 1876 to reduce wages, Lanyon authorised a series of pass raids. While the Colonial Office refused to vindicate racially defined legislation, strict enforcement of registration and pass laws - a sizable wellspring of state revenue - did carry its sanction. The stepping up of policing and a more than twofold increase in police manpower between January and September 1876 capacitated the arrest of 3,131 Africans in the first six months of 1876, as compared to 1,396 arrests in the corresponding period in 1875.34 Figure 4.4 shows how the number of those charged with pass offences had soared.

Culminating in headlong procedures in the determining of guilt and the passing of sentence, the resulting burden of cases in the court-room created what William Worger labels the 'production-line techniques' of the Kimberley Magistrate's Court: hearing as many as 150 cases in a single day meant accepting the evidence of arresting officers as adequate proof of guilt. When punitive sentencing proved unavailing, a new court was

32 Turrell, R.V., 'Kimberley: labour and compounds', in Marks, S. & R. Raibbone, op. cit., p. 59; the first compound was closed on recruits with six-month contracts: Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 107, 144, 300 n.11.
33 Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 60.
34 Van Onselen, C., Capital and labour on the Kimberley diamond fields, p. 169.
35 Van Onselen, C., Chibaro, p. 131; Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 300.
36 Street pass checks and regular Sunday 'raids' were instituted: Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 121-3.

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set up in 1879 to relieve the Magistrate's Court of its burden. Operating without a jury, the Police Magistrate's Court dealt with offences under the 1872 pass ordinances and the 1856 Cape Masters and Servants Act only: its adjudicating of 4,359 cases in the first year lessened the case-load of the Kimberley Magistrate's Court to 952.35

But even the combined efforts of police and court fell short of according employers total control over their African workers, as the failure in 1879 to expunge black resolve to retain 'board wages' elucidates. The system of 'board wages' came under fire in May 1876 when the Labour Commission branded its prevalence a 'fruitful source of temptation to crime' and exhorted the obligatory housing and feeding of servants on their employers' premises.36

Spatial independence prevented employers from subordinating African labourers to rigid industrial discipline. Upon applying to the Mining Surveyor in August 1877 for space behind the company's engine-house to construct a barracks for between 60 and 80 men, the Kimberley Diamond Mining Company's manager substantiated his appeal as follows: 'When our Kaffirs sleep away, we find they are seldom to their work in proper time and more especially so on Monday mornings ... the loss to us for the want of accommodation for our Kaffirs means a large difference in the working expenses'.37

Promulgation in August 1879 of Government Notice No. 151 made the board and lodging of African workers on company premises compulsory. But the new regulation lost its clout when compliance resulted in large-scale desertion - keen though they were to re-establish the close physical proximity with their labourers, employers would sooner break the law than be without labour. Chary of prosecuting transgressing employers, the police were nonetheless adamant in their enforcing of the rule which barred Africans from frequenting a chief source of meals, the so-called 'Kaffir eating-houses'. Concludes Worger: 'The workers soon realised that in dealing with the law and its agents the only lesson to be learned was not to get caught'.38

Such arbitrary enforcement of the law had a counter-productive effect on the supply of African labour to the Fields, a scenario encouraged by a disinclination among many employers to fulfil their contractual obligations to their workers. For the victims of the high incidence of non-payment of black wages there was no form of redress at hand, a temptation to crime' and exhorted the obligatory housing and feeding of servants on their employers' premises.36

35 One magistrate in 1877 doubled penalties to a 20s. fine or one month's hard labour (with eighteen days on a rice-water diet): ibid., pp. 123-4.
38 For the corollary of Notice 151, i.e. an attempt to segregate Africans who were not compounded from the main camps: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 98, 186; Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 125-6.
39 The position of 'protector' was created in 1877: Worger, W.H., op cit., pp. 126-7.

T.C. Kitto and the Brazilian experience

I believe the natives of South Africa, under European supervision, are capable of being made almost - if not quite - as good as the blacks of Brazil, provided they are dealt with in the same manner.

... if natives could be bound to masters for say seven years ... under strict government supervision, it would be for the infinite benefit of the natives themselves.40

It was the Cornish mining engineer, Thomas Kitto, who first mooted the notion of the compound as a site of labour control in Kimberley. Publication of his Report on the Diamond Mines of Griqualand West coincided with promulgation of the 1879 lodging and feeding rule. Although the report was based partly on his experience of slave-labour on the diamond mines of Brazil, Kitto insisted that he was not advocating slavery. Describing the 'quality of labour' at the Fields as the worst he had ever encountered, Kitto purported that one Brazilian worker would do the equivalent in work of three Kimberley workers.41

In Brazil the British diamond mining companies could hire four different categories of labourers from slave-owners. The slaves were lodged in barracks 'built in the form of a square'. A strong light illuminated the courtyard at night, with a large gate providing the only access. Here, upon their leaving in the morning and returning in the evening, male and female inmates answered 'to the call of their names'. The gate was locked overnight, for workers were required to 'retire to rest early'. Reassuringly describing the feeling between owners and slaves as 'very good', Kitto concluded: 'in another 22 years, or thereabouts, all will be free; by which time, if they continue in their present state of progression, they will be ripe for the occasion'.42

Kitto's ideas on labour found instant favour in Kimberley. But the path to realising these was fraught with obstacles, least of which was the refusal of the Colonial Office to endorse racially defined laws - annexation to the Cape in 1880 furnished mineowners with a way round this trammel by placing the responsibility for enacting legislation for the Fields with the Cape Parliament. Even so, much water was still to flow under the bridge before African workers in Kimberley were to become what a visitor in 1896 described as the De Beers Company's 'prisoners as well as its labourers'.43

40 Report on the Diamond Mines of Griqualand West, pp. 60, 104 - the report was published in parts in the Griqualand West Government Gazette in August and September 1879.
41 Ibid., p. 59.
42 Their owners received 'for a first class man, one milreis (2s.), for a second class man, ls. 8cl. , for a third, ls. and for a fourth class, about 3d.' per day: ibid.
43 Cumberland, S.C., South Africa: its peoples and its politics, p. 52.
'GONIVAS', AFRICAN LABOUR AND THE CLOSED COMPOUND

Kimberley's first Parliamentary election in March 1881 centred on the issue of labour. Warning that the future prosperity of the Fields depended on the supply and treatment of black labour, one candidate asserted that Africans had to be taught above all 'to respect the laws of mesum and tuum'. His sentiments having struck a chord with the Kimberley community, J.B. Robinson was elected to Parliament along with Dr J.W. Matthews; Cecil Rhodes took one of the two uncontested seats for Barkly West.44

One of the first major issues raised in Parliament by the Kimberley representatives was the problem of illicit diamond buying or IDB. Expounded as 'a haemorrhage the mining companies could no longer bear',45 the intractability of diamond theft was the premise upon which their crusade for legal control of African labour in and outside the workplace hinged. The labours of the Kimberley parliamentarians in the end yielded a fortress of protective laws later described as 'in thorough conformity with South African sentiment', elevating 'I.D.B.ism almost to the level, if not above the level, of actual homicide'.46

Illicit Diamond Buying

The digger may dig for ever; a dozen fortunes may glide past him without his knowledge, owing to the dishonesty of native servants, and he may strive and work early and late, and yet reap only the stubble of his own fields, over which the scythe of the native, whetted considerably by the white illicit dealer, has mercilessly swept, garnering the ripe and full ears, and leaving only a few withered grains to reward the owner's toil and outlay in capital … robbery most foul, reaching to deeper depths than have ever been sounded by the heaviest plummet of the law, now saps the very foundation of digging prosperity.47

Regarded as the 'canker-worm' of the Kimberley community, the illicit diamond trade was apportioned the lion's share of the blame for the depressed state of the industry after the collapse of the share mania. The grave mismanagement on the part of many companies was a contributory factor many chose to ignore.48

44 J.B. Robinson, cited in Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 133-4; the fourth MP for the Province was Frank Orpen; Dr Matthews later became one of the 'pemphigus men': vide supra, p. 85.
46 J.B. Robinson in 1880, as cited in Breet, G., The grand old days of the diamond fields, pp. 143-4.
47 The recorder of the High Court likened IDB to a 'canker-worm': Matthews, J.W., op. cit., p. 205; also Roberts, B., op. cit., p. 168.

The precise extent of the leakage of diamonds into illegal channels was impossible to uncover, a situation which mineowners were quick to exploit in the battle to procure legal sanction for the introduction of closed compounds. While providing a better basis for quantification, the company regimes of the 1880s still did not make for clear-cut assessment - knowing whether to ascribe the declining diamond output to theft or to a downturn in yield was just one of many problems. Estimates as to the magnitude of diamond theft ranged: at the higher end of the scale was the assertion in 1881 that only £60,000 of the £100,000 worth of diamonds exported each week was legitimate.49

The well-trodden avenues of the illicit dealers were no secret. Claimownership was one of the oldest guises in the trade, though a succession of bounteous washes from a poor claim was liable to immediate suspicion. A far more insidious operation was the engagement of a gang of African workers, 'planted' on different claimholders with the sole object of robbing diamonds for their true 'master'. Obtainment of a legal diamond dealer's licence rendered perhaps the most sophisticated mantle for IDB.50

In the early 1880s the 'goniva' passed through four hands before reaching a legal holder. At the bottom-end of the distribution chain was the African labourer, who cleverly evaded the attention of the overseer to swallow or secrete about his person any diamond he might chance to expose whilst working in the claim or on the floors.51

In the 1870s African migrants generally sold their labour to acquire guns or gold, the best currency of exchange in rural areas. To many minerswiers the pilfering and sale of diamonds on the illicit market presented a means of supplementing their wages and cutting short their sojourn. After 1879 and the abolition of the gun trade, however, Africans began leaving the mines with diamonds instead. These were bartered for guns at canteens and stores on the journey home. One merchant in Kuruman was alleged to have made £30,000 in this way in no time at all during 1880.52

In the second phase of the IDB chain, workers vended their pilfer at well below market rates to a middleman. The tout or 'well nigger' frequented the barracks and, as section 4.3 will show, managed even to maintain these contacts for some time after compounds were closed. Many operated in the 'Kaffir eating-houses', where food and drink were provided to 'table boarders' who paid their dues in diamonds. Working in teams, the touts shrewdly mingled with patrons at meal-times. While some collected 'payment' from regulars, others accosted prospective 'boarders', ensuring the subject was not a police 'trap' before acquainting him with the disposition of the proprietor.53

51 For their tactics: Matthews, J.W., op. cit., p. 190; 'goniva' - Jewish slang for stolen diamond.
52 Some African paramounts were moved to require tribute in diamonds from returning subjects: ibid., p. 189; Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 176.
53 See for example: Matthews, J.W., op. cit., pp. 188-9, 195; Angove, J., In the early days, p. 67.
Having acquired the stolen diamonds, the tout passed them on to his 'master', often an eating-house keeper. Kimberley employers felt nothing but scorn for the 'low white men' who kept 'kaffir eating-houses', a distaste even more emphatic after 1879 and their abortive attempt to crush the board wages system. But, try as best they could, mineowners failed to have these institutions closed down altogether. Even after having succeeded, in 1880, in getting IDB on such premises made punishable by three years' hard labour, the consumption of liquor in eating-houses proscribed and applications for eating-house licences made subject to the sanction of two claimholders, there were no fewer than twenty such going concerns in Kimberley by 1882.54

Likewise vilified by mineowners were the 'Kaffir shop-keepers', many of whom were Indians or Africans and suspected of indulging in IDB. But the greatest share of the mineowners' vehemence was reserved for the Kimberley liquor traders. Each and every hotel, bar or canteen was regarded as a potential 'fence' for IDB - several of these enterprises were known as the 'celebrated resting-places' of the IDB fraternity, venues for the men whom J.B. Robinson labelled 'ghouls in human shape'.55

The goings-on in lucrative hostelries like Harry Barnato's famous London Hotel in Stockdale Street, Madame Delalée's French Café or the Red Light bar in Main Street, are vividly captured in the pen-pictures of Louis Cohen. Depicting the London Hotel as 'the favourite abiding place of all the pleasant emigrants from Petticoat Lane and the fair streets of London, or catching birds in Hampstead Heath ... yet, although everybody knows all this, everybody winks at it'.59

Whereas the first links of the 'goniva' distribution chain were quite visible, the latter faded into obscurity. Forming the receiving-end of the chain were Kimberley's most elusive gentlemen, the licensed dealers who bought stolen diamonds on the quiet while pretending to transact legal business, or who funded illicit agents to buy on their behalf. More Machiavellian still was the involvement of illicit capitalists, those wealthy and most cautious of buyers who installed their own licensed dealers. Plugging all the loopholes proved beyond even the law: although required after 1882 to keep a register of each purchase and sale, the illicit dealer's books were made to tally by getting rid of the bort (diamonds for industrial use) kept on hand to substitute for illicit acquisitions.57

The 'custom of the country'
IDB was by many accounts the 'prevailing industry' on the Fields in the early 1880s, 'an exhilarating game ... excitable, profitable, and not so very risky', and those at the head thereof were allegedly well-known. Nonetheless, the loudest wails in the myriad of complaints voiced at this 'eradicable evil' were said to emanate from those who had 'ennobled the profession' themselves. Their fortunes made, avers Louis Cohen, these men sought 'to protect their property against a thieving and undesirable community of which they themselves had been highly distinguished and successful associates'.58

Commented a visitor in the early 1880s: 'As for the moneyed men on the Fields, is it a libel to say that most of them owe their wealth to illicit diamond buying or to taking advantage of the necessities or inexpérience of unfortunate diggers?'. And elsewhere: 'Some of the most prominent men of the place were yesterday selling umbrellas in the streets of London, or catching birds in Hampstead Heath ... yet, although everybody knows all this, everybody winks at it'.59

Of course, the better part of those convicted for IDB were minor offenders - the police seemed quite incapable of bringing the masters of the trade to bay, as Robinson explained in 1880: 'No wonder the police, when following up a scent, are discouraged when they know that, at the utmost, it will only result in lodging some men coloured accomplice in goal, while the guilty principal, tucked out in purple and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day, escapes'.60

The 'searching of all natives employed in the different Mines' was put forward as a possible preventative measure by the various Mining Boards in April 1880. A draft bill published before annexation endorsed their proposal, but affronted white sentiments by subscribing the searching of both workers and white overseers. Government in the end obliged white protestations by changing the rule to apply to 'servants' only: redefined to exclude managers and sub-managers, the term permitted companies to exempt certain employees from being searched by classifying them in either of these categories.61

Although 'rigid enforcement of the searching system' was officially deemed as the most likely means of putting a stop to 'the crime of illicit diamond buying and selling', the search law lay in abeyance for some years owing to fear that action in the matter of searching would aggravate the shortage of African labour on the Fields.62

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55 Beet, G., op. cit., p. 144.
56 Just as Africans were widely associated with thieving, Jews were most commonly identified with IDB: Cohen, L., op. cit., pp. 192, 154-5; Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 177.
58 Cohen, L., op. cit., pp. 140-2, 148, 155; the Barnato brothers in particular were the constant subjects of IDB rumour-mongery - for an exposition of the illicit milieu in which they operated: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 195-6; also Roberts, B., op. cit., pp. 139-52.
59 Little, J.S., South Africa, pp. 143-4; Count Plater was one of 'an aristocratic gang of convicts' doing time for IDB: Angove, J., op. cit., p. 67; Dixie, F., In the land of misfortune, p. 286.
60 Robinson cited in Beet, G., op. cit., p. 145.
61 The original bill was said to class 'intelligent and honest white men with raw and thievish natives': Smallberger, J.M., op. cit., pp. 401-3; Matthews, J.W., op. cit., pp. 190, 215.
Illicit diamond buying became a burning issue in Kimberley after 1882. The fact that the trade was seen to originate with African workers, earlier harnessed to great effect by those who jockeyed for the compulsory searching of all black employees in the mines, now made for a powerful argument for their isolation in closed compounds.

Propounders of closed compounding were quick to resurrect the old ideologies with regard to black labour. The idea of the African as presumptive thief, for instance, was wrapped up in official discourse at the time with the perception of the migrant worker as a 'child' contaminated by the influences of a new environment. Appointed by the Diamond Commission, a Special Committee in 1882 held that 'natives should be kept as far as possible isolated from the temptations to which they are exposed' and that workers in the mines and on the floors should therefore 'be kept in compounds'.

Even more explicit was the 1882 report compiled by an official from Scotland Yard. Brought to the Fields to investigate the Detective branch of the Kimberley Police, B.V. Shaw believed that searching alone 'would not constitute a thoroughly effective check against the theft of diamonds by natives'. He went on to pronounce 'the compounding of natives as the only absolute remedy' to the problem of IDB: 'Natives would then be prevented from communicating with Europeans and their Kafir agents, from whom the temptation to steal emanates, and the channels of illicit traffic being closed, the present inducements to steal would cease to exist'.

Embellished over the years, the notion of the 'unsophisticated savage' suffering under the corruptive agency of 'dishonest white men and cute natives' ripened into an ideology pervasive enough to prevail upon the more liberally minded public figures in Kimberley. Dr J.W. Matthews, for instance, not long after giving up his parliamentary seat, wrote: 'The native labourer at the present time through contamination influences has become an adept, and will steal with an adroitness which almost defies detection'. The fact that South African blacks are 'naturally honest', he goes on to say, 'irresistibly induces to steal with an adroitness which almost defies detection'.

The first salvo of legislative measures secured by mining capital had a stormy passage through Parliament - Rhodes and Robinson had to fight for practically every clause. Although in the end it included most of their demands, the Diamond Trade Act of 1882 fell short of cheering Kimberley employers for it did not impose closed compounding.

Dubbed by Rhodes as his 'baby', Act 48 embraced strict controls and penalties for theft and IDB. Two tenets of British law were discarded: first, the new act placed the onus probandi of legal possession of a diamond on the suspected party, i.e. suspects were presumed guilty until they could prove their innocence; secondly, it upheld the practice of trial without jury for IDB defendants instituted in 1880. Thought by some to constitute 'a blot on the judicial system of the country', the special IDB court was empowered to mete out a maximum penalty of 15 years imprisonment, or 5 years and banishment from Griqualand West - African offenders could be flogged in addition to these punishments.

The new act also laid down the setting up of an independent Detective Department to concentrate on IDB only: partly funded by mining capital, its detectives were given wide powers of search in public and private places.
In 1881 the number of arrests per officer averaged 53 in Liverpool, 43 in Newcastle and 29 in Kimberley. It was not uncommon for the police during a routine pass raid to pick up some 30 to 100 people in one swoop - an instance is recorded during which 286 pass-offenders were arrested in a single day. Justice in the courts was equally forced temporarily to sound the retreat on labour related issues such as a new liquor law, the extension of the Cape vagrant law to the Fields and closed compounding, the Kimberley mineowners resorted to rigid enforcement of the pass laws and a newly promulgated searching law.

Police harassment of the African community of Kimberley escalated after 1882 due to the animated implementation of the town’s ostensibly colour-blind laws by a much strengthened police force. Interpretation of the term ‘servant’ as referring to Africans alone meant that in reality the statutory burdens which applied to all wage employees regardless of colour were being shouldered by black earners only: they alone were prosecuted for not carrying passes, they alone were expected to pay a hospital tax.

Figure 4.5 shows how rising levels of arrest and conviction in Kimberley peaked in 1885/86 with the introduction of the first closed compounds, a tendency which is all the more meaningful given the town’s falling population figures during this period. Kimberley’s arrest figures for 1882 amounted to almost half those for Manchester, a city with at least five times the population, and were three times as high as the arrests recorded in Cape Town, which had a community of comparable size to the Fields.

As illustrated in Figure 4.6, pass offences accounted for the single largest number of arrests in Kimberley. It was not uncommon for the police during a routine pass raid to pick up some 30 to 100 people in one swoop - an instance is recorded during which 286 pass-offenders were arrested in a single day. Justice in the courts was equally summary: in trials lasting no longer than ten minutes, pass-offenders were ‘arraigned guilty’ (as they were expected to), and sentenced en bloc.

To proceed to the searching of natives, though there are certain differences in different mines, generally speaking the system is as follows: On arriving at the searching house they are compelled to divest themselves of their ordinary garb and pass through a central compartment in pursuance naturalibus, after which they assume working suits, needless to say absolutely pocketless. Their work over, they are first searched in the claims by the overseers and then are examined by the searching officers. They are stripped perfectly naked and compelled to leap over bars, and their hair, mouths, ears, etc., etc., carefully examined...

Promulgation of Proclamation No.1 in January 1883 provided for the searching of all ‘servants’ upon entering and egressing the mines. Effective as from 1 March 1883, the system of searching had as prerogative the elimination of diamond theft: it laid down that employees below the rank of manager had to pass through one of the segregated search-houses: here Africans were required to wear a ‘uniform’ in the pits - grain sacks were to be donned during working hours to foil the practice of concealing diamonds in clothing. Many refused to comply and wore their own clothes or stripped naked in the claims instead.

Flour bags were another popular uniform:...
But searching did very little to prevent diamond theft in practice. Searchers simply could not cope with the task of thoroughly searching around eight thousand African workers twice a day, once on leaving for lunch and again at the end of the working-day. But the Mining Boards were averse to engaging more searchers. Management, again, would sooner skimp on the time allowed for searching than on the number of loads hauled per day. Structural security was incommensurate too. Diamonds could easily be dropped through the wire fences that formed the passages along which the workers proceeded from the mine entrance to the search-houses.  

Some companies found it more gainful to offer rewards for found diamonds. These varied from company to company but roughly equalled what the diamond would have fetched if bartered to a tout: overseers received about 5 per cent, and workers a 'present' amounting to 1 or 2 per cent of the stone's value. One Dutoitspan company offered 25 per cent commission on every diamond, but was accused of encouraging workers into offering stolen stones legitimately to premium-paying companies.  

Like the searching rule, the Diamond Trade Act failed to achieve its chief objective, viz. the rooting out of IDB. Instead of passing through the bank accounts of licensed dealers, illicit traffic simply moved across the Orange Free State border and outside the jurisdiction of the Griqualand West courts. Africans 'runners', white 'troopers', dogs, horses, oxen and even pigeons were used to carry stolen diamonds across the nearby republican border to the villages of Free Town and Oliphantsfontein, flourishing IDB havens said to have been 'inhabited by men whose acquaintance with the diamond law of Griqualand West had been of too intimate a character.'  

Most illicit diamonds were shipped to London from either Port Elizabeth or Cape Town in a mirror-image of the legitimate trade. Extension of the Diamond Trade Act in to the Cape in 1885, however, diverted the flow of illicit diamonds across the Transvaal border to Christiana, from where the route led to Durban via Pretoria.  

The inefficacy of the Diamond Trade Act and the searching rule in eliminating IDB aside, the Kimberley industrialists saw their crusade for the introduction of closed compounds take a turn for the worse in 1883 with the election of George Wolf as parliamentary successor to Dr Matthews. A Licensed Victuallers' candidate, Wolf was a most scathing critic of the industry.  

Closing ranks  

The outcome of the 1883 by-election was symptomatic of the widening rift between industry and commerce due to their contradictory interests in relation to African labour. To the former closed compounding held the promise of coming to grips with the enduring problem of IDB and, more particularly, African labour. To the latter closed compounding connoted lower profits at best and commercial destruction at worst.  

Merchants' 1882 parliamentary petition was the first in a series of triumphs for the commercial lobby - closed compounds were kept off the statute book with the backing in Parliament of coastal merchants and the 'brandy interest'. The 1884 election saw a repeat of the earlier by-election. 'Commercial' men swept the polls in Kimberley - George Wolf, George Goeh and Moses Cornwall - with their anti-industry policies like the rescinding of the Diamond Trade Act and the proscription of closed compounding; Charles Rudd became mining's only successful candidate. Rhodes was returned for Barkly West along with another merchant, Alfred Hill.  

It was the voting power of white workers that turned the tables on mineowners in the 1884 election. As Chapter 5 will show, the workers saw their interests threatened by employers. There were two attempts to submit them to searching: the first having failed, mineowners waited until after the election before trying again, a tactic which accorded them their only representative in Parliament. In the show-down that followed six workers were killed. An attempt to reduce the European wage bill by substituting African for white labour and rumours of white compounding further deteriorated the relationship of industry and white labour towards the later 1880s.  

The coming into office in Cape Town of the Upington-Hofmeyr Ministry in May 1884 did not augur well for mineowners either. Neither man shared mining's concerns - the 'brandy interest' was paramount to Hofmeyr, while Upington openly condemned the Diamond Trade Act. IDB became a major rallying point in Parliament. Exposure of widespread abuse of the 'trapping' system used by the Detective Department to entice would-be 'IDB-ers' became a powerful weapon to opponents of the industry.  

By 1885 it had become quite evident to Cecil Rhodes that a different strategy was needed if the crusade for closed compounds was to succeed at all. His wooing of Jan Hofmeyr's Afrikander Bond proved a sapist move. In May 1886 J.B. Robinson went down to defeat in a Kimberley by-election against none other than J.J. O'Leary, rebel leader of the Black Flag Revolt in 1875.  

By 1885 the 80 searchers were costing the Boards £30,836 annually: Turrell, R.V., op. cit, pp. 135, 261n.43; Matthews, J.W., op. cit, pp. 215-6; Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 140.  

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76 By 1885 the 80 searchers were costing the Boards £30,836 annually: Turrell, R.V., op. cit, pp. 135, 261n.43; Matthews, J.W., op. cit, pp. 215-6; Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 140.  

77 If I only was a nigger, and got 25 per cent' was the refrain of a popular song of the time: Turrell, R.V., op. cit, p. 149; Matthews, J., op. cit., p. 192.  

78 The republican authorities chose to ignore the existence of these villages: Turrell, R.V., op. cit, pp. 178-9; Matthews, J., op. cit, pp. 200-1.  


80 Wolf's victory was an upheb of J.B. Robinson's attempt to have the sale of liquor to Africans outlawed within a five-mile radius of Kimberley: ibid., pp. 189-90.  

81 Merchants relied heavily on black buying power and gained from a strong IDB trade: ibid., p. 186.  

82 Cape 'brandy farmers' had a vested interest in the roaring Kimberley liquor market.  

83 Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 198. Kimberley's parliamentary seats were increased to 4 in 1884.  

84 In the election campaign the two mining candidates condemned white searching: ibid., p. 178.  

85 e.g. the exposure of the agent provocateur Wassilio Rojesky: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 200-2; eager detectives even resorted to 'planting' diamonds on suspects: ibid., p. 183.
4.3. Combining work and living space: the closed compound

The mill and the mine were respectively the sources of the growth of industrial wealth in Britain and in South Africa. If the 'dark, satanic mill' was the abiding image of new social relationships in Britain, it was the repressive role played by the mine compound that came to symbolise the early development of capitalism in South Africa.86

In the earliest days of digging the term 'compound' alluded to both work and living space, i.e. the encampment where the 'master' had his tent or frame house and sorting-table and which he shared with his labourers, black and white.

In the course of time, however, as canvas made way for wood and corrugated iron, the word 'compound' took on a different meaning. As pointed out in Chapter 2, many a successful digger abandoned his encampment for more respectable surroundings, leaving affairs there in the hands of a white foreman or manager. Those who could afford it settled in Belgravia, a prestigious residential 'suburb' laid out in 1875 around the Public Gardens on the London Company Estate (see Figure 4.7).87

Workers too began taking up residence away from the work-place. Europeans and 'persons of colour' moved into boarding-houses or rented rooms. Many Africans felt likewise disinclined to billet on compounds under the scrutiny of the foreman. Some elected to squat in informal 'native camps' on the outskirts of the camps, while others quartered in the main townships. Their spatial independence from the work-place was gained by way of a major change in master and servant relations, brought about by the imposition in the mid-1870s of 'board wages'.88

A substantial proportion of the African labour force nonetheless continued to reside on the compounds. In the late 1870s, therefore, when production was moved to the depositing floors, the word 'compound' referred simply to an open barracks for black workers, a notion vindicated by the 1879 lodging and feeding rule. The formation of joint-stock companies during the 'share mania' saw the construction of large new compounds and extensions to existing ones to house ever-larger workforces. Before long some 20,000 Africans lived in these open compounds. Their 'open' regimes meant that inmates were free to come and go after working hours and made their own way to and from work.89

86 Turrell, R.V., Kimberley: labour and compounds, p. 45.
87 Governor Southey resided in Belgravia: Turrell, R.V., Capital and labour on the Kimberley diamond fields, p. 95.
88 Vide supra, p. 63; Turrell, R.V., Capital and labour on the Kimberley diamond fields, p. 94-5.
A MODEL FOR TOTAL CONTROL

The success of a De Beers experiment in the use of convict labour gave partisans of closed compounding a foretaste of what securing their objective would imply in terms of labour relations in Kimberley.

Negotiations with Government for the employment of African convict labour in surface-mining operations were initiated in October 1884 - the 200 or so convicts in the service of the De Beers company until May 1885 were accommodated in the local jail. Following acceptance of an offer by management privately to house and feed prison labour, however, a convict station was erected in close proximity to De Beers Mine. With building material provided by De Beers, prisoners thus set about constructing the penal institution on which closed compounds were to be modelled. To an inspector of mines at the time the De Beers Convict Station exemplified 'the perfection of the compound system'.

During the first three years 300 black inmates were maintained in the new barracks. Convicts were provided to De Beers at no charges whatsoever until 1888, when a 3d. charge per day per man was introduced. The expediency of prison labour in mitigating labour costs in times of crisis proved invaluable. When, for example, work in the open-cast mines was ceased in 1889 to expand deep-level mining operations, the number of convicts in the company's employ was doubled at the same time that around a third of the industry's workforce was being laid off. Practically all surface tasks were then being performed by indentured labour, while regular wage labour was being ousted by a system of underground subcontracting and piecework.

De Beers Consolidated Mines employed 650 black detainees at the close of 1889, a figure which by 1892 had risen to 701 and two years later to 809. Its desire for this third of the industry's workforce was being laid off. Practically all surface tasks were then being performed by indentured labour, while regular wage labour was being ousted by a system of underground subcontracting and piecework.

A third alluring property of convict labour was its cheapness. The annual cost of maintenance for prisoners in the De Beers Convict Station outstripped those of free labour. Inmates were issued with 'thick jumpers, moleskin trousers, felt hats, boots "when necessary", three blankets in winter and two in summer, and two sacks sewn together which formed a pillow and pallaise (sic) for bedding'. With 'a generous meat component suitable to hard labour' the station diet was a cut above that on offer in the town jail.

Convict labour formed a small but salient proportion of the De Beers labour force until March 1932. Management made no secret of its preference for convict labour, a predilection Robert Turrell ascribes to the five spheres of labour efficiency, discipline, cost, economies of scale in maintenance, and the prevention of diamond theft.

An ideal form of labour

Efficiency was a prime advantage of prison labour. As the De Beers' General Manager explained, prisoners were unable to desert like ordinary workers: 'If the latter attempt to escape you cannot shoot them, whereas the sworn officials of the Government can shoot a convict if he attempts to escape'. Kimberley Goal rendered a stable supply of labour - Proclamation 14 channelled a plenteous of Africans through jail. But the short sentences for pass offences and the dwindling prison population of the 1890s impelled De Beers occasionally to look further afield for long-term prisoners.

The second advantage of convict labour lay in the strict discipline and supervision it demanded. Zulu guards - one to every five prisoners - oversaw the convicts during the thirteen-hour work-day in summer (nine and a half in winter). Exceeding by two hours the official hard labour regulations, this was no longer than demanded of free labour. Transgressors of station rules were often placed in stocks, usually for three hours a day for two to three days at a time; recalcitrants were flogged with a cat-o'-nine-tails.

The final appeal of convict labour lay in the prevention of diamond theft. To encourage the vigilance of the convicts in the work-place, De Beers offered rewards for found diamonds which in the 1890s ranged from 3d. to 10d. per carat. After being thoroughly searched at the end of day, convicts proceeded to their cells naked, where blankets were worn for warmth. Upon their eventual release convicts spent five days in confinement, 'naked and with large leather gloves locked on their hands', a precaution against the swallowing of diamonds.

93 Turrell, R.V., Diamonds and gold in South Africa, p. 75.
CREATING THE CLOSED COMPOUND

Closed compounding became a reality in January 1885 with the closing of the gates of the Compagnie Française compound behind a 110 strong African workforce. Recruited from Natal on six-month contracts, the men were not permitted to leave the confines of their new barracks - except to go to work - for the duration of their contracts.\textsuperscript{99}

Underground mining, closed compounding and the sanction of law

So significant was closed compounding to the reconstruction of the diamond industry after the 1882-85 depression that industrialists pressed ahead with its introduction some two and a half years before the granting of statutory authorisation. Their exigence for total control was due not only to the inadequacy of searching and of the Diamond Trade Act to expunge IDB, but also to the development of underground mining. As will be recalled, the connection between deep-level mining and a rigid compound regime was made as early as 1882 when Rhodes proposed to amalgamate De Beers Mine.\textsuperscript{100}

Encompassing sophisticated technology and large capital investment, the new mode of production demanded a sustained supply of disciplined black labour in the crucial departments of mining. But the use of high wages to induce Africans into working below ground was ruled out by the projected working costs of underground mining at double those of open operations. Moreover, early underground experiments like the deep-level works of the Central that collapsed in September 1884 were of no cheer to Kimberley's unnerved workers. Exposure to air and moisture caused the disintegration of the treacherous blue ground, thereby turning the roofs and supportive pillars of the vast subterranean caverns into constant sources of danger. The threat to life and limb was exacerbated by the shocks of blasting. A steep increase in accidents led to a review of underground working practices in 1885. Earlier, in 1883, the risk of firedamp had become evident when accumulated gas in the exploratory deep-level workings of the Compagnie Française exploded.\textsuperscript{101}

It is therefore not surprising that, upon switching to deep-level mining, the major companies all chose to initiate recruited novices to working below ground rather than retaining 'old hands'. Their generally longer contracts permitted the former to acquire the new skills of stoping, loading and drilling at appreciably lower wages. Of course, closed compounding formed an intrinsic part of the move to deep-level mining. In April 1885, for example, just before it became the first company on the Fields to have

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\textsuperscript{99} The Diamond Fields Advertiser, 19 January 1885.

\textsuperscript{100} Vide supra, p. 72.

The truck bill in the end failed to get a hearing before the close of the 1886 session. Having recaptured his parliamentary seat in the by-election, a resolute O'Leary returned to Cape Town in June 1887 to reintroduce the uncompromised bill, now named the Labourers' Wages Regulation Bill. However, Rhodes' persistent political juggling was finally paying off. With the help of Gordon Sprigg (the new Premier and old friend), Hofmeyr's Bond, and MP's who had visited Kimberley at his invitation, an act was passed based on the old Chamber of Commerce compromise.107

The new Act rang the knell for small trade despite providing that the prices charged in compounds were not to be lower than the ruling rates outside (lest retailers lose the custom of workers at the end of their contracts) and that such merchandise should be bought within the electoral division of Kimberley. Employers were happy to oblige with the former, for, if anything, higher living expenses would prolong the stay of inmates trying to save enough money to take back home. They also went along with another provision that all compound profits be expended on charity, but were known in later years to have imported supplies direct from cheaper wholesalers outside.108

The diamond industry's entire black workforce of 10,000 was housed in 17 closed compounds by March 1889. These were not totalitarian institutions from the start, as many companies still had to offer the liberty of going into town on Sundays, along with inducements like free liquor, tobacco and food in order to fill their compounds. By the early 1890s, however, Rhodes had instigated on an industry-wide basis the measures he had implemented to great effect at De Beers Mine. With subways linking mine and barracks, the compound once again constituted both work and living space, hence the likening thereof to a total institution, i.e. 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the rest of the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered life'.109

The restructuring of the compound housing system after 1888 must be seen against the background of Rhodes' quest to complete his company's monopoly of the diamond industry. Far from accomplishing a straightforward takeover of the Kimberley industry. Far from accomplishing a straightforward takeover of the Kimberley mines, amalgamation in March 1888 failed to render De Beers Consolidated Mines with an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered life'.110

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Soaring production expenses were another heavy financial millstone. The De Beers fire disaster of July 1888 was followed by the collapse in November of the 'whole underground works' in Kimberley Mine. The laborious task of reopening both mines took several months. Salvage work in De Beers alone cost a quarter million pounds. The necessity of underground development work and more sophisticated machinery swallowed fixed costs further. Tunnelling procedures in both mines had to be completely reorganised and a safer system of terrace caving introduced.111

A drastic cut in labour costs presented the only means of lowering working costs to secure the immediate survival of Rhodes' newly won monopoly. Suspension of all open-cast operations and major changes in the organisation of production effected a one-third reduction in the Consolidated workforce before the end of 1889. Machine operations, subcontracting and piecework ousted wage labour. Paid a set rate per excavated load, independent contractors employed black workers who, for a fixed daily wage, had to meet certain production targets. Piecework reduced the difficulties and expenses of supervision underground - the 1 to 6 ratio of overseer to worker in open mines widened to 1 to 30 underground. Piecework increased productivity, as did the introduction of round-the-clock shift-work (two 12 hour shifts, reduced to three 8 hour shifts in 1892). Another cost-saving expedient was the doubling in November 1889 of the convict workforce to perform all surface tasks at De Beers Mine.112

The reorganised and a safer system of terrace caving introduced.111

The closed compound in time became structurally identical to the convict station. Inmates were not allowed to leave the confines of the compound, as all their 'essential needs' were catered for. Food and clothing (but no liquor) were on sale and medical care made available. To complete their isolation, workers were marched under guard to and from work along covered walkways. Other theft prevention refinements included detention cells to flush out swallowed diamonds at the end of inmates' contract periods and the covering with wire mesh of sections of the open courtyard. As a visitor to the Fields commented in 1896: 'The compound is one vast prison ... '114

109 Goffman, E., Asylums, pp. xii, 4-5.
110 When debt payments reached almost £600,000: Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 247; Rhodes acquired Kimberley Mine in July and control of the open-cast mines in September 1889: vide supra, p. 77.
EARLY COMPOUND PLANNING

No plans of Kimberley’s nineteenth-century compounds seem to have survived, though it is possible to picture in some detail what these had looked like with the help of old photographs and various depictions by on the spot observers.

Early closed compounds appear to have been very similar in layout, a good example of which is a sketch of the first Kimberley Central closed compound published in a local newspaper under the heading ‘Inauguration of the Compound System’. Situated near the northern edge of the mine, the Central Compound is described as a rectangular enclosure covering several acres of ground:

Entry is obtained through a guard-house at the corner, which is turreted, and on the summit a big ‘C’ is a landmark. Along the four sides of the enclosure are ranged the offices and sleeping rooms for such white employees as choose to avail themselves of the accommodation, the general store, refreshment room, Kaffir dining room, dispensary, infirmary etc., whilst the remaining three sides are devoted to the Kaffir sleeping rooms, capable of housing about 400 boys. Clean urinals and latrines are provided, and also the unusual luxury of a bath in the centre of the enclosure, the use of which the boys were not slow to appreciate.115

Figure 4.8 depicts the De Beers West End Compound of the late 1890s viewed from the headgear of the incline shaft at its north-east corner. Then covering four acres and housing around 3,000 inmates, the West End was the largest of 17 compounds on the Fields and the flagship of the Consolidated compound system. It was one of the twelve ‘magnificent De Beers’ compounds’ serving the Kimberley mines and depositing floors and which in 1892 inspired a campaign for the introduction of closed compounds at the Witwatersrand gold mines and in 1903 attracted a visit by a private commission from the Transvaal and Rhodesia to avail itself of the Kimberley know-how.116

A three metre high fence of corrugated iron formed the perimeter of the West End Compound. The open space of three metres wide between the fence and the blank outer wall of the compound buildings was patrolled by company guards - specially trained ‘Alsatian dogs and cross-bred bull mastiffs’ were later used to accompany them on nightly rounds. Strategically placed arc-lights illuminated the complex by night.117

115 Daily Independent, 12 June 1885; an earlier article named it ‘The Central Hotel’; ibid., 28 April 1885; for Dr Matthews’ impressions: Matthews, J.W., Incwadi Yami, pp. 218-9.

116 Williams, G.F., op. cit., pp. 412-3; the Consolidated flourished after 1895, increasing its black workforce to between 15-20,000 in 1905: Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 300.

Imparting the late-Victorian roots of the compound is the gazebo-like watch-tower that overlooked the main courtyard. The administrative section, stores and offices of the compound manager and guards - and the only entrance to the complex - are presumed to have occupied the northern side of the compound. Sleeping quarters fringed the rest of the courtyard - cabins measuring 7.5 by 9 metre housed 20 to 25 workers each.\textsuperscript{118}

The much-vaunted facilities of the West End Compound included a chapel, hospital and dispensary. When not used for religious purposes, the church served as a school for worker training. A colonnaded verandah lined the edge of the courtyard - in the centre was a large swimming bath which those who failed 'to show the necessary regard for cleanliness' were compelled to frequent. Early sewerage plans show the location of two sets of latrines as indicated in Figure 4.9.\textsuperscript{119}

The wire mesh covering sections of the courtyard was one of the 'improvements' introduced after Rhodes had enlisted the expertise of 'Matabele' Thompson, former Supervisor and Protector of Natives - the mesh was meant 'to prevent the sly tossing of precious crystals [in a container of some sort] over the walls' to 'confederates' waiting outside the mining area. Access to the underground workings was through a covered entrance - partitioned into exit and entry ways - and down an inclined shaft, another measure to thwart communication with outside IDB agents.\textsuperscript{120}

Life in the closed compound

After having had their clothes searched for forbidden articles like playing cards and liquor, new inmates were medically examined by the company officer in charge of the dispensary. Those with symptoms of disease were quarantined to be re-examined by the company doctor during his daily visit to the compound - the diseased and aged were turned away. Every newcomer had to sign a contract binding him 'to live in the compound and work continuously and faithfully for a period of at least three months, or longer if he so desires'. Permission to leave the premises during this time rested with the compound manager, but was 'rarely given because of the opportunities that would be opened for taking out diamonds'. At the close of his contract, the worker was free to go or to have himself recontracted 'indefinitely'.\textsuperscript{121}

Common articles of food and clothing were purchased from the compound stores. Workers prepared their own meals or paid injured workers to cook for them - meals typically consisted of meat and porridge or hoe cakes made of mealie meal, a choice of food which made inmates prone to attacks of scurvy. The industrious supplemented their wages by rendering their services part-time as tailors and barbers or by peddling cakes, tobacco, ginger beer, and handmade adornments like bangles. Others wiled away their free time playing the popular game of 'mancala' (African backgammon) or singing and dancing to the sound of a variety of traditional musical instruments.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{118} Gardner Williams, the first De Beers General Manager, provides a detailed account of the West End compound: Williams, G.F., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 413-6; see also the description in Bryce, J., \textit{Impressions of South Africa}, pp. 198-9 - James Bryce visited the Fields in the latter half of 1895.

\textsuperscript{119} Citation from Williams, G.F., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 416; the undated sewerage plans by Reunert and Lenz Engineers, Johannesburg, probably dates back to 1899: DBA, EY 409.

\textsuperscript{120} Rouillard, N., \textit{Matabele Thompson}, pp. 81, 87; Williams, G.F., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 421, 443.

\textsuperscript{121} The law proscribed employment of boys under 12 years old: Williams, G.F., \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 421-2.

\textsuperscript{122} For a description of these and other pastimes, e.g. organised choral societies: \textit{ibid.}, pp. 428-39.
Compound regulations prohibited gambling, the playing of cards and the use of anything alcoholic stronger than traditional African beer, though workers were not, it seems, barred from indulging in the smoking of 'dagga' or Indian hemp. Workers were encouraged to participate in organised sport like cricket and football to kill time on Sundays. Obstacle races, sack-races, walking the greased pole and 'other comical features for the general amusement of the native and white spectators' were arranged for special holidays like Christmas, when every inmate was given 'for his Christmas box a loaf of bread, a bottle of ginger beer, and a piece of meat'.

Upon expiration of their contracts, workers spent five days in a large detention room or 'comfortable purgatory' in batches of 200 or more, their bodies and excrement thoroughly searched for diamonds. Under the constant scrutiny of white guards, the naked men wore blankets for warmth, their hands padlocked in large fingerless leather gloves. 'Soft goods' like clothing were the only articles workers were allowed to take with them when finally released - boots and shoes had to left behind as it was very difficult to detect concealed diamonds without destroying these.

Visitors were forbidden too: ibid., pp. 438-441; Rouillard, N., op. cit., p. 84.

348 carats of swallowed stones were reportedly recovered from one worker after 4 days' detention; diamonds were sometimes concealed in incisions of the skin: Williams, O.F., op. cit., pp. 444-8; also Ransome, S., The engineer in South Africa, pp. 66-7; Rouillard, N., op. cit., p. 98.

An 'eligible residential situation'? Closed compounding was hailed an 'eligible residential situation' from its inception. In the late 1880s the Consolidated asserted that its black employees were 'better housed and better fed' than uncompounded labour, that their health was 'out of all comparison better than before the compounds were in vogue' and that they were being denied access to strong liquor, gambling and prostitutes, enabled them to save more money. Turrell has shown these claims to be unfounded: the introduction of closed compounds did not lead to noticeably higher standards of accommodation, diet and health-care on the fields until after an extensive reconstruction of the compound system in 1903.

The belief that closed compounding from the outset benefited the material and social well-being of African workers has been repeated by commentators and historians over the years. Held out in support of this contention is the idea that the diamond mines never had to 'out actively for labour'. Company provision of salutary accommodation, food, and health-care is said to explain why, unlike the Witwatersrand, Kimberley experienced no labour crisis in the wake of the South African War in 1903.

Kimberley's involvement in full-scale labour recruitment was dealt with earlier. As regards the improved social welfare of workers, a comparison of the mortality statistics for the two boom periods of the late 1870s and the late 1880s and 1890s suggests the contrary. In 1878, when African workers lived in open compounds or elsewhere in the camps, the black death-rate for Kimberley was 80 per thousand. In 1888, when they lived in closed compounds, it exceeded 100 per thousand.

While the contributions to the high African mortality of the late 1880s of improved death registration (after the smallpox episode) and the underground accident death-rate (double that of open mining) should not be overlooked, the prime cause of death for African mineworkers in the late 1880s and 1890s was disease, and more specifically pneumonia, not accidents. Whereas in the era of open mining and open compounds most deaths were ascribed to poor sanitation, the prime causes of death in the era of underground mining and closed compounds were bronchitis, pneumonia, phthisis and pleurisy, lung diseases attributable to inadequate protection against major changes in temperature, overcrowded accommodation and poor diet.


127 These rates were for all Africans on the Fields, but they were overwhelmingly male and the mines by far the biggest employer: Turrell, R.V., 'Kimberley's model compounds', op. cit., p. 63.

128 The accident-rate for 1888-89 was 9.5/1,000: ibid., pp. 63-3; pneumonia accounted for two-thirds of compound hospital fatalities in the early 1890s: Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 265.
Workers were exposed to extreme temperatures and poor ventilation in the workplace and in their quarters. Temperatures below ground ranged from 56 °F (13°C) near the surface to 93°F (34°C) at the work-face, and the air was full of detritus due to bad ventilation. Above ground, the uninsulated corrugated iron barracks afforded workers little protection against the savage inversions of temperature at the diamond fields. Cross-ventilation of the sleeping-quarters was implausible as security demanded an unfenestrated outside wall. Instead, they were permanently ventilated by way of door-openings (no doors were fitted), an open space between the walls and roof (louvred in the case of the Kimberley Central Compound) and/or roof ventilators (on the inward-sloping section of the roof of the West End Compound). While providing some relief in the day and during summer, the barracks were unbearably cold in winter, particularly at night. 'Free' firewood was supplied, but not in sufficient quantities - the compounds were so cold in winter that workers for the night shift went down into the mine for warmth early in the afternoon.

Not only were Kimberley's closed compounds cold, they were overcrowded - De Beers' compounds violated the minimum public health standard of 300 cubic feet of space per man early in the 1890s. A rapidly expanding mine workforce after 1895 was absorbed, not by a reciprocal increase in accommodation, but by the systematic sharing of compound facilities: while one shift slept, the other two worked or took time out. Pneumonia remained the most feared killer in the compounds throughout this time, a state of affairs put down to overcrowding by a commission of enquiry into compounds in 1901. Its report followed an official warning that, until the Kimberley compounds were 'extended and re-modelled with an increased air-space, proper lighting and impermeable floors, this terrible disease amongst natives will continue its ravages'.

Poor diet was another contributor to the high death-rate of the 1890s. The benefits of paying cash wages only were not wasted on employers, even though it cost them direct control over the eating habits of inmates: the company believed its workers to be more diligent as they had to earn cash to buy food, whereas rationed labour expected to be fed all the same. With food prices in the compound stores at least as high as ruling rates in the town, compound dwellers spent at least one-third and sometimes more than half their wages on food purchases. Workers tried to economise by forming their own 'eating clubs' - members contributed a sum for food each week and took turns to do the cooking. As suggested earlier, the popular diet of inmates tended to be unbalanced and lessened their resistance to disease.
Far from the models of social welfare they were claimed to have been, Kimberley’s nineteenth-century closed compounds were models of labour control. Rather than improving the lives of African mineworkers on the Fields, they furnished employers with the means of creating a disciplined, experienced and cheap African workforce. Or, in the words of Robert Turrell, ‘the closed compound system was the effective form in which mineowners came to terms with migrant labour’.133

The maintenance of a constant supply of experienced workers to the underground works was probably the biggest asset of the closed compound system. Although the average period of contract was not extended beyond four months, most labourers were recontracted for additional periods of up to nine months or longer. Many were given no choice in the matter. Before 1892 no compounded African was freely recontracted. A list of names was sent to the Registrar of Natives who renewed the labour contracts and sent them back to the compound manager. It was furthermore common practice to maintain a reserve pool of labour to replace injured or striking workers. In the late 1880s, for example, both De Beers and the Central admitted to compounding a surplus of labour over and above their immediate needs. The reserve force formed between 20 and 60 per cent of the full complement of labour. Being uncontracted, these men could lay no claim to the protection of the Registrar or the Protector of Natives.

Africans found their real earnings and the actual conditions of their employment below ground dictated by the white mining contractors. As pieceworkers they had to meet daily job-targets in order to earn the weekly wage initially contracted for. Failure to do so resulted in their losing a portion of the week’s wages. Many found themselves penalised unreasonably. Striking a particularly hard patch of blue ground, for example, could mean forfeiting up to half of the week’s pay. Wage disputes became a uniform source of grievance among underground workers, a state of affairs aggravated by the absence of formal contractual ties with the mining contractors.135

Kimberley’s early closed compounds were instrumental to the curtailing of labour costs. Between 1887 and 1894 the annual cost of ‘free’ labour was pushed down from £65 to around £40 per man (the corresponding decrease in black wages was from 30s. to 12s. per week). Black wage rates were lowered by 25 per cent in 1890/91 alone. By 1895 the combined endeavours of compound managers and mining contractors had resulted in African wages lower than at any time since the early 1870s, albeit at the expense of much discontent among workers.136

Closed compounding also allowed the subjugation of labour to stricter discipline. Under rules framed by the compound manager, the judicial functions of punishment reserved to the state in the Masters and Servants Acts were usurped by management and guards in the compound. Transgressors were fined, placed in detention or beaten. The system was open to abuse for lack of regular official inspections and the monitoring of the actions of managers. With no means of redress in cases of ill-treatment or non-payment of wages open to them, workers took matters into their own hands. Violent racial conflict became the order of the day, especially below ground.137

Fears of ‘an African uprising underground and the wholesale slaughter of white contractors and supervisors’ in 1890 spurred mining and public authorities into action. Creating a means through which workers could pursue their grievances became a chief priority, a process in which compound managers and the Protector of Natives came to occupy key positions. Instructed at all times to be willing to lend an ear to inmates, the compound manager’s new image was that of ‘great white chief’ responsible for settling all disputes, especially those regarding payment and ill-treatment. His actions were monitored by the Protector who visited the compounds on a daily basis.

With strategies like the divide and rule tactic of lodging ethnic groups separately and fostering sport, dancing, singing and other recreational activities, an environment was to be generated in which compound inmates had neither time nor inclination for riots and subordination’. Those falling foul of the rules were fined or put in detention - recalcitrants were blacklisted and expelled. All literature other than Bibles and hymn books was banned. British and German missionaries (financially aided by De Beers) were given free access to teach daily classes and to preach Sunday services. Comments Worger: ‘In the course of doing God’s work these men stressed to their pupils the importance of temperance, punctuality, and respect for those in authority’.139

While having succeeded in defusing the state of near anarchy in the mines by the mid-1890s, the above measures did not ensure the fair-treatment of labour. In 1896, for example, after being flogged by the head guard, 22 striking workers at the West End were confined in detention for 5 days and then dismissed. Earlier, in March 1894, uncontracted workers in Wesselton Compound were forced to resume work with the help of mounted police - 6 workers were killed in the process.140 Compound housing had evolved in an effective instrument for quelling worker unrest and resistance.

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134 They were incarcerated in ‘a legal no man’s land’: ibid., pp. 170-1; Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 265-6.
137 Williams, G.F., op. cit., p. 432.
140 Williams, G.F., op. cit., pp. 452.
MODEL COMPUCLES FOR MODEL LABOUR

A major reconstruction of compound housing in Kimberley in 1903/04 followed the reopening after the South African War of the mines of Dutoitspan and Bultfontein. The new generation of Kimberley compounds were model institutions, remarkably similar in layout and a reflection of some fifteen years' experience in compound planning.

Of the new compounds the Dutoitspan Mine Compound was the largest, with a capacity of 3,072 inmates and covering an area of 40,000 square metre. Designed by the A.& J. Main & Company in London, the compound was a steel and corrugated iron structure exhibiting all the features by then synonymous with the closed compound: a single-gated perimeter fence enclosing barrack-type dormitories and an administrative section, stores, a church, hospital, latrines and detention rooms, all arranged round a vast courtyard. Lined by a verandah, the courtyard contained a swimming bath, a small kitchen with serving area and the entrance to an incline tunnel giving access to the mine.

The complex was served by a narrow-gauge railway track. Recruits and stocks were delivered by train. Sewage was disposed of by rail. Hoppers carried soil from the compound, hospital and detention room latrines into special receptacles on a service track. Waste- and storm-water was piped to a nearby ditch. Two separate installations provided water, one for ablution and drinking purposes, the other for fire-fighting.

Now with a timber door and impervious floor, the standard dormitory (5.8 x 7.9 m) slept 30 workers. Three-tier bunks lined three of its walls (Axonometric X, Figure 4.15). Bunks (1.9 x 0.9 m) were fitted with timber bottoms. With a cubic capacity of 8.6 cubic metre (302 cubic feet) per man, these dormitories complied with public health standards. As regards floor space, 1.5 square metre (16.5 square foot) was allowed per man. With no wall-openings but the doors leading on to the verandah, rooms were ventilated and lighted by way of a continuous ridge ventilator with fixed metal louvres (10 per cent of floor area) alternating with glass (10 per cent of floor area).

One set of latrines served all the dormitories (Axonometric Y, Figure 4.16). Raised 2.5 metre from the ground on wooden supports and jutting out perpendicularly to the compound to aid ventilation and cleaning, the latrines were approached along a narrow passage and stairs leading from the courtyard.

Like the dormitories, the hospital had no ceilings, but its roof was raised 850 mm higher to allow for a double row of staggered windows on either side of the four hospital wards (Axonometric Z, Figure 4.17). A row of windows and a roof-light provided daylighting and ventilation to smaller rooms like the dispensary, operating and dressing rooms and so on. Arranged on either side of the hospital courtyard, these and other service areas were linked to the wards by way of an open verandah.
FIGURE 4.15 Axonometric X: dormitory section, Dutoitspan Mine Compound
(after DBA: BY988, EY891, 894, 896, 900)

3-metre high corrugated iron fence

blank outside wall

roof lights

timber wall and roof structure

corrugated iron

FIGURE 4.16 Axonometric Y: compound latrines, Dutoitspan Mine Compound - note timber roof and wall structure (after DBA: BY988, EY895)
All virtually identical in layout, the closed compounds built during 1903 reconstruction were assemblages of standard designs for dormitories, a hospital, detention room, church and latrines. These were the model compounds upon which Kimberley’s good reputation came to rest and whereby a substantial reduction in the annual death-rate of Africans in the compound-hospitals was effected: the De Beers mortality rate averaged 20 per thousand between 1903 and 1912 as against an average of around 65 between 1897 (the year mine-hospital death-rates were first recorded) and 1902.141 Surviving documentation of these compounds includes plans and working drawings for a surface compound at Dutoitspan Mine (next to the mine compound described in the previous pages), a 1,962 bunk compound at Bultfontein Mine and a 981 bunk surface compound at the Premier Mine (Figure 4.19). The Premier (or Wesselton as it was first known) was a fifth mine discovered in 1890 - it came under full De Beers control in 1896. Plans for a new compound hospital at Kimberley Mine have also survived.142

141 In the years before 1903 pneumonia accounted for as much as 75 per cent of African mortality: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 162-3 & ‘Kimberley’s model compounds’, op. cit., p. 66.

CHAPTER 5 - WHITE LABOUR AND KENILWORTH VILLAGE

The labour debate brought on by the collapse of the European diamond market in 1882 and the concomitant depression on the Fields did not concern African labour alone: the issue of white labour exercised the minds of the Kimberley mineowners to a no lesser degree. Their ongoing bid for control over the mine workforce within and without the work-place did not preclude white labour either. In Chapter 4 the closed compound was described as the effective form in which the diamond mineowners came to terms with African migrant labour - the village of Kenilworth will in this chapter be shown to have furnished the industrialists with the means of coming to terms with the potential and absolute power of white labour on the diamond fields.

Before contemplating the wider implications of company housing for white mine employees in Kimberley, it will be useful to consider in more detail the formation at the Fields of a peculiar white working class, its make-up, the divisions within the ranks of its members, its increasingly antagonistic bearing towards mining capital, and its initial triumphs and ultimate failure to protect the interests of white labour.

5.1 Kimberley's emerging white working class

The chief determinating factor in the differential treatment of white and black labour at the Fields in the 1880s was that of franchise - few Africans were eligible to vote. In the rough industrial hierarchy hammered out of early digger society, white diggers thus came to occupy a position of privilege underpinned by their superior political status.

SHAREWORKING: A CURTAIN-RAISER TO WAGE LABOUR

Few whites appear to have sold their labour in early Kimberley - white manual workers as a rule were engaged only when African labour was not forthcoming, and then at substantially higher wage rates. While initially most whites owned their own claims, the rising costs and perplexities of small-scale digging forced many into working their properties 'on shares' with one or two partners. By the mid-1870s shareworking had become the dominant form of employment among white 'diggers' on the Fields.2

1 Any male British subject resident at the Fields for at least 6 months and either a claimholder or worth £25 in immovable property or £100 per annum in wages qualified for the vote: Worger, W.H., *South Africa's city of diamonds*, p. 198.
2 The practice of shareworking is dealt with elsewhere: *vide supra*, p. 58.
Shareworking did not remain the dominant relation of production in Kimberley for very long though. Consolidation in claim ownership and the attending rise of company mining in the late 1870s set in motion the transformation of the bulk of shareworkers into waged overseers. Larger units of production, organised purely on the basis of wage labour, were progressively becoming the order of the day. A hurriedly growing demand for overseers of labour gave rise to the gradual displacement of shareworkers, thereby robbing them of the speculative boons of profit-sharing. Of course, not all diggers experienced shareworking as a prelude to wage labour, but those promoted to positions of privilege like that of manager were few and far between.3

Shareworking did not fall into disfavour tout de suite. Forms of profit-sharing persisted well into the late 1870s in Kimberley Mine and lingered a good few years longer in the poorer mines. But with overseers' wages quadrupling from £5 a month to £5 a week, the volatility of shareworking proved no match to the greater regularity of wage income. Steadily emerging from the echelons of Kimberley's shareworkers was a white working class, the majority of which - over 60 per cent - was overseers: 'By 1880 the stratum of white overseers was large enough to organise in defence of their interests on the basis of a privileged position in supervisory labour'.4

Making up the bulk of the remaining 40 per cent was skilled labour, the demand for which was boosted by the increased mechanisation in the mines and on the floors and the experimental underground working of the early 1880s. Skilled workers - engine-drivers and artisans (mechanics, smiths, miners and carpenters) - formed a third of the white labour force of the Central in 1881. By 1883, with the race for a viable deep-level system gaining pace, skilled labour accounted for 56 per cent of the white workers in Kimberley Mine and 38 per cent of those on the floors. By comparison, the figures for the less-mechanised Dutoitspan Mine were 25 and 36 per cent respectively.5

The two groups that made up the rank and file of Kimberley's emerging white working class had little in common besides the colour of their skin and the privileges associated therewith in the work-place. Overseers were mostly from the middle class and colonial. Many had themselves been petty producers and employers of labour once - the pattern of authority in the work-place so established was buttressed by the racial and cultural differences between overseer and labourer. Supervising African workers required no special skills: it was a second and in many cases an enforced occupation, yet one overseers were ready to put up a fight for.6

Skilled workers, by contrast, were later arrivals to the Fields and immigrants in the main. Hailing from the tin mines of Cornwall and coal mines of west Cumberland as most of them did, they brought with them a heritage of wage labour experience. Unlike overseers, these men did not come to the Fields in the hope of making a fortune but to earn a good living and, in many cases, to escape the effects of depression at home - the wages on offer in Kimberley were two to three times those paid in Britain. Very few brought their families along. The work they came to do was very similar to what they had been doing before, and limited their contact with African labour in the work-place.7

A WHITE LABOUR POLICY?

The onset of the depression once again focused the attention of mine and town on the problem of labour. White mineowners were cogitating how to reduce labour costs, others were espousing the employment of 'a superior class of labour' - unskilled white colonials and recruited Italians or Irish - in lieu of black migrant labour.8

In the forefront of those jockeying for a white labour policy on the Fields were the merchants and tradesmen. Their belief that the higher cost of white labour would be compensated for by its greater productivity was shared by some mineowners. Even the Inspector of Mines was later to add his support to the idea that expensive white labour would be more advantageous than 'typical Kaffir-dawdling'. White workers were also seen as more reliable, more honest and less likely to steal diamonds. In fact, a system of 'honesty' wages, i.e. the payment of higher than average wages to white labourers and overseers, was turned to good account by some employers in the poorer mines.9

But the prohibitive cost of white labour - as much as four times that of black - was bound to tip the balance against the merchants' case. With the white mining workforce having grown from 1,000 in 1877 to nearly 3,000 in 1881, the soaring European wage bill was a source of grave concern to the Kimberley mineowners already. Though still comprising only a small proportion of the total mine labour force, white overseers and skilled white workers received a very large share of the total wage bill. The enormous wage discrepancies between white and black explain why the white labour component of the Kimberley Central accounted for just 15 per cent of the company's workforce, yet received 46 per cent of the wages paid by the company (and 55 per cent in 1883): when in 1882 Africans earned around 30s. per week, overseers were taking home £5, and mechanics and engine-drivers from £7 10s. to £8 per week.10

3 One such man was Rhodes, unmistakenly the most celebrated shareworker of all: Turrell, R.V., Capital and labour on the Kimberley diamond fields, pp. 52, 83, 87.
4 Ibid., pp. 87, 89.
6 The ratio of overseer to workers were 1:10 in the late 1870s and early 1880s: ibid., pp. 148-51.
7 More than half the Cornish tin mines were shut down between 1873 and 1878: ibid., pp. 150-1.
8 An Irish manual worker was said to be worth 4 black 'new hands': Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 21.
9 Large numbers of settled white families were an alluring prospect for merchants: ibid., pp. 125-6.
EARLY WORKING-CLASS LIFE

The exuberant wages on offer at the diamond fields paint an auspicious picture of white working-class life, when in reality most white working families in Kimberley were leading a hand-to-mouth existence years before the onset of depression. Indeed, so extreme was the cost of living here during the later 1870s that a single man had to earn between £2 10s. and £2 16s. per week merely to subsist. With the weekly overseer's wage at around £3, the wives and children of married unskilled workers had to find ways of supplementing the family income.11

Working conditions on the Fields left much to be desired too - the hours were very long and the working environment a constant threat to life and limb. The early 1880s saw an upturn in the number of mining accidents: reef falls, machinery and explosives counted among the causes. Kimberley Mine, for example, had a combined death and accident-rate for white workers of 50 per thousand and a death-rate 24 per thousand in 1882. Mineworkers in the two deep diamond mines were therefore at least twelve times as likely to die in the course of their work than were their peers in the coal mines of Britain, yet received no form of accident compensation from the mining companies or the state whatsoever.12

Living conditions were equally distressing. Kimberley's grim white death-rate of 40.5 per thousand in 1878 was due to inadequate sanitation, polluted drinking water and improper burial procedures: of the 262 Europeans who died that year, 51 died from zymotic diseases like remittent fever and dysentery and 36 from lung diseases like bronchitis, pneumonia, phthisis and pleurisy.13

White workers who fell victim to the vagaries of the diamond labour market were thrown on their own resources. Kimberley, it seems, was ready for neither public nor private charity. Before the depression, merchants and prominent claimholders did seek to instil in workers the habit of saving their surplus earnings (rather than spending it on drink and gambling) to provide for the unforeseeable and, ultimately, to acquire a taste for property. A bank, an industrial school and a building society were established in the assistance of the state, cruelly and with impunity. It was this flexing of the white labour muscle on the diamond fields that gave rise to talk of white compounding and led to the building of Kenilworth.

5.2 A trial of strength: capital versus labour

A steep reduction in the European wage bill was an important component of Rhodes' 1882 amalgamation scheme for De Beers Mine. That the disproportionately high white labour bill came under attack as the depression tightened its grip on the industry is therefore not surprising: the mineowners set about reducing wages, retrenching overseers and, more importantly, using cheap black labour in jobs hitherto reserved for whites.15

Equally detrimental to capital-labour relations on the Fields were the simultaneous attempts by employers to subject Kimberley's white labour class to tougher industrial discipline. The subjugation to searching first of overseers and later of skilled workers was tangible evidence to white workers of all grades that mineowners had no scruples about lumping them together with black labour.

Although the coordinated resistance to these incursions on what white workers had come to accept as rightfully theirs took industrialists by surprise, it was put down with the assistance of the state, cruelly and with impunity. It was this flexing of the white labour muscle on the diamond fields that gave rise to talk of white compounding and led to the building of Kenilworth.

MINEOWNERS' ASSAULT ON WHITE LABOUR COSTS

White overseers entered the early 1880s still regarding themselves as very much part of the managerial sector in capital-labour relations. That they no longer were part of the Kimberley bourgeoisie first dawned on overseers in June 1880, when they were made the subject of the very first clause of a draft ordinance which laid down the compulsory searching of all 'natives and others' employed within the mines.16

Pointing out that most of them until recently had been claimholders themselves, overseers voiced their dissent at such 'classing of intelligent and honest white men with raw and thievish natives' and the degradation of having to suffer daily body searches. But their protests went no further than the odd number of letters that appeared in the local newspapers, the calling together of a public meeting or two and a petition sent to the government in Cape Town. It was misgivings about the effect of searching on the already insufficient number of African labourers on the Fields, rather than the overseers' remonstrances, that moved mineowners to put the new law on ice.17

11 Skilled workers were less pressed to make ends meet: ibid., pp. 154-5.
12 The yearly death-rate in British coal mines was reduced to 2/1,000 in the 1870s: ibid., p. 164.
13 The town's cesspits were overflowing; in its three black cemeteries the dead were placed in shallow graves without coffins: ibid., p. 153.
14 The Good Templars Bank offered relatively high interest rates on small deposits - the bank itself paid 4% and the state added another 2½%: ibid., pp. 156-7, 163.
15 The Erlanger scheme is dealt with elsewhere: vide supra, p. 72.
16 For more details on the Prevention of Diamond Thefts Ordinance of 1880: vide supra, p. 95.
The absence of early worker-protection societies of their own reflects the overseers' lack of entity and inability to safeguard their collective well-being. Skilled workers, by contrast, had set about protecting their welfare from as early as 1876, with the founding of the Star of Griqualand Lodge of the Association of Foresters. The next few years saw the founding of several other friendly societies, branches of British working-class organisations offering medical benefits and disablement pensions. Their members were mostly artisans or mechanics - overseers could not afford the small weekly fees.18

Skilled workers were equally versed in dealing with employers, know-how readily bestowed on their less-experienced work-mates when, in late 1882, the Central and the Compagnie Française announced cuts in supervisory wages. Construing the proposed cut as a first step towards the unilateral lowering of white wages, they prevailed on a meeting of overseers to call a strike. A Working Men's Association was formed to coordinate strike action. Such mobilisation of white workers across the job divisions of skilled and supervisory labour, albeit temporary, was enough to convince employers to back off.19

Overseers continued throughout the depression to bear the brunt of the assault on white labour costs - dismissal was in the offing for hundreds of overseers as company after company went bankrupt. Those companies that survived into the mid-1880s did so by increasing mechanisation, adopting new technologies and by shedding excess labour. Employment figures reveal the extent of labour retrenchment on the Fields: the African labour force contracted by 47 per cent to 9,000 and the European by 61 per cent to 1,210 between 1881 and 1884. While a downturn in the number of African workers in the mines more often than not implied a reciprocal retrenchment of overseers relative to the current ratio of overseer to workers, redundancy offers no explanation for the sharp reduction of white employment in relation to black.20

Robert Turrell has shown the widening ratio of white to black labour on the Fields - from 1:5 in the two richer mines and 1:6 in the poorer mines in 1881 to 1:6 and 1:9 in 1884 - to have been the product of an undertaking by mineowners to reorganise the division of labour. A start was made in 1882 to substitute black for white labour, a policy carried out to great effect in the poorer mines in particular, as the above figures clearly illustrate. Several companies began employing African overseers - they received better wages than black workers and were paid a commission on found diamonds.21

While mechanisation and underground working afforded some protection to skilled labour, occupations requiring a lesser degree of skill came under threat before long. The racial division of white engine-driver and black stoker, for instance, was upended through the employment of black engine-drivers.22

The only mine where the bid to curtail labour costs during the depression came to naught was Kimberley Mine. Higher than average wages were necessary to uphold a large enough workforce on account of its being so much deeper and more dangerous than any of the other mines. As experimental underground working got under way, the mine also demanded a progressively higher proportion of high-priced skilled labour. Its biggest company, the Central, had a skilled component one-third the size of its white labour force in 1881 - by 1883 skilled workmen in the mine as a whole accounted for 56 per cent of white labour in the pits and 38 per cent on the floors.23

**SEARCHING AND THE STRIKES OF 1883 AND 1884**

Emboldened by their implementing a new search law in March 1883 without provoking so much as a strike from the overseers, mineowners decided to extend the system from the mines to the floors, work-shops and engine-houses. In September it was disclosed that, as from 15 October, skilled workers too would be searched, and that all workers were to wear uniforms and to change in the search-houses.

Skilled workers reacted swiftly and with efficiency: a Combined Working Men's Committee was set up, a strike called and mass meetings held to rally the support of all grades of white labour to protest against 'white men having to wear a suit of uniform and be stripped like a common Kafir'. Yet, despite such racist overtones, it was black participation in the four-day strike that, more than anything else, carried the day for the workers. Having taken advantage of overseers' authority in the work-place to persuade Africans to come out in support, the strikers managed within days to bring production in the mines to a standstill, even if at times it meant resorting to violence.24

Badly wrong-footed by their first encounter with an organised strike, mineowners responded rather ineptly. Fearing a flight of Africans from the Fields, especially in light of the concurrent outbreak of smallpox, they capitulated: white employees would have to wear the prescribed blue serge uniforms. The strikers accepted.25

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18 Head overseers were able to join, though: Worger, W.H., *op. cit.*, pp. 157-8.
21 Evidence suggests that poor white boys, some only 12 years of age, were also used as miners and overseers in the quest for cheaper labour during the depression: *ibid.*, pp. 128-9.
23 The ratio of skilled worker to overseer in Kimberley Mine was inverted from 1:1.4 to 2:4:1 between 1883 and 1884: Worger, W.H., *op. cit.*, pp. 149, 162-3.
24 Scabs were pelted with stones, one was stripped and beaten: *ibid.*, p. 177; Smalberger, J.M., 'I.D.B. and the mining compound system', *op. cit.*, p. 405; on smallpox: *vide supra*, p. 85.
Mineowners waited until after the 1884 parliamentary elections before launching their second attempt to impose white searching. In the run-up to the election both their representatives enunciated their support for the white workers in the searching debacle. Charles D. Rudd, candidate for the De Beers company, was duly elected to Parliament with the assistance of the Artisans and Engine-Drivers Protection Society. R. English of the Kimberley Central failed to take a seat, his posing in public as an independent candidate notwithstanding. Their explicitly anti-industry political platform procured 'commercial' men three of the four Kimberley seats.\[26\]

In March, barely a month after the election, mineowners reneged on their October promise: white workers were now instructed to open their mouths for a digital search and to remove their boots. The arrest and sending to trial of six workers in Kimberley Mine who spurned these procedures were followed by more arrests and dismissals.\[27\]

Having set up during the 1883 show-down the first trade union on the Fields - the Artisans and Engine-Drivers Protection Society - artisans now swayed their unskilled partners to follow suit. Like its older counterpart, the Overseers and Miners Protection Association offered members illness and unemployment benefits for a weekly fee. It also started a strike fund. A Combined Committee was formed to correlate worker action - on 22 April it resolved to wait for the test-case ruling before calling a strike, to refuse to submit to the new rules in the meantime and to petition Parliament.\[28\]

Mineowners set about organising their forces too. A Mining Protection Association was formed to coordinate their actions. It was dominated by larger companies and had direct access to the state in the persons of John X. Merriman and Cecil Rhodes - both men were subsequently singled out by the workers as their foremost enemies. In mid-April the Detective Department took the precautionary measure of swearing in as special constables those workers, white and black, designated by their employers as unlikely to heed a strike call-out. On 23 April, the day the Committee dispatched its petition to Parliament, the Association reiterated its decision to search white workers of all grades.\[29\]

Not all workers downed tools on the first day of the strike and in some companies work continued under armed guard. The Protection Association, in collaboration with a quasi Local Government called to life by the Civil Commissioner, spent the weekend preparing to meet a riot: canteens were closed, gun shops cleared and, on the Sunday, a mounted parade of 200 special constables staged in Dutoitspan. Strikers for their part went about inciting the diffident and intimidating the non-partisan; and at a mass rally on Monday, they won commercial support for their cause.\[30\]

By Tuesday almost the entire Kimberley workforce, white and black, had joined in the strike. Besides a private contractor pumping water for the Kimberley Central, only two companies were able under armed protection to continue to work, viz. the Standard in Kimberley Mine and the Victoria in De Beers. A large crowd of workers, black and white, approached the latter at around midday and successfully demanded that all work cease. They then set off for Kimberley Mine, work-place to two-thirds of the white labour force on the Fields, their target the pumping gear of the Central.\[31\]

The funeral held on the following day was an impressive affair: a procession of 2 hearses led 1,400 men in mourning garb, four abreast, followed by 48 horsemen and 34 carts through town. At the cemetery the crowd grew to several thousand.\[32\]

Even though the shooting episode did not bring an immediate end to the strike, worker unity crumbled soon enough. Rallies held during the next few days were attended by fewer and fewer workers. Dispirited by their employers' threats never to rehire those who continued the stay-away, the strikers began returning to work - the mines were back in full operation scarcely a week after the funeral.\[33\]

Two factors which had an important bearing on the outcome of the dispute were the identification by industrialists of themselves as the upholders of law and order and the securing of the state's full support for their views. The strikers were thus seen to have been engaging in unlawful and riotous behaviour, which in effect placed them outside the law while lending countenance to the action of the special constables.\[34\]

The rapid breakdown in worker resistance evinces the failure within the ranks of the white working class truly to bridge the divide between skilled and supervisory labour, between immigrant and colonial-born. As for the 'affluence' with Africans, it simply was one of convenience and not a reflection of white empathy with black interests.

\[26\] Compensation for injured workers was one such policy: Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 178, 198.

\[27\] Issued verbally in March, the new searching rules were promulgated on 19 April: ibid., pp. 180-1.

\[28\] Ibid., pp. 177, 179-80; Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 135, 139-40.

\[29\] Merriman was the Commissioner of Crown Lands and Mines, Rhodes the Treasurer-General: Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 140.
The 1884 strike was an impressive show of labour power all the same, and one not lost on the employers: the potential of an alliance across the racial divisions of labour was far more ominous than the strength of white labour. Rhodes, defending in Parliament the action of the 'specials', used the spectre of a class alliance between black and white labour to persuade the House not to investigate the shooting incident - what Kimberley had witnessed was not a skirmish between capital and labour, he maintained, but 'white men supported by natives in a struggle against whites'. The strikers were betrayers of their race, IDB-ers in cahoots with African thieves, and the 1884 conflict the 'final struggle of the IDB' and not a legitimate labour dispute.35

BRINGING WHITE LABOUR TO HEEL

Having restored their authority in the work-place, industrialists set about consolidating their command of labour. As recounted in Chapter 4, closed compounding formed the social pivot of the system of black labour control introduced on the Fields in the aftermath of the strikes: apart from debilitating black labour resistance of any kind, it also attenuated the risk of a black-white labour alliance. By early 1889 the isolation of the industry's 10,000 strong African workforce in closed compounds was complete.


A similar system of housing was envisaged for white mine labour. The directors of the Kimberley Central in December 1884 purposed to provide the company's imported skilled labourers with accommodation 'so arranged as to be the commencement of complete barracks arrangement for the white employees (sic) of the Company'. In his annual report for 1884, the Inspector of Diamond Mines in like manner held out closed compounding as the means of physically separating black and white workers from each other and from the rest of society, creating places of confinement either group would be allowed to leave only after having been thoroughly searched. He went on to suggest that white workers were to be isolated not in barracks but in 'small detached cottages with gardens attached and with a central mess and reading room'.36

However much they wanted to, Kimberley's employers were in no position willy-nilly to subject white labour to 'compounding' of any description, their victory in the work-place notwithstanding. Mining's presence in Parliament was paramount to the successful reorganising of industry, and the key to electoral success in Kimberley lay with white labour. Only in late 1888, after having defused the political challenge of merchants, and with the town's workers in a more untenable position than ever before, did they judge it prudent to proceed in completing their command of white labour.

The continuing tug-of-war

In the preceding chapters it was described how, in the mid-1880s, amidst all-time low carat prices, paltry profits, the crippling costs of underground mining, and the abiding threat of over-production, the large mining concerns that survived the depression were frantically trying to achieve predominance within the Kimberley industry. By so doing they imposed measures which incurred them the ire of both the ir employees and the mercantile community on the Fields.

Having concluded that a trenchant intervention in local politics offered the only way to a sheltered future in an economic climate largely determined by mining, merchants had little difficulty in mobilising the white labour vote. The political platform which accorded them victory the 1886 election was virtually identical to that of 1884. J.J. O'Leary argued for a return to free trade in diamonds, warning that amalgamation and monopoly would entail further cuts in white labour. He renounced all forms of closed compounding and excoriated the dire underground death-rates (the Kimberley Mine death-rate soared from 4.4 in 1884 to 13.3 in 1885, and that of De Beers Mine from 1.9 in 1885 to 17.7 per thousand in 1886). He further clamoured for legislation that would make employers liable for safety in the mines and for accident compensation.37

37 Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 197, 204.
Once in Cape Town, O'Leary suited the deed to the word. He played a leading role
in the passing in Parliament of a bill whereby the mineowners were made accountable,
for the first time ever, for injuries due to deficient equipment and negligent techniques,
and for accident compensation of up to three years of a workman's wages. O'Leary
then went on to propose his 'truck bill', the gist of which, it will be recalled, pertained
to the payment of black wages in cash only, and the proscription of the sale of goods in
company stores within closed compounds.

How Rhodes and his colleagues negotiated the merchants' challenge, the 'truck bill'
and a none too conciliatory Parliament, was recounted in some detail in the previous
chapter. Their success in having O'Leary's election annulled by the High Court and in
setting at variance the Chamber of Commerce (large retail merchants and wholesalers)
and the Shopkeepers and Licensed Victuallers Associations (small retailers and liquor
traders) coincided with attempts to regain the allegiance of white workers. In the first
round of talks with their opponents, for instance, the mineowners readily relinquished
the idea of compulsory white compounding. A month later, the by-election only weeks
away, a De Beers spokesman announced plans for a voluntary sickness and accident
benefit society for company employees. But, unpersuaded by the carryings-on of their
employers, white workers rallied behind O'Leary in the August by-election, forcing the
preferred candidate for mining once again to bow in defeat.

The political contest then shifted to Cape Town, where Rhodes' resolve in paying
court to the Afrikaner Bond and to different members of Parliament finally bore fruit.
In July 1887, O'Leary lost the next round with the passing in the House of a watered-
down version of his original 'truck bill'. The new Labourers' Wages Regulation Act
did not debar the completely closed compound regime for black labour which so
affrighted the merchants, nor did it proscribe the future compounding of white labour,
though it did require mineowners verbally to undertake not to compound white workers
against their will.

But a month had passed before the issue of white compounding resurfaced,
when Charles Rudd verified his company's support for the isolation of white miners in
some form of 'cantonment' where they would have 'ample society and intercourse
amongst themselves'. Such an arrangement would furnish the employers with round-
the-clock surveillance of their white labour force while protecting the workers from
being corrupted by illicit dealers, it was argued.

The final undoing of white labour power
Authorisation for the building of Kenilworth village in December 1888 came one month
after a general election which set the seal on Rhodes' newly created monopoly of the
diamond industry. Mining capital had finally managed to unseat J.J. O'Leary and his
fellow-merchants - Kimberley was now represented by four parliamentarians all of
whom were favourably disposed to the diamond industry or, more specifically, to De
Beers Consolidated Mines Limited.

The inversion in the balance of political power on the Fields was the product not of
reformed capital-labour relations but the foundering of the merchant-worker alliance.
Most small retailers were long since squeezed out of business and the Shopkeepers' 
Association disbanded; many wholesalers and large retailers had set off in search of
greener pastures too - those who remained depended on compound supply contracts for
their profits. As for the town's white workers, the event of monopoly in March had
left them wholly reliant on the Consolidated for their survival. Unemployment was rife
and the closure of the open-cast mines in the offing. Several hundred men received
marching orders in early June, when production in the deep-level mines was put on a
half-time basis to reduce the output of diamonds. Their dismissal triggered two protest
marches during which effigies of Rhodes and other Consolidated directors were burnt.
In July, August and early November disasters of some kind or another brought on the
temporary closure of the De Beers, Dutoitspan and Kimberley mines respectively,
rendering hundreds more workers jobless for varying periods of time.

With the Consolidated holding the purse-strings in a labour market saddled with a
large pool of unemployed, those still in employment were holding on to their jobs as
best they could. Even if they had wanted to support O'Leary in the election, the public
nature of the ballot in Kimberley was sure to prevent them from doing so. Rhodes was
vehement in his condemnation in July of O'Leary's proposed bill for the introduction of
a secret ballot at the Fields (though he hastened to add that no employee of his needed
fear dismissal on the basis of his vote). Most workers registered as voters all the same,
under pressure from their employers - by the time of the election the workers accounted
for nearly half the town's voters. Many were said to have been 'cowed and frightened'
in specially arranged meetings into announcing their support for the mining candidates.
On election day the polls were headed by Barney Barnato, who earlier had expressed
his support for the introduction of an eight-hour three-shift system in the mines in lieu
of the existing twelve-hour shift.

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38 Vide supra, p. 107.
40 Rhodes supported Bond causes like the stopping of Sunday trains, import duties to protect Cape
agricultural producers, and restricting the black franchise, to name a few; several MP's at his
invitation had visited the Fields and toured the existing compounds: ibid., pp. 208-9, 217-8.
41 Rudd's ideas were shored up by William McHardy, manager of the Central: ibid., p. 218.
42 Rhodes in July aired his chagrin at the fact that his industry supplied two-thirds of Cape exports
yet was represented by only 4 parliamentarians, 3 of whom were merchants: ibid., p. 228.
43 Ibid., pp. 228-31.

5.3. The company village of Kenilworth

The building of the garden suburb of Kenilworth played a key role in the completion of Rhodes' monopoly. Only when set against the background of life on the Fields in the years following the establishment of De Beers Consolidated Mines can this innovative use of housing be fully appreciated. Amalgamation in March 1888 marked the practical event of monopoly only - the moulding of Kimberley's economy into that of a company town was a long and painful process and earned De Beers the wrath of the town.

COMPLETING THE MONOPOLY, 1888-96

The most immediate upshot of amalgamation was mass unemployment: the number of white mine employees dropped by a third between 1887, the last year of competitive production, and 1889 (Figure 5.2). This was due to expanding machine operations in the deep-level mines, the closure of the open-cast mines in 1889, and a reduction in the overseer/worker ratio to 1:30 underground. An inflated demand for skilled miners and the event of monopoly only - the moulding of Kimberley's economy into that of a company town was a long and painful process and earned De Beers the wrath of the town.

FIGURE 5.2 The average daily number of white mineworkers in the Kimberley diamond mines, 1886-96 (after Turrell, R.V., Capital and labour on the Kimberley diamond fields, p. 228)

Supplemental income took the form of commission paid on found diamonds and, in the late 1880s, accounted for a third of white earnings. Generated by black cooperation or compliance, this form of income was severely curtailed by the racial conflict prevailing in the mines during the early 1890s. Conditions in the work-place were as bad as ever - Barnato's election pledge of a shorter work-day was yet to materialise. In addition, workers now had to contend with the most feared underground hazard of all, those vast quantities of mud from the poorly drained open section of the mine which, from time to time and without warning, would rush down the mine and fill up underground tunnels in a flash.47

Rhodes' post-amalgamation policies had an equally devastating effect on the local economy. Excluded from the dealings of the monopoly company, Kimberley's several hundred diamond dealers were forced to close up shop. Local banks no longer had the custom of earlier years either - the Standard Bank saw its deposits plunge by 44 per cent between 1889 and 1890. Property values in the town plummeted by 50 per cent in the same period. The undoing of the last major sector of commercial business in town not entirely dependent on the diamond industry, viz. the transshipment and supply of goods to the Rand, British Bechuanaland, and Mashonaland, was yet another setback: extension of the railway to Vryburg some 150 km further north robbed Kimberley of the fruits of being the northern terminus for the Cape rail system, and cost its merchants as much as three-quarters of their trade. The town also lost access to the personal wealth of the diamond magnates who, one after the other, succumbed to the lure of gold and left the Fields to settle on the Witwatersrand.48

People were leaving the Fields in droves by the early 1890s. Beaconsfield, where most of the redundant miners lived, began taking on the appearance of a ghost town as half its population took their leave between 1888 and April 1891. Hundreds more were unable to leave for lack of money, and with no form of alternative employment open to them were facing an increasingly grim future. Private charities set up a soup kitchen and organised temporary accommodation, but were scraping the bottom of the barrel before long. Lack of resources prevented the Kimberley Hospital Board from putting up any more than the fifty down-and-out it already housed. Arguing that the ‘giving of free handouts’ would only attract more undesirables to the Fields, De Beers provided no relief for displaced overseers other than offering a few dozen labouring jobs in the mines at less than subsistence-wages, and making available, in March 1891, some 60 jobs with Rhodes’ British South Africa Company in Mashonaland.49

The unemployment and destitution in Kimberley became a political embarrassment to Rhodes - Cape Premier since 1890 - before long: Parliament in 1891 voted in favour of an official inquiry into the state of despair on the Fields. Among those clamouring for an investigation was Rhodes’ chief ally, J.H. Hofmeyr - poverty among Afrikaners on the Fields was acute. But with seven of its nine members political allies or business associates of Rhodes’, amongst whom Merriman and Barnato, the Select Committee’s findings were a foregone conclusion. Its majority report of August 1891 surmised that distress and poverty arose from ‘natural causes’ and for that reason had to be left to ‘natural remedies’.50

The discovery of the Wesselen Mine some 6 km outside Kimberley sparked off yet another controversy. Hushed up for several months, news of the discovery of a fifth mine leaked out early in February 1891. A public ‘rushing’ of the mine ensued, after which the rushers petitioned Government to have it proclaimed a public digging. While his administration dragged its heels on the issue, Rhodes furtively negotiated an option to purchase Wesselton. Meanwhile, at a series of public rallies, speakers were voicing their anger against ‘one of the cruellest monopolies that ever oppressed mankind’ and accused Rhodes of abusing his office. Spurred into action by a second and larger rush of the mine late in April, the Rhodes Government denounced public right of access to the digging. Their fate sealed by a court ruling, the trespassing diggers were evicted with the help of the police.51

Perceived in terms of ‘the struggle between capital and labour’, the Wesselen saga reawakened the language of class on the Fields and led to the founding of the Knights of Labour. It hid the depressed state of Kimberley’s white working class squarely at the door of De Beers and agitated to have the mine thrown open to the public, but to no avail. With ‘Unity, Charity, Fidelity’ as slogan, the Knights declared ‘perpetual war and opposition to the encroachment of monopoly and organized capital’.52

Rhodes’ intransigence in the debris-washing episode further earned De Beers the contempt of white labour. A major source of income to Kimberley’s unemployed in the later 1870s and early 1880s, the public washing on private property of the tailings of dry-sorted ‘blue’ had since been prohibited on grounds of security. The growing number of virtually destitute unemployed on the Fields in 1890 and public pressure led to partial reinstatement of the practice: 600 debris-washers were licensed to work on state property, while the other two landowners concerned, De Beers and the London and South Africa Exploration Company, admitted 100 washers each. But Rhodes’ success in having the washing of debris on company premises debarred in June 1891 unleashed a public outrage and resulted in the dynamiting of the De Beers’ Head Office a week or so later.53

The question of legal title to excavated ground was subsequently thrashed out in court. In February 1892 it was ruled that excavated soil belonged to the claimholder from whose property it had been taken, i.e. either De Beers or the London Company. All debris was now declared off-limits to the public. De Beers still allowed around fifty ‘deserving’ ex-employees to wash, but they were – it was soon alleged – ‘moneyed’ men on the whole and not in any way distressed.54

De Beers’ stranglehold over the diamond fields was complete by the mid-1890s: ‘marketing was under control, working costs falling, the company’s employees co-opted and coerced, and Kimberley’s residents deferring to the dictates of the diamond magnates’. Having secured his company’s monopoly, Rhodes was able, at De Beers’ eighth annual general meeting on 28 December 1896, to voice satisfaction at the results of his efforts. During the twelve months ending 30 June of that year, the company showed the highest profits since its formation - £1,712,854 - and paid out £1,500,000 in dividends. The Kimberley diamond Industry, Rhodes told shareholders, was ‘one of those cases where a monopoly is justifiable and justified by the results’.55

49 Many diggers returned to the largely deserted river diggings - by 1890, around 40% of white employees in the Griqualand West diamond industry were located there: Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 273.

50 A minority report by the two opposing members, however, contradicted the majority report in almost all its findings: Worger, W.H., op. cit., pp. 277-8; Turrell, R.V., op. cit., p. 226.

51 Around 1,500 to 2,000 white diggers and as many black workers were working the mine then: Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 276.

52 Ibid., p. 277; Simons, J. & R., Class and colour, p. 44: the Knights’ chief aims - to secure direct parliamentary representation and to exclude cheap labour competition - became the ideological platform of the future white labour movement in South Africa.

53 Calls for state intervention were joined by the mayors of both Beaconsfield and Kimberley, but fell on deaf ears: ibid., pp. 273-4, 278-9.

54 Ibid., p. 280; Doxey, G.V., The industrial colour bar in South Africa, p. 37.

Figure 5.4 General plan of Kimberley, 1901, showing the location of Kenilworth Village. Note too the compounds and convict station serving the two deep-level mines then in operation (after 'General plan of the diamond mines owned by De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited', Chief Land Surveyor, 1901, published in Williams, G.F., The diamond mines of South Africa, p. 316)

Figure 5.5 Original layout of Kenilworth Village as published in 1891 (after an illustration which appeared in The Building News, 9 January 1891)

Kenilworth was originally to have comprised four parallel main avenues, 'bounded on the north by a bordering avenue, on the south by the main road to Kimberley, and intersected by a central avenue' (Figure 5.4) - only two had been built by the turn of the century. The village was approached along Central Avenue - a large circle marked its junction with First Avenue and separated married from single quarters. Surrounded by public buildings such as a club-house, school, church, post-office and swimming bath, the circle formed the heart of the settlement. The only residential buildings on Central Avenue were those of the company's mine and floor managers - the other houses all fronted First and Second Avenues. A secondary road system provided access to the backs of the houses and to stables, fowl runs and pig sties (Figure 5.5).

One of the earliest and by far the most prominent of the Kenilworth buildings was its impressive club-house. Like nearly all the houses in the village, it was built of the local red brick with 'coloured and moulded bands and stringcourses', complete with gables, stone plinth, corrugated iron roof and fretwork front verandah. The latter was raised above the garden level and sported a balustrade of timber uprights fitted in between horizontal timber railings.

See quotation vide infra, p. 170.
57 Rhodes referred to Kenilworth as 'my hobby': Roberts, B., Kimberley: turbulent city, pp. 270-1.
58 An engineer-cum-architect, Stent left England in 1869. He became District Inspector in the Public Works Department, Eastern Province, and South Africa's first RIBA Fellow before commencing his practice in Kimberley in 1885: Radford, D., Architecture of the Western Cape, p. 60.

59 Citation from Williams, G.F., op. cit., p. 473.
60 Citation from 'Mining village of Kenilworth, South Africa', The Building News, 9 January 1891, p. 64: the club-house was built at a cost of £4,500.
FIGURE 5.6 View of Kenilworth club-house, early 1890s: note the double row of trees and corrugated iron fence (after MMKP 4290)
Completed in 1889, the Kenilworth club-house was 'open to any white employé of the Company'. It offered facilities which included a reading room 'where many of the Weekly and Monthly papers and Magazines are kept, and also 600 volumes from the Kimberley Public Library'. It also sported a billiard room with 'two very good tables', gifts from two of the De Beers Life Governors. Not only was the club the venue for the occasional social gathering, its kitchen provided the single men of the village with three cooked meals a day at a fixed charge - main meals were taken in the dining room, while breakfast and lunches were sent out to the floors or other places of work. The club's manager resided on the premises.  

Another non-residential building proposed for the village was the recreation hall (Figure 5.8). Though not unlike the club-house in feeling - a stonework plinth, brick walls and verandah - several features seem to point to it being of a somewhat later design, e.g. the reduced roof gradient, the use of hipped ends in lieu of gables, the lattice-work of the verandah, the absence of contrasting bands of brickwork, the lack of fancy roof trimmings and so on.  

Across the road from the club was Kenilworth School. Built in the early 1890s, this three-roomed building closely resembled the typical British village school of that period. It resembled the club in finishes - stone plinth, brick walls with contrasting stringcourses, and a corrugated iron roof - but the latter was half-hipped and had no verandah at a time when it was all but an element de rigueur of most building types in the colonies (Figure 5.10). Linked with the public schools in town, the school offered 'the usual elementary studies up to the common English grammar school', whereafter village children attended the higher schools in Kimberley. Until 1902, when the church was built, the schoolhouse served as a place of worship; on weekday evenings it was used by various 'philanthropic and social organisations'. The school library functioned as a public library after school hours - its own stocks were supplemented with books from Kimberley Public Library.  

Kenilworth's Anglican Church of St Edward the Confessor was completed in 1902. Laid to coincide with the coronation of King Edward VII, its foundation stone ended up with two dates when the coronation ceremony was postponed. The heavily expressed bargeboards on the gables reflect a rejection of the lighter Victorian expression (Figure 5.9). St Edward's was the work of Daniel Greatbatch - once articulated to Stent, he was later appointed as the architect for De Beers.  

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61 The fixed meal charge averaged 25s. at the turn of the century: Williams, G.F., op. cit., p. 475; also DBCM, Report of the General Manager, 31 March 1890, p. 10.  
62 Surviving drawings are undated - whether or not it was ever built is unclear.  
The village post-office was accommodated in one of the houses on the circle. It also included a telegraph-office and a post-office savings bank. Apart from the swimming bath and recreation grounds, these conclude the list of public facilities catered for in an otherwise strictly residential settlement. No stores or shops of any kind were provided.

Like most other buildings in the village, the earliest residential quarters were built of brick from the Kimberley brickfields, each with its own garden and enclosed by a neat corrugated iron fence. The bachelors quarters were set in a straight line on lots of about 18 x 24 metres (60 x 80 feet). As Figure 5.11 illustrates, the simpler of the two types comprised a row of six rooms, 3.7 x 2.7 m each, opening onto a fretwork verandah. It had a corrugated iron saddleback roof while two pedimented openings to the verandah and a decorative roof-ventilator accentuated the symmetry of the main façade. The other house type was H-shaped in plan and accommodated just four men. It included a large dining and sitting room, a kitchen, pantry, bathroom and even a servant's room, an arrangement which made for easy converting into married quarters.65

The semi-detached married quarters were built on 24 x 30 metre lots and, as Figure 5.12 shows, very similar in appearance to the bachelor quarters. Class C was a two- and A a three-bedroomed house (Class A' without the third bedroom - see Figure 5.5); with its two side verandahs, Class B was just a more elaborate version of Class C.66

65 Class D quarters cost £612 in 1890: 'Mining village of Kenilworth, South Africa', op. cit., p. 64.  
66 Class A cost £1,300, A' £1,165 and B £955 to build in 1890: ibid.
FIGURE 5.11 Two early types of bachelors quarters, Kenilworth (after DBA: 738, 739, both undated; also Kenilworth illustration, The Building News, 9 January 1891)

FIGURE 5.12 Two early types of married quarters, Kenilworth (after DBA: BY740, undated; also Kenilworth illustration, The Building News, 9 January 1891)
Building Kenilworth was an expensive and, in the end, a piecemeal undertaking. The scheme was hailed 'a complete success', even though its overall outlay rose by 50 per cent towards the end of 1890 - in March of that year, with 24 family houses, quarters for 48 single men and the club-house completed, the village housed a mere 10 per cent of the De Beers white workforce. Rent was calculated at the rate of 9 per cent on cost, thus providing for interest on the capital sum, for repairs and other charges, and leaving a balance large enough to allow for the amortisement of costs within a thirty-three year period. Even when by 1891 capital expenditure had surged to almost three times the original estimate, Barnato was adamant in reassuring shareholders that Kenilworth was 'one of the very best investments the Company ever entered into'.67 Work proceeded, but suffered under cost-cutting measures, as the houses in Figures 5.14 to 5.16 clearly illustrate: terraced housing was introduced; roofs were simplified; the verandah was reduced to an extension of the main roof and lost much of its wooden fretwork; walls were plastered and painted, suggesting the use of a lesser quality brick.

FIGURE 5.13 A third early type of married quarters, Kenilworth (after Kenilworth illustration, The Building News, 9 January 1891)

FIGURE 5.14 Semi-detached houses in Second Avenue, Kenilworth, probably 1893: note the plastered walls, simplified roofs and verandahs (MMKP 5874)

FIGURE 5.15 Terraced housing in Second Avenue, Kenilworth, probably 1893 (MMKP 1750)

Establishing a garden village in a semi-desert environment with its low precipitation and extreme temperatures did not come cheap. Two separate water supplies were laid on, one for drinking and the other for irrigation purposes - a small charge was levied on the former, but the latter, piped from Premier Mine or the nearby Kenilworth dam, was supplied free of charge to encourage tenants to tend their gardens. Individual gardens were initially planted by the company, with fruit trees, vines and flowers. Gardner Williams, the De Beers General Manager, later reported that most residents were taking 'a keen interest in their gardens and have added largely to their beauty by purchasing plants on their own account'.

68 The charge for drinking water was 10s./1500 gal. in 1900: Williams, G.F., op. cit., pp. 472-3.
Of course, the company's tree-planting endeavours did not stop there. Kenilworth's finely macadamised main avenues and wide sidewalks were soon lined with a double row of blue and red eucalyptus, beefwood and pepper trees, all of which were watered by distributing carts. Observed Charles Bryce in 1895: 'They are not beautiful trees, but they have the merit of growing very fast, and any shade is welcome'.

The surrounding plantations and orchard just north of Kenilworth were the 'special pride' of De Beers, which had been 'indefatigable in introducing, acclimatizing and maintaining every variety' of shade and fruit tree that would survive. By 1902 some 8,000 trees had been planted in the orchard alone: 'oranges, lemons, apricots, peaches, plums, pears, apples, quinces, and other fruits, as well as shade trees and grapevines' trained on trellises from 300 to 550 metres long.

69 Bryce, C., Impressions of South Africa, p. 197; the trees stood some 3 metres tall after just one year: 'Mining village of Kenilworth, South Africa', op. cit., p. 64.
Maintaining Kenilworth's orchard and other cultivated vegetation was no easy task in a region plagued by hailstorms, frost and, during September and October, myriads of wingless locusts or 'voetgangers'. Sheets of corrugated iron, placed along and leaning against the fences, afforded some protection to both the gardens and residences - the locusts were unable to climb up the smooth surface of the iron.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 477-8: swarms of flying locusts too destroyed the orchard on many an occasion.}

Fruit from the company orchard was distributed to employees, hospitals and other charitable institutions (or sold in the compounds 'to natives at a price hardly reaching the cost of production'). Kenilworth orchard proved of 'incalculable value' as a source of fresh fruit and vegetables during the Siege of Kimberley which took place shortly after the declaration of the South African War in October 1899. It also provided Cecil Rhodes with a means of keeping occupied during the 124 day long siege the thousands of idle Africans in the employ of his company: a trellised 'Siege Avenue' was planned to commemorate the event and 'to outdo anything in the line of vine and tree planting that had been done in South Africa'. Fourteen trenches, each over 1,8 km in length, were dug - the two centre ones were for vines and some four metres apart; they were flanked by two trenches for orange trees followed by three trenches for 'ornamental evergreen trees' (Figure 5.21).\footnote{The avenue was completed after the siege at a cost of £3,000: ibid., p. 477.}

Kenilworth developed into a showplace in no time at all. Its attractive residences, well-kept gardens and leafy avenues, the orchard, recreation grounds and, in later years, a small zoo, made the village a choice venue for the occasional fête champêtre like the mammoth De Beers picnic held there in December 1889 to celebrate amalgamation.\footnote{Roberts, B., Kimberley: turbulent city, p. 271.}

The splendour of the village and its surroundings found great favour with overseas visitors to the Fields, among whom Lord Randolph Churchill in 1892, and, a few years later, Lord James Bryce and Lady Sarah Wilson. Another visitor in the mid-1890s, S.C. Cumberland, was likewise impressed: 'The model village of Kenilworth, owned by the De Beers Company, and housing its white workmen, is an exemplar of cleanliness, prosperity, and picturesqueness; it is well planted, well laid out, and is quite an oasis of greenery in a desert of stone and sterility.'\footnote{Churchill, R.S., Men, mines and animals in South Africa, p. 47; Bryce, J., Impressions of South Africa, p. 197; Wilson, S., South African memories, p. 15; Cumberland, S.C., South Africa: its peoples and its politics, pp. 61-2.}

In reality, however, the universally acknowledged attributes of Kenilworth - its charming setting, pretty dwellings, club, school and church, its tree-lined avenues and inviting gardens, orchard and plantations - were all cosmetic dressings that served to obscure the essence of the 'cantonment', namely that it was a parallel institution to the closed compound.
A PARALLEL INSTITUTION TO THE CLOSED COMPOUND

The white miners at Kenilworth, the suburb of Kimberley, are absolutely under the control of De Beers Company: drawing their wages from De Beers, living in houses owned by De Beers, trading with shops controlled by De Beers, they are the political and social serfs of the company; if they object to any terms imposed upon them by the company, they must quit not only their employment but their homes, and must leave Kimberley to find a means of living outside the clutches of the diamond monopoly.75

It was shown earlier how housing had furnished Kimberley mineowners with a directly coercive means of controlling and disciplining African labour within and without the work-place - housing in like manner completed their stranglehold over white labour. The closed compound and the model village of Kenilworth were parallel institutions serving one and the same purpose, i.e. rendering Kimberley's mine workforce wholly dependent on De Beers Consolidated Mines for their livelihood and submitting them to stricter industrial discipline.

Though furnishing mining capital with a comparable degree of control over white labour, Kenilworth was not a totalitarian institution like the closed compound. It was merely a place of residence and a non-compulsory one at that. All the same, the miners who chose to settle in the village relinquished their spatial independence outside the work-place: living in Company houses on Company estate meant enduring the constant scrutiny of their employers. It also meant separation from the rest of the community, albeit not behind a 3 metre high corrugated iron fence like compound inmates. Serving as barriers to intercourse instead were the De Beers depositing floors and distance. Like their black counterparts, white miners found their institutional needs seen to by their employers. A school, church, library, post-office and savings bank were put at their disposal. A club, recreation grounds and a swimming-bath promoted healthfully occupied leisure hours away from the canteens abounding in Kimberley.76

The location of Kenilworth amplified the white workers' dependence on De Beers - they now relied on their employers to get to and from work. Company transport took the form of mule-drawn trams and, after 1896, a steam-tram, thus obviating passenger traffic over the depositing floors and ensuring that workers got to work on time.77

Unlike the closed compound, Kenilworth catered for the families of married men. Indeed, family accommodation comprised some two-thirds of the dwellings originally proposed for the village (compare Figure 5.5). With the cost of a semi-detached family unit equal to that of a four-man bachelor unit, this was an expensive policy but one which made for a stable labour force and fostered dependence on De Beers. Apart from a monthly salary, the Company provided a roof over the heads of the married worker's family, looked after the education of his children as well as taking care of transport to and from town for older children attending secondary school in Kimberley and for spouses wanting to purchase daily necessities.78

The conspicuous superiority of Kenilworth relative to the closed compound served to obscure its true function as a parallel institution for whites. White workers were, it seemed, exempted from the lot which befell black labour. The high quality housing on offer in the attractive surroundings of Kenilworth appeared a far cry from the repressive disposition of the closed compound. Here single men lived one to a room, while in the closed compounds black men lived thirty to a room. Accompanied by a reinforced legal colour bar, their privileged treatment bolstered white workers' authority in the workplace and had a divisive impact on the mine labour force.79

By institutionalising differential standards of housing for white and black miners, De Beers was able to sustain its dominance over white labour outside the workplace and to eliminate the potential danger of an alliance across the racial divisions of labour.

Kenilworth also promised the company's white employees a standard of living a cut above that of working-class life in Kimberley. The realities of life on the Fields after 1888 were sketched out earlier: insecurity, mass unemployment, poor living conditions and growing indigence. Even those miners who had not fallen prey to their employer's rationalisation policies were struggling to make ends meet, married men in particular. As will be recalled, a substantial proportion of white miners earned below-subistence wages. Kenilworth offered liberation from the crammed iron shanties and boarding-houses, exorbitant rents and avaricious landlords in town.80

As Figures 5.23 to 5.25 show, Kimberley of the late 1880s and early 1890s was still very much a mining settlement trying to shake off its air of non-permanence - its residential buildings were for the most part wood-and-iron structures even in 1895.81

75 The surmise of J.A. Hobson in 1900 in his book The war in South Africa, p. 239.
76 Excessive indulgence in alcohol was a worrying phenomenon among the working classes on the Fields: Matthews, J.W., Incwadi Yami, p. 100; the intention not to allow 'alcoholic liquor' or even 'table beer' in the village was described as 'rather grandly': CPP, Report of the Inspector of Diamond Mines, G11, 1890, p. 27.
77 De Beers built the line but paid Gibson Brothers to run the cars: Chivers, H.A., op. cit., p. 273.
78 A pair of 3-bedroom semi-detached houses cost £1,600 and a four-bed bachelor unit £612 in 1890: 'Mining village of Kenilworth, South Africa', op. cit., p. 64; children attending school in town were issued with free monthly tram-tickets: Williams, G.F., op. cit., p. 475.
79 After 1889 the law required that no black miner was to work above or below ground unless under the charge of a 'white man as his master or "baas"': Turrell, R.V., op. cit., pp. 153-4.
80 On wages: vide supra, p. 140; for an example of how married Company employees struggled to make ends meet, their crowded living arrangements facing the sharing on a shift basis of beds: Millin, S.D., The night is long, pp. 73-5.
81 For a description of these: British Museum, Insurance Plan of Kimberley, October 1895.
FIGURE 5.24 Residential street in Kimberley, 1899 (Allen, V., *Early Kimberley*, p. 35)

FIGURE 5.25 A private boarding house in Craven Street, Kimberley, c. 1909 - called 'Else's buildings', it was founded in 1882 (Allen, V., *Early Kimberley*, p. 41)
Corrugated iron pretty much dominated the residential scene in Kimberley in the early 1890s. Hitherto the use of brick was largely restricted to the houses of the bourgeoisie and to non-residential buildings. Corrugated iron was the prevailing roofing material - it crowned Kimberley's most stately homes and continued to do so for a good many years (Figures 5.27 and 5.28). Corrugated iron roofs were anything but peculiar to residential building. As a visitor to the Fields in the late 1890s remarked: 'whatever the edifice, the roofing is always corrugated iron'.

Kenilworth presented white mineworkers with a style of living which until then had eluded most of them: a pleasant living environment and comfortable yet affordable brick houses with the trappings of late Victorian bourgeoisie elegance surpassed only by the graceful residences which lined the streets of Belgravia, Kimberley's elite suburb.

Linking house and garden, Kenilworth's shaded fretwork verandahs were set off against red-brick walls as in the houses of the well-to-do in Kimberley - fitted with timber fascias and balustrading made up of small scantlings, they were very similar in character to those verandahs pictured in Figures 5.27 and 5.28.

82 Citation from Wilson, S., op. cit., p. 15.
83 When, in 1901, the monthly rent of workers' cottages in town was £4 to £8, Kenilworth cottages rented for £2 10s. to £5: Williams, G.F., op. cit., pp. 409, 472; also H.M. Stationery Office: Emigrants' Information, Cape Colony Handbook, No. 4, 1904, p. 31 (and subsequent issues).
Kenilworth's dwellings contained both dining and drawing rooms, while the larger units showed off the unusual luxury of bathrooms. The planning of its 3-bedroomed semi-detached family units closely resembled that of the free-standing verandah houses built in Kimberley in the late 1880s and early 1890s: stairs leading to a front verandah and central entrance door, a passage with living and bedrooms on either side and a back verandah off which led the kitchen, pantry and, in the furthest corner, the bathroom - the privy was located in the rear garden. This arrangement still prevailed in 1900 - the Belgravia residence depicted in Figure 5.27 followed the same pattern: its asymmetrical massing of bay-windowed gable and fretwork verandah remained a characteristic feature of town houses in South Africa until the early 1920s.84

A 'RANSOM' FOR MONOPOLY

... in purchasing, laying out and building upon the Kenilworth Estate, we were actuated by weighty reasons, and above all we had to take into consideration the benefit and welfare of our workmen ... The men now have their happy homes, instead of stifling and otherwise unsuitable tin or canvas shanties from which they were glad to escape. Kenilworth has improved their condition, has made different men of them, and surely, gentlemen, the atmosphere must be pure and the climate healthy, because, did we not see some of the Kenilworth villagers taking prizes with their children at the recent baby show?85

Kenilworth Village, while wrapped up as a giant philanthropic gesture, was informed by a tantamount sense of business - as Barnato conceded in his address to shareholders cited above, it was 'one of the very best investments the Company ever entered into'.

The De Beers venture served a function analogous to that of the model villages built in Britain in the late nineteenth century, i.e. 'it offered a way of making the workforce more contented (and thereby more productive) without affecting the basic relationships of capitalist production'. Just as the model houses, substantial gardens and spectacular setting of the villages of Port Sunlight and Bournville were a rejection of the built form of industrial towns in England, Kenilworth's model houses, substantial gardens and spectacular setting were a rejection of the disorderly corrugated iron aggregation of Kimberley. Just like the industrialists Lever and Cadbury, Rhodes thus hoped to improve not only the workingman's approach to life but also his efficiency.86

The building of Kenilworth had formed part of an extended programme through which Rhodes completed his monopoly, a painful process which left behind a legacy of bitterness. De Beers simply could not afford to lose political control of Kimberley as its continuing profitability in large part depended on state and local policies.87

Built at a time when Rhodes was so unpopular that he visited Kimberley only under police protection, Kenilworth was meant to induce white workers into becoming loyal employees of the very company blamed for the realities of life on the Fields (and which the workers held the means to overthrow by their voting power). The tranquil village, its houses, gardens, orchard and so on were all intended to palliate the rationalisation policies instituted after 1888. It was to design, therefore, that De Beers looked to carry the ideological function behind the creation of Kenilworth, namely to serve as visible evidence to the arrival of a new era for white labour and for Kimberley as a whole.

The success of Kenilworth must be measured against the result of the 1892 general election during which, unlike four years earlier, white compounding no longer featured as an election issue: mineowners managed once again to swing Kimberley's electorate behind them though not without the usual carrot and stick tactics.88 Even when in the new year white wages reached an all-time low, where it remained right up to the turn of the century, the Knights of Labour still failed to mean the new class of labour emerging from Kenilworth from loyalty to De Beers.89

The construction of Kenilworth set in motion a building boom - 144 brick buildings were built in 1890 alone - to which the choice of Kimberley as the venue for the 1892 South African and International Exhibition gave added momentum. The Savoy Hotel was one of a number of buildings finished in time for the reception of visitors to the Exhibition and which helped to transform the town into what a visitor a few years later described as 'the essence of sleepy respectability and visible prosperity'. Referring to De Beers as 'the moving spirit, the generous employer, and the universal benefactor', Lady Sarah Wilson continued: 'If I asked the profession of any of the smart young men who frequented the house where we were staying, for games of croquet, it amused me always to receive the same answer, "He is something in De Beers" '. She perceived of Kenilworth as 'evidence of the generosity of this company'. Another visitor spoke of 'Papa De Beers' as the source of Kimberley's 'roads and trees and electric light, water, model villages, and heaven knows what else'.90

87 Particularly with regard to labour control and its ongoing exemption from direct taxation.
88 e.g. the public ballot and the introduction of eight-hour shifts underground; Rhodes was cheered when stressing the 'unanimous' interests of capital and labour: Worger, W.H., op. cit., p. 291.
89 Simons, J. & R., op. cit., p. 44; Turrell, R.V., op. cit., Appendix Table 1, p. 228.
90 Wilson, S., op. cit., pp. 14-5; Cumberland, S.C., op. cit., p. 61; Roberts, B., op. cit., p. 271; De Beers was seen as 'a religion' from which flowed 'benefits, commandments, the place to which one was called, one's daily bread, life and death': Millin, S.G., op. cit., p. 45.

84 Patent cisterns were introduced just before the turn of the century.
86 Swenarton, M., Homes fit for heroes, pp. 5-9; on the early garden city movement: Creese, W., The search for environment, p. 13f.
The building of Kenilworth, finally, must also be viewed against the backdrop of the inflated demand for skilled labour after amalgamation - dominated by English miners and Scottish artisans, the non-colonial share of the white De Beers labour force soared to some 90 per cent in 1889. Kenilworth's splendour and its comfortable married quarters aimed to lure them into making Griqualand West their permanent home:

*The Kenilworth established by the De Beers Company is universally recognised, even by the keenest opponents of the diamond monopoly, as the completest model village to be found in South Africa or any other country ... It was created in order the better to wed men to their employment, to induce them to 'fix their stakes' in the country. It is beautifully situated. It has grown out of one initial harmonious design, instead of being the mere disorderly aggregation of canvas and corrugated iron out of which new South African towns generally originate. It is sanitised on a plan in advance of almost any other town in South Africa save Durban and Port Elizabeth. There is an abundant water supply, and the rents are about half those prevalent in Kimberley itself. All this is part of the 'ransom' which the Company pays for its monopoly.*

91 Compared to well under half four years earlier: *vide supra*, p. 140.
92 *South African Mining Journal*, 7 December 1895, p. 214.
CHAPTER 6 - EARLY HOUSING FOR BLACK RAILWAY WORKERS

Compound accommodation formed the central thrust of early black worker housing in the Railways much in the same way as it did on the mines. While the development of black railway housing policy, along with the evolution of type designs for compounds and houses, merit a study of their own, this chapter seeks merely to highlight the extent to which labour policies on the mines determined the conditions of employment - and housing in particular - of black workers in the Railway service.

The influence of mining labour policy on the terms of employment of black Railway staff is eloquently illustrated in the 1921 Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Native, Coloured and Indian Labour in the service of the Railways and Harbours. Appointed in November 1920 and chaired by H.G. Falwasser of the state Department of Native Affairs, the Committee was assigned to investigate 'wages, accommodation, feeding, general treatment, and efficiency of work', and 'to make recommendations with a view of maintaining an adequate and contented supply of labour'.

The appointment of the Falwasser Committee came at a time of economic recession in South Africa. Describing the prevailing state of affairs as transitory, the Committee urged the Railway Administration to 'see to it that the conditions of employment of its non-European labourers are improved, especially as regards accommodation, at the earliest possible moment in order that there may not be created a prejudice against the Administration which it will be difficult if not well nigh impossible to remove when the fortunes of the leading industries of the country improve and the old but a stronger competition for native labour recommences'. The Railways were already experiencing severe labour shortages in Natal, a situation which, had it existed in the other Provinces of the Union, would have amounted to 'a crisis in railway and harbours affairs'.

The Falwasser enquiry was precipitated by growing militancy among black workers after the war. Particularly worrying from the Railway organisation's point of view was the formation, by a meeting of coloured and black dock workers, of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union in Cape Town in January 1919. The ICU made its first impact with the organisation of a strike of black and coloured workers at the Table Bay Docks late that year, after which a wave of industrial unrest swept the country.

The political nature of a ruling class, the competitive position of the South African Railways, and the nature of black workers' grievances are a matter of record. Chapter 7 establishes a context in which Railway housing provision can be set by outlining the origins of the poor white problem and the role of the State in its eradication. It then goes on to trace the origins and development of the white labour policy pursued by the Railway Department and shows how, by 1943, more than 50,000 white labourers had found their way into the graded staff establishment of the Railways.

Adequate accommodation was viewed by the Railway Administration as crucial to the success of its white labour policy. Chapter 8 examines the provision for white railway workers and their families, and evinces how, in later years, the Railways looked to design and planning in an attempt to overcome the association of railwayfolk, predominantly Afrikaans-speakers, with 'living on the wrong side of the tracks' in towns, historically the economic and cultural strongholds of English-speakers.

Chapter 9 concludes Part II with a discussion of the innovative portable railway model village. Forming part of a major railway reconstruction programme embarked upon early in 1934, the model village system proved a most effective instrument in the rehabilitation of poor white workers and their families.

3 S.A.R., Report of a Committee appointed by the General Manager to enquire into and report on the administration of the Native, Coloured and Indian Labour employed by the Railways and Harbours of the Union (hereafter referred to as the Falwasser Report), p. 1; Annual Reports of the General Manager, UG 42-21, p. 62.
6.1 The early 'laisser faire' approach to black railway housing

The Falwasser Committee of 1921 was highly critical of what it called the 'laisser faire' approach of the Railway Administration towards the housing, feeding and general treatment of its black employees. It expressed astonishment at the fact that, despite the existence for many years of 'a state of keenest competition' between large employers of black labour, the Railways had done 'nothing of any general importance to attract or retain its quota of such labour'. Labelling the Administration 'the greatest sinner' in making light of the 'strict legislation' which governed the 'housing, feeding and general treatment of native labourers' in the Union, it went on to say:

The indifference of the Railway Administration, particularly in regard to housing, has severely handicapped the Native Affairs Department in areas where their powers were not absolute as the private employer was able to point to the very much worse conditions of railway and harbour quarters.6

PRE-1920 HOUSING ARRANGEMENTS

The Railway Administration's disregard for the housing needs of its black employees in the years leading up to 1921 is evident from the share of black and coloured quarters in terms of the estimated total value of Railway housing, a mere 7.2 per cent in 1919 and 6.8 per cent in 1920, at a time when blacks made up just over half of the railway staff.7 These figures reflect in part the relative ease with which the organisation managed to fulfil its highly inconstant demand for black labour during these early years. Migrant workers were known to prefer work on the railways and in the harbours to minework, and many of their own accord offered their labour at stations and maintenance gangs. The balance of the labour supplement was recruited 'through the medium of native runners' employed by the Railways' Native Labour Department. Only occasionally were the services of private labour agencies enlisted, and then usually to fill at short notice urgent requirements for special relaying and construction work or, due to local shortages and the 'inadvisability of drafting natives from other parts of the Union' to these regions, to recruit 'tropical natives' for relaying work in the malarial districts.8

Periodical shortages in labour prompted wage increases 'in the most competitive areas' in 1912 and 1917 and 'at all centres' in 1919. The growing labour shortages experienced in Natal after 1910 led to the establishment in 1920 of several departmental recruiting depots in the Transkei. The Railways also supported a campaign by farmers and others for the restriction of licences for Durban's ricksha pullers.9

While the precise nature of early black accommodation in the Railways is difficult to ascertain, it is known that compounds had formed the crux of the housing arrangements for 'single' workers from the very early days of railway and harbours development. Temporary compounds would have been provided on many of the open lines where major relaying and construction works were in progress. Recruits on the open lines generally opted for departmentally-fed rates of pay: in 1917, for instance, the whole of the black staff in Natal and about half of those in the Transvaal and Orange Free State were reported to have been fed by the Administration. Large compounds are also known to have existed at these railway stations designated as recruiting depots.10

Large railway compounds were serving all the major urban centres by the turn of the century. Typically located in close proximity to the station or harbour, these often combined single and married accommodation, although married workers were usually expected to make their own living arrangements, especially in areas where housing was available in local municipal locations. Married labourers at wayside stations either built their own homes or were provided with accommodation in the form of huts.

Even though the provision of suitable accommodation was perceived as 'a matter of importance' and its value in making 'the coloured staff more contented' and creating 'more useful members of the staff' acknowledged, no uniform black housing policy prevailed in these early years. Railway compounds and quarters were not subjected to the scrutiny of a health or any other inspector either.11

SOME EARLY EXAMPLES OF RAILWAY COMPOUNDS

Very few plans of the early railway compounds appear to have survived. One of the earliest examples, the drawings of which are dated November 1903, is a compound in the Pretoria Station Yard. Built by the then Central South African Railways, it formed part of the railway camp complex - subsequently renamed 'Salvokop' - situated behind the Pretoria Station and on the opposite side of the lines to the town (Figure 6.1).

The respective total estimations were £4,190,772 and £5,256,206: S.A.R., Annual Report of the General Manager, UG 66-20, p. 54, & UG 42, 1921, p. 40; a separate allocation for black housing in the yearly railway budget was introduced only in 1941: Annual Report of the Railway Health Officer, 1941/42, p. 49.

8 See for example S.A.R., Annual Report of the General Manager, UG 39-11, p. 49; UG 57/12, p. 76; UG 46-13, p. 64; UG 38-14, p. 81: the proportion of labour on open lines recruited by outside agencies during these years ranged between 1 and 6%.


11 S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 318: 'apparently it has been nobody's duty to inspect native quarters'.
The Pretoria Compound was of a two-tier type. Married accommodation took the form of two sets of thirty-two cottages, two-roomed and semi-detached, adjacent to the main compound and grouped around what must have been the latrines. 'Single' men were housed in a rectangular Kimberley-type compound, their thirty-bunk dormitories lining two sides of a large open courtyard and providing sleeping accommodation for between 570 and 760 men. Enclosing the rest of the compound was a brick wall, 2.7 metres high, its top finished with broken glass. Another notable feature was the fenestration of the outer walls of dormitories and other buildings fringing the boundary.

Access to the main compound was from the north, with the entrance flanked by offices for the compound manager and his assistant, on one side, and the compound police quarters on the other. The latter consisted of the gate-keeper's office, store, a cell and sleeping quarters.

Food for those workers employed on departmentally-fed wages was prepared in a steam kitchen situated within the courtyard not far from the main entrance. Two small cooking sheds were provided for men on self-fed wages (Figure 6.2).
Located against the southern boundary wall, the compound hospital consisted of two wards, each with eleven beds, an office for the visiting doctor and a room for the black attendant. These were fitted with suspended wooden floors and ceilings. A verandah shielded the front façade from the sun. The mortuary and hospital latrines were placed some distance away, against the western boundary wall (Figure 6.3).

Use was made of a pail system in the compound latrines positioned in the north-eastern corner of the complex. These, like the latrines serving the hospital, were accessible from the outside for night-soil clearance (Figure 6.4). Washing facilities were in the shape of a large open bath with three pairs of shower roses overhead.

The dormitory unit is depicted in Figure 6.5. It had ant-heap floors, no ceilings, and measured 9.8 x 8.5 metres. Paired in four rows, its single-tier matchboard bunks were raised from the floor on a framework of timber. Bunks were removable so as to allow for later conversion into continuous rows - the number of bunks per dormitory could thus be increased from thirty to forty. The cubical air space per occupant (inclusive of the roof space) came to 11.1 cubic metre (388 cubic feet) for the former and 8.3 (291 cubic feet) for the latter layout. The allowances in terms of floor space per man were 2.8 and 2.1 square metre respectively (29.9 & 22.4 square foot).12

The dormitories were reasonably ventilated by means of louvred openings - equal to 5 per cent of the floor area - on either side. Constant ventilation was aided by a series of air inlets at floor level and a roof ventilator (a 'Boyle’s Patent Air Pump Ventilator'). With a glazed window area of only 2.2 per cent, these rooms were badly lighted. No provision was made for heating. Interesting, though, is the introduction of fire walls (i.e. party walls of brick rising above the level of the roof) between the dormitories.13

The cubic capacity of its contemporary in Kimberley, the Dutoitspan Compound, was 8.6 cubic metre per man: vide supra, p. 121.

12 In Kimberley both ventilation and glazed areas amounted to 10% of the floor area: ibid.
Another example of a rectangular railway compound in the Kimberley tradition is that built in late 1914 in Waterval-Boven, railway centre of the Eastern Transvaal.

The Waterval-Boven Compound was a wood-and-iron construction, its walls brick-nogged and plastered. It comprised 55 small dormitories (2.75 x 2.45 metres) arranged around three sides of a large courtyard. Dormitory perimeter walls were pierced by louvred openings to allow for cross ventilation. Concrete floors were used throughout. The compound also included a meal store, kitchen, coal and wood store and, in one corner, the latrines. A large concrete bath was provided in the centre of the courtyard (Figure 6.6).\(^\text{14}\)

A far more elaborate design was that of another C.S.A.R. compound proposed for Pretoria in 1906. Whether or not this compound was ever built is not clear.\(^\text{15}\)

Dormitories probably slept between 2 and 4 men each - the type and number of bunks provided are not known.

It appears, from what little evidence there is, that Pretoria had only one railway compound and that this was the earlier rather than the later proposal; see for example S.A.R., *Falwasser Report*, par. 428-439; S.A.R., *Housing Commission*, 1937, *Interim Report No. 4*, par. 32f.
Planned for 1,000 men in phase one and an additional 960 in the second, the design of this unusually large railway compound made for unobstructed supervision. A single entrance gave access to a fan-shaped courtyard around which was arranged, in strict symmetry, a steam kitchen and scullery flanked by two large dining rooms (20 x 11 metres each), an enclosed concrete bath and shower area, and most of the dormitories. A number of dormitory units were placed within the courtyard itself, but in a manner so as not to obscure the view from the compound manager’s office. The compound was to contain 49 dormitories in phase two, each sleeping 40 workers, with two sets of latrines linked to the courtyard by way of some 20 metre long passages (Figure 6.7).

Dormitories were square in plan (7.6 x 7.6 m) and fitted with continuous bunks of wood, a two-tiered row on either side of a central entrance. Floors consisted of rammed earth filling surfaced with asphalt. The units were well ventilated by way of a continuous ridge ventilator with fixed louvres, a louvred opening and fan-light over the door and air inlets at floor level - permanent ventilation alone comprised 17 per cent of the floor area. Fixed windows on either side (9 per cent of the floor area) provided for daylighting. No provision was made for heating. As in the earlier Pretoria compound, use was made of fire walls between dormitories (Figure 6.8). The air space per occupant for these dormitories amounted to 7.5 cubic metre (265 cubic feet) inclusive of the roof space, with a floor space of 1.45 square metre per man (15.6 square feet).

For an illustration of an earlier variation of the fan compound see Pearson, A. & R. Mouchet, Practical Hygiene of native compounds in tropical Africa.

FIGURE 6.7 Plan of proposed new railway compound for 1,960 workers, Pretoria, 1906 (after SATS 313P/208, 5 February 1906: orientation not indicated)

THE STATE OF BLACK RAILWAY HOUSING IN 1921

The 1921 Falwasser Report described the housing accommodation for black Railway employees throughout the Union as ‘totally inadequate’. Commenting on the appalling state of existing railway quarters, it likened a large proportion of the buildings occupied by black employees to ‘nondescript shanties in varying stages of dilapidation erected by the natives themselves’. The type of building provided by the Administration was said to range from a brick barrack in Natal to a sleeper hut in the Cape Province, the latter sometimes built into the face of a bank and resembling a dug-out.

Existing railway compounds were, almost without exception, in violation of every single minimum requirement under the Union Government’s Native Labour Regulation Act No. 15 of 1911.

16 For an illustration of an earlier variation of the fan compound see Pearson, A. & R. Mouchet, Practical Hygiene of native compounds in tropical Africa.

17 S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 311-3.

18 Annexure C, Part II, Schedule III to the Regulations under the Native Labour Regulation Act No. 15 of 1911, promulgated under Government Notice No. 1988 of 30 November 1911.
The Kimberley compound was small, two-tiered, and covered two acres - there are no surviving plans other than the general layout depicted in Figure 6.9. Suffice it to say that, according to the Falwasser Report, the ‘best of the rooms’ were constructed of unlined wood and iron ‘without any regard to hygienic conditions or comfort’; there was ‘no ventilation other than wooden shutters’ which, when closed, left the rooms in ‘utter darkness’; no provision was made for heating.20

In contrast, the guidelines laid down by the 1911 Native Labour Regulation Act with regards to housing accommodation not only proscribed the use of ‘walls of plain iron or iron with matchboard lining’, but required that provision had to be made for ‘sufficient cross ventilation, both constant and occasional’, for glazed ‘window space equal to one-tenth floor area’ and for ‘stoves surmounted by chimneys and canopies’.

The other minimum requirements were: air space per occupant of 5.7 cubic metre (200 cubic feet) exclusive of roof space above 3.65 metres where single tier bunks are used and above 4.27 metres where two tiers are used, no more than two tiers of bunks, impervious floors, sufficient provision for rain and stormwater drainage, and no back to back structures.21

Recommending the demolition of all existing buildings in the Kimberley Compound apart from the church, the Falwasser Report proposed the erection of a new compound to provide accommodation for 200 ‘single’ workers (8 each per room of 4.9 x 4.3 m) and 15 married workers (in detached cottages comprising two back-to-back rooms of 3.7 x 3.7 m) as shown in Figure 6.9, along with separate latrines and washing facilities for the two groups, and also a kitchen for the single men. Note the position of the compound manager’s quarters in relation to the entrance gates to the single and married sections.22

The housing conditions of black railway employees in the other major urban centres were equally reprehensible. The Docks Location in Cape Town, for instance, was a condemned structure composed of ‘a collection of verminous huts of wood and iron without impervious floors, which were hurriedly built at the time of the bubonic plague in order to segregate the native dock workers’. A new compound of brick or reinforced concrete was proposed in its place. It was to house 750 labourers and to include a fumigation plant, plunge and shower baths, latrines, kitchens, food stores and a room for recreation.23

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20 Ibid., par. 359, 360.
21 For a copy of the 1911 regulations: Falwasser Report, Annexure 28.
22 S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 361; the location of the proposed kitchen was not indicated.
One of five railway and harbours compounds in Durban, the Greyville Compound accommodated some 700 workers in 67 'wood and iron hartebeeste huts' designed for only 400 - an additional 400 men were crammed into 'three large rooms of the same material'. Occupants of the Cartage Quarters, also in Durban, were periodically forced to vacate their rooms by the encroaching sea during exceptionally high tides.24

Living conditions at the five main railway compounds in Johannesburg varied from tolerable to shameful. The wood-and-iron Cartage Singles Compound in the Newtown area, for example, was described as 'an insanitary building of the worst type that should be speedily demolished'. Rooms in the Tapson & Glynn's compound were placed back to back and were 'without light or ventilation'.25

Accommodation in the Pretoria Railway Compound was found to be satisfactory apart from twenty odd lean-to corrugated iron huts utilised as sleeping quarters to cope with overcrowding. These huts were only 2.75 metres deep, 1.8 metres of which were taken up by a long shelf serving as a 'sleeping ledge'. The brick dormitories, though acceptable, were said to have lacked sufficient daylighting and heating facilities, and their floors were in a very bad state of repair.26

The accommodation provided by the Railway Administration in Bloemfontein was regarded as 'totally unfit for human habitation' and was to be demolished 'at the earliest possible opportunity'.27

Housing was not the only major defect in terms of the conditions of employment of black railway staff identified by the Falwasser Report. Closely associated with the compound, hospital and medical facilities were provided by the Administration in some centres but could 'in no single instance ... be described as adequate or anything like up to modern standards'. One example was the Railway hospital at Greyville in Durban, a 'totally inadequate and out-of-date' wood-and-iron structure situated on land that was often water-logged. In Bloemfontein, hospital accommodation for the town's entire black male population comprised 15 beds at the National Hospital - no provision was acceptable, were said to have lacked sufficient daylighting and heating facilities, and their floors were in a very bad state of repair.28

The immediate impact of this economic boom was, as shown in Figure 6.10 (overleaf), reflected in the fact that the country's decennial growth rate in gross domestic product for the period 1920-30 amounted to an astonishing 6.9 per cent, the highest in the history of the Union, despite the economic stagnation experienced between 1920-22. The immediate impact of this economic boom was, as shown in Figure 6.10 (overleaf), a 38 per cent increase in the demand for black labour in the Railways organisation, from 34,277 in 1922 to 47,157 in 1924, a trend upended in dramatic fashion by the implementation after 1924 of a formal 'civilised labour' policy in the Railways.32

The Railways' biggest rival in the African labour market was, of course, the mining industry. Despite an inclination among black migrant labourers towards railway rather than mine work, the Falwasser Committee called attention to the fact that 'natives on the Mines are comfortably housed and liberally fed and in these respects are better off than the Administration's employees'. Only by virtue of its matching the 'good conditions as regards pay, housing and general treatment' existing on 'the average mine', could the Railway Administration be ensured of 'its pick of the best native material in South Africa'.33

The evolution of black housing policy in the South African Railways has been likened to a crisis-management strategy.30 Commenting on the 'almost chronic' shortfall of labour encountered in Natal, the Falwasser Report warned - as was pointed out earlier - of 'a crisis in railway and harbours affairs' had similar conditions prevailed in other parts of the Union. The Committee foresaw 'a time, and perhaps in the very near future, when competition for the services of natives will become still keener' and implored the Railway Administration to 'lose no time in setting its house in order'.31

6.2 The importance of the mining labour model

We unhesitatingly state that work on the railways and in the harbours is naturally attractive to natives and there is no apparent reason why, given as good conditions as regards pay, housing and general treatment as exist say on the average mine on the Witwatersrand, the Administration should not have its pick of the best native material in South Africa.29

For more detail on these and other railway compounds in Johannesburg:

24 For these and the conditions in the other Durban compounds: S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 386-400.
25 For more detail on these and other railway compounds in Johannesburg: ibid., par. 412-27.
26 Ibid., par. 428-439.
27 Ibid., Third Interim Report, Annexure 3, par. 2.
28 Ibid., par. 7, 16; S.A.R., Falwasser Report, Part 20, par. 542f: the Committee acknowledged that Act No. 15 of 1911 placed on the employee 'the responsibility in certain areas of providing for the care when sick or injured of his native employees'.
29 S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 15.
31 S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 17, 18, 39; vide supra, p. 175.
33 S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 15, 47.
It was further submitted that 'some European official' was to be charged with the duty of 'inspecting native and coloured quarters once a month'. In those areas where the Railways' Native Labour Department was represented, the officers concerned were to be made responsible. Elsewhere the duty was to fall on the respective permanent way inspectors (along the permanent way), station masters (at their stations), and the Cartage Superintendent (at the different cartage depots). 36

Railway compounds were to be managed by a team of compound managers and assistants under the auspices of a bigger and regraded Native Labour Department. The Falwasser Committee was not impressed 'by the type of officer occupying the position of compound manager' and stressed the need to revise the pay and status of these and other officers in the service of the Labour Department in view of the important function of the latter. The Native Labour Superintendent was to be 'vested with a fairly wide discretion' to enable him to deal with 'crises in connection with native matters which often arise unexpectedly and in settlement demand an immediate decision'. A 'motor trolley' was to be put at his disposal for the purpose of co-ordinating compound management and making detailed inspections of conditions 'as they affect his charges along the permanent way'. 37

A general principle was put forward according to which one compound manager was to be appointed 'at any centre where 250 or more natives are employed'; managers of compounds with 500 or more workers (e.g. at stations serving as recruiting depots), to have at least one assistant. Compound managers were to be 'provided with and required to occupy quarters adjacent to the compounds'. 38

A 'capable and conscientious' manager was looked upon as someone proficient in 'securing and holding the confidence of natives': 'Considerable organising ability is necessary to satisfactorily control a coloured population of from 500 to 1,000 or more, to see that their abodes are kept in a clean and sanitary condition, to ensure their turning out to work, to issue rations not only to the residents of a compound but to large numbers of natives at a distance, to see to the proper cooking and punctual issue of food on places where cooking is done and generally to attend to the comfort of natives'. Compound managers could keep no regular hours: 'Opportunities of fomenting trouble amongst natives occur particularly at night and on Sundays and responsible officers must be on the qui vive at all times for any indication of unrest'. 39

34 S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 351; for the type plans: ibid., Annexures 24-7, 29-32.
35 To avoid costly mistakes (such as the new Bluff Compound in Durban) and to prevent individuals from putting into practice their own often inappropriate ideas on the subject: ibid., par. 350, 398, 418; also ibid., In interim Report No. 1, Annexure 1, par. 36; all plans were to be submitted to the Native Affairs Department and local Union Health Officers: Falwasser Report, ibid., par. 352-3.
37 Ibid., par. 659-67, 682-4: the Railways' Native Labour Department was based in Johannesburg.
38 Ibid., par. 673, 678-9.
39 Ibid., par. 668-72: managers had to be accessible to compound inmates for 'an hour or two out of ordinary working hours' to lend an ear to any complaints and had to be qualified in first aid.

COMPOUNDS, FEEDING, WAGES AND THIRTY DAY PAYMENT

Having identified housing accommodation and feeding as the chief deficiencies in terms of the conditions of black employment in the Railways, the Falwasser Committee put forward a series of measures aimed at remedying these and bringing the Railways in line with the conditions prevailing on the Witwatersrand mines.

A uniform policy for the housing of black railway staff throughout the Union was propounded. It was to take the form of up-to-date compounds - on lines similar to those used on the mines - to house and feed the 'singles' component of the black labour force at all the large centres, combined where necessary with quarters for married workers and their families. Type plans embodying the suggestions of the Falwasser Committee were prepared by the Administration's architect, who had accompanied the Committee on 'inspections of mine compounds and hospitals', and were appended in the 1921 Report. 34

Existing compounds were to be brought 'up to the standard of modern ideas' as per the Committee's recommendations for the individual centres and in conformity with the schedule of minimum requirements under the Native Regulation Act of 1911. Designs for new compounds and married quarters, especially in larger centres, were henceforth to be executed by the Administration's architect who was 'in the best position to keep in touch with the latest developments in connection with native housing'. 35


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It was asserted that 'only experienced, keen and reliable men' were to be appointed as compound managers, 'well paid for their services with the understanding that their duties require that a large proportion of their spare time must necessarily be spent in looking after the Administration's interest'. As the Railway Administration did not have 'on its strength sufficient suitable men to fill these posts', the engagement 'from outside the service of a certain number of compound managers who have graduated in similar positions in the service of the mines' was suggested as an initial measure.40

Held out by the Falwasser Report as a 'model compound room' was the 24-bunk design No. 106/P202 (Figure 6.11) based on the Rand Mines type hut. Measuring 8.76 by 5.06 m, this dormitory unit allowed 1.85 square metre floor space and 7.7 cubic metre air space per occupant (if calculated up to a height of 4.27 metres as per two-tiered bunk layout). Window space came to 8.9 per cent of the floor area. Note too the provision made for heating.41

40 Ibid., par. 672, 674-5; for the rates of pay of compound managers on the mines: ibid., par. 676.
41 S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 438; also ibid., Annexure 29. For an illustration of the improved Rand Mines version later used, viz. the Dr Orenstein type, see Pearson, A. & R. Mouchet, op. cit.

For workers employed on the permanent way, a thatched type rondavel, based on the traditional built forms in rural areas, was advocated (Figure 6.12): 4.27 metres in diameter, plastered and white-washed, the rondavel was to have walls not lower than 2.1 metres, with the opening sections of windows equal to one-twelfth of the floor area and a ventilating cowl at the apex of the roof.42

Feeding formed a vital element of the new railway compound system. Accordingly envisaged as essential adjuncts to the railway compound were - in addition to separate quarters for compound police, latrines and washing facilities in the shape of plunge and shower baths - a proper steam kitchen and 'marewu' plant.

Black Railway workers could normally elect to be engaged on either a self-fed or a departmentally-fed rate of pay. While railway wages compared favourably with those on the mines, the Committee criticised the self-fed allowance of 6 d. per day worked in contrast, were engaged on a 'monthly' rate of pay based on thirty work-days or shifts paid in five weekly instalments. An equal daily wage rate in the Railways, when expressed in terms of a monthly rate, would thus come to a lesser amount. Railway

Shunned by the bulk of the regular black workforce, departmental feeding was as a rule accepted only in the earlier stages of employment. It was thought that, besides a greater sum of money at pay day, lack of variety largely accounted for its unpopularity. Describing as long since passed the time 'when mealie meal was regarded as the staple and only food of a native', the Falwasser Report advanced an improved scale of rations based on those issued on in mine compounds including mealie meal, raw and cooked meat, vegetables, dry beans or peas, yellow sugar, salt and coffee.

The Committee further advocated the 'rationing of the highest possible number of natives'. It believed that 'liberal feeding' by the employer could only result 'in the servant being in the best physical condition to perform a good day's work'.

Other essential components of the railway compound were a compound hospital and fumigation plant. Plans for a 15-bed hospital and a sulphur fumigating box for clothing - 'courtesy of Dr Orenstein of the Rand Mines' - were subjoined in the 1921 Report. Larger hospitals and isolation wards were to be managed by a Hospital Master and black attendant and situated within close proximity of the compound.

Provision was also to be made for the 'healthy and harmless recreation' of inmates to prevent the undermining of 'discipline and efficiency' caused by indulgence in those 'illicit pleasures' on offer in the large industrial centres and to which, when left to their own resources, 'natives are very liable to succumb'. To this end the Falwasser Report suggested the setting aside of a piece of unoccupied railway property as a sports ground as well as the 'erection adjacent to large compounds of a hall - which need be nothing elaborate - for inside amusements' and regular church services 'by recognised Christian denominations'. Compound managers were to be instructed 'to encourage and further legitimate sport amongst natives as far as in their power lies'.

Mining labour, in addition to the above, also served as a model for a new system of payment put forward by the Falwasser Committee. Black employees in the Railway service were, under the current system, engaged on a fixed monthly rate payable at the end of each month for either twenty-six or twenty-seven days worked. Mineworkers, in contrast, were engaged on a 'monthly' rate of pay based on thirty work-days or shifts paid in five weekly instalments. An equal daily wage rate in the Railways, when expressed in terms of a monthly rate, would thus come to a lesser amount. Railway recruiters for that reason found it difficult to convince black workers that they were better off in the Railways despite a seemingly lower monthly rate of pay.

43 As well as coal and firewood where necessary - for more details: ibid., par. 288-304.
44 'Marewu' or 'magou' is a traditional drink made of fermented wheat, finely ground maize and sour milk (for exact ingredients: SARS 1199) - marewu kitchens were a later addition to the Rand mine compounds: ibid., par. 385, 390-3, 405, 437, also Interim Report No. 3, Annexure 3, par. 25.
45 S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 53-7; for a comparison of mine and railway wages: par. 42-5.
46 For a comparison of mine and railway wages: ibid., par. 288-304.
47 Ibid., par. 57-8, 291-310, also Third Interim Report, Annexure 3, par. 27-31.
48 S.A.R., Falwasser Report, par. 499, 500, 507, 511, 677; also Annexures 31 and 32.
49 Wherever there are congregated together large numbers of full-blooded men in the prime of life there must be some outlet during periods of leisure for those hoild up energies: ibid., par. 585f.
Arguing that the prevailing system militated against recruitment, the Committee set forth the adoption of a system of payment similar to that on the mines. Under the new system the Railway Administration would get 120 instead of the previous average of 105 shifts worked per worker on a four-month contract. Furthermore, by staggering payment the likelihood of industrial unrest would be reduced.51

SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As was stated in the introduction of this chapter, the piecemeal development of black housing policy in the Railways warrants a study of its own. While the above analysis supports the assertion that this process must be seen as a crisis-management strategy, no attempt has been made to distil the proportional significance of the various motives to the new policy advocated by the Falwasser Committee, i.e. economics, industrial discipline and labour control. Besides creating a more efficient workforce and reducing labour wastage, the housing and feeding of black railway employees in compounds were also meant to isolate them from militant Unionism. Commenting on the 1920 Port Elizabeth riots and the fact that no provision was made for black railway housing in this centre, the 1921 Committee observed:

Located as they were in their leisure hours amongst the general native population which includes a proportion of riff-raff, professional agitators and out-of-works, they were brought willy-nilly into the general labour agitations of the moment ... To a great extent the Administration's native labour force can be kept away from such influences in a private township or compound from which the undesirables can be excluded and in which the protection of willing workers could more easily be provided for in any serious crisis.52

The implementation of the 1921 housing policy in view of the 1924 'civilised labour' policy, the contemplated introduction in 1937 of a sub-economic housing policy funded by central government and the development of sub-economic house types, Railway experiments in mass-produced housing in the later 1940s, and the eventual adoption in 1953 of a type quarters similar to the 51/9 township house developed by the National Building Research Institute, all offer compelling subjects for further research.53

51 Ibid., par. 193-5, 200, 203-4.
52 'After pay is the time when the trouble comes to a head and a cessation of work occurs': ibid., par. 371-2.
53 Sub-economic housing: S.A.R., Housing Commission, 1937, Final Report No. 6, par. 79; housing experiments: Pigott, M.J.D., Housing for black workers in South Africa, p. 131; for post-1937 house types: SATS Type P/116 to Type P/248 (or 51/9).

CHAPTER 7 - 'POOR WHITES' AND THE STATE RAILWAYS

Historically, the South African State is one of the few that can look back upon a series of policies that were successfully implemented, eliminating a serious poverty problem. The pressing social problem of the first quarter of the twentieth century in South Africa was growing White indigence - a problem that had been totally eliminated thirty years later, as a result of a determined, well co-ordinated government-orchestrated attack upon it. The problem of poverty amongst the White, mainly Afrikaner, community was eliminated by the introduction of preferential employment policies, particularly in the government service, by a substantial effort to upgrade the rural areas, by a number of measures designed to foster the growth of a local capitalist class and by the activities of the Afrikaner community itself, in its attempt to preserve 'volkseenheid' and obtain both economic and political power through institutions such as the Broederbond.1

It is against the background of the protracted government-orchestrated assault on the problem of white indigence in South Africa during the first three decades of this century that housing provision for white Railway employees - to which the remainder of Part II is dedicated - must be viewed.

South Africa's State Railways played a salient role in what David Berger, in his rendition of the evolution of government policy towards eliminating poor whiteness in South Africa in the period between 1892 and 1934, collectively terms the 'rehabilitation policy designed to eliminate white poverty', i.e. a series of measures implemented to ensure that poor whites would receive priority absorption in the growing economy, at levels higher than the blacks'.2 Berger recounts in great detail the rehabilitation policy as instigated by the Cape Government in 1892, and shows how it was later subscribed and added to by the governments of the Transvaal, the Orange Free State, Natal, and, ultimately, by the Union Government after 1910. His enumeration of the manner in which the various government departments were utilised in addressing different aspects of the multifarious Poor White Problem evinces why, in 1945, the Railways Administration was able to take pride in having been 'the only Government Department which took the Government's white labour policy seriously and introduced white labour on a large scale'.3

1 Nattrass, J., The South African economy, p. 244.
3 Ibid., passim; S.A.R., Report on model villages, par. 61.
 Berger goes on to describe as the driving force behind the extensive rehabilitative programmes perpetuated by successive governments a 'consensus among whites of all types in favour of continued white supremacy'. 4 This consensus not only led to the adoption of the rehabilitation policy in the Cape Colony in 1892 'with the long-term goal of uplifting the poor whites into the white labour aristocracy', he contends, it also led voters 'to switch allegiances to the Pact' in the special circumstances of the 1924 'poor white election'. 5

While the coming to power of the Nationalist/Labour Government under J.B.M. Hertzog is widely held to represent a watershed in South African history, 6 Berger has shown that the basis of the greatly expanded policies subsequently cultivated - of job creation through industrial growth and government provision - was in fact laid in the years leading up to 1924. It was by virtue of this gigantic and well-organised attack, helped along by the sustained economic growth of the post-1933 period, that the poor white problem was by and large eradicated by the 1950s. 7

Before examining the commitment of South African State Railways to provide employment for poor white workers, the causes, extent and consequences of the poor white problem will be related in brief.

7.1 The 'Poor White Question' 8

One of the shibboleths of South African history holds that the proletarianisation of 'rural' Afrikaners began with the Anglo-Boer War. While the process accelerated dramatically after 1902, the Dutch Reformed Church synod discussed 'the poor white problem' as early as 1886 and a church conference on the subject was held in 1893. Though evident in all the colonies and republics, the rate of proletarianisation of white Afrikaner-speakers was highest in the Transvaal prior to the Anglo-Boer War. 9

CRISIS ON THE LAND

The unfolding of diamond mining after 1870, as related in Part I of this study, and of gold mining after 1886, was a portent of changes that were to transform South Africa's overwhelmingly agrarian communities into an industrialised society in less than two generations. It was a combination of land pressure, natural disasters, the South African War of 1899 to 1902, and the modernisation of farming that led to the decline into indigency of rural Afrikaners and caused them to abandon the land.

Prior to 1870, the prevailing or 'traditional' form of rural settlement in South Africa was that of 'separate, isolated farms, often many miles apart and with practically no kind of common bond of organisation', a system producing 'hardy and self-sufficing pioneers', often 'opinionated, refractory and unsocial'. Their very simple mode of life was reflected in their way of dress, their abodes and furniture. Even up to the turn of the century 'wooden floors and ceilings, lamps and windowpanes', and most other 'shop articles' were not to be found in the homes of many landowners. 10

Members of this subsistence-based society were often regarded as 'backward', as the prevailing ideologies on the diamond fields outlined in Chapter 2 reveal. Referring to the 'backward' farmer of the Transvaal, the 1908 Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission describes his 'dwellinghouse' as 'generally of poor quality, his outhouse accommodation ramshackle and inadequate, his garden, if he has one at all, untidy and unkempt'. These farmers, it continues, 'have formed no habits of industry, live a hand-to-mouth existence, and accumulate no reserves, so that any sudden misfortune, such as the failure of a crop, at once brings them to the brink of starvation'. 11

Farmers in the Orange Free State and, more particularly, the Transvaal were slow to take advantage of the vast new inland markets provided by the opening of the diamond and gold fields. While those in the Orange Free State belatedly began producing for the Kimberley market, the overwhelming majority of farmers in the Transvaal continued to shun commodity production until after the turn of the century. Many farmers in both the republics and in the Cape profited from the highly lucrative occupation of 'transport riding' before the connecting by rail of the mining centres to the major ports (Figure 7.1 overleaf). Based on horse, donkey and ox-wagon motive power, this early transport sector had provided employment to many thousands of blacks and whites alike. Its crushing was said to have contributed substantially to the growth of rural poverty. 12

5 Ibid., p. 471.
6 Hertzog introduced, over and above the 'civilised labour' policy, 3 important acts which entrenched the concept of white labour supremacy and were to form the foundation of apartheid labour legislation: the Industrial Conciliation Act, No. 11 of 1924, the Wages Act, No. 27 of 1925, and the Mine and Works Amendment Act, No. 25 of 1926: Nattrass, J., op. cit., p. 76.
8 Or the problem of the economic and social decline of people of rural origin - more particularly those that have left the farms and drifted to urban areas (and their descendents): Carnegie Commission, Report of the Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, (hereafter referred to as the Report on the Poor White Question), Part I, p. 4.
9 O'Meara, D., Volkskapitalisme, p. 81.
The first great wave of townward-moving poor whites came about when the cattle disease rinderpest swept through the republics and the Cape in 1896, resulting in huge cattle losses, and was followed by a period of drought in 1897. A series of droughts in subsequent years - in 1902-03, 1908, 1916, 1919, 1924, 1926-27, 1930, 1932-35 - continued to push impoverished farmers from the land. While most of these were regional, the drought in 1919 was one of the worst and affected the whole country.13

Likewise producing rural indigency and preventing capitalist farming from getting a foothold, especially in the Transvaal, was the excessive subdivision of farm land into uneconomically viable units due to the Roman Dutch Law's rules of inheritance. In the Cape, for example, where this law was in operation until 1874, a case occurred where one heir was entitled to a 296,387,007/4,705,511,234,760 share of a 5,347 acre farm. Here, as in the Transvaal where freedom of bequest was introduced in the early 1900s, the traditional subdivision of farmland persisted for a great many years longer.14

While firmly entrenched in the British Colonies of the Cape and Natal by the turn of the century, the development of fully capitalist production agriculture was impeded by the prevailing agrarian property relations in the Boer republics. Boer landlordism was based mainly on 'the extraction of surplus in the form of rent (in kind and labour) from African tenants on the large farms of Boer landlords'. Sharecropping or 'farming on the half' was a highly popular arrangement in both the Orange Free State and Transvaal until the early nineteenth century: black tenants, in return for farming his land, paid the white landowner half or more of the crops raised as rent, whereas labour tenants were obligated to pay rent in the form of a fixed period of labour service.15

The farming community of the Transvaal constituted three distinct socio-economic groups, a differentiation aggravated by the rise of mining after 1886. Large 'renter' landlords or 'notables' formed the most dominant of these groups. With their interests nursed by the Boer state, most notables continued to shun commodity production and encouraged rent-paying African squatters to occupy their large landholdings instead, thereby incurring the wrath of the mining companies on both accounts. The second and largest group was formed by smaller landowners. They too were living off the rents of African tenants, albeit far fewer, explaining why sharp struggles between the notables and smaller landowners were a prominent feature of 'Boer' politics at the time.16

16 When the latter succeeded in getting the 1887 Plakkers Wet (squating law) passed to limit to 5 the number of African tenant families on any farm, the notables used their influence to prevent its implementation: O'Meara, D., op. cit., p. 24.
A large proportion of small landlords was among those who joined in the townward drift during the nineteenth century. With the consolidation of gold mining thousands of Boers either sold their farms or themselves went prospecting. Even before the turn of the century almost half the surveyed farms in the Transvaal were owned by absentee landlords, either notables or, to an increasing extent, mining companies.17

A growing number of landless Boers or 'bywoners' from 1886 onwards comprised the third group. The commonest type of bywoner was those who, in return for a house for their families and certain grazing and ploughing rights, were allowed either to share with the landlord the crops which he raised and the increase of his stock, or to a certain amount of work about the farm. Drawing attention to the insecure position of most bywoners, the Transvaal Indigency Commission equated the system to 'the road by which people on the land are reduced from comparative comfort to poverty'.18

The Carnegie Commission of Investigation into the Poor White Question in 1932 singled out as the mainspring of the poor white phenomenon the transition to capitalist production in South African agriculture, in particular during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Providing the impetus for this transformation after 1899 was the South African War. Beer agriculture was devastated by the so-called 'scorched earth' policy during the war: the British army, in an attempt to expunge the sources of food and shelter of Afrikaner guerillas, burned down their crops and farm buildings and herded their dependants into concentration camps. Close to 30,000 farmsteads and 20 villages were destroyed while, in the Transvaal alone, some 75 per cent of livestock were lost.19

The ravages of war forced thousands of bywoners and small landlords to seek a means of livelihood in town after the war drew to a close in 1902. Many bywoners found themselves being replaced by rent-paying tenants, as landlords tried to survive by populating their farms with even larger numbers of cultivating African tenants or, in later years, shifted from 'rentier' to commercial production. With the new colonial state introducing measures to consolidate the dominance of the emerging capitalist farmer, landowners who for years had blocked anti-squatting legislation by 1908 were in the forefront of those lobbying for measures to remove African tenants from their land, thus freeing it for commercial production.20

The exodus of the rural poor was greatly exacerbated by the war and the development of capitalist farming. In the period 1911-21, a decrease of about 35,000 whites was recorded in ninety-four magisterial districts, mainly in the Cape and Orange Free State. By the latter date an annual average of 12,000 whites was leaving the rural areas. The white rural population, if account is taken of natural increase, plunged by close to 40 per cent (250,000 whites) between 1936 and 1951. Not until 1955 did the Agriculture Department note an end to the migration of rural poor whites to the towns.21

Railway expansion did much towards facilitating the rural withdrawal. Numerous branch lines were built to link vast rural areas to the railway system. By 1925 an additional 14,169 km of track was added to the main lines which had joined the mining centres and major ports in 1895, an increase of 250 per cent (compare Figures 7.1 and 7.2 overleaf). The extended railway network, besides opening new markets for remote farming communities, also increased the mobility of rural indigents, especially in the case of the very poor who, having had no means of transport of their own hitherto, now found it possible to migrate in search of more favourable opportunities elsewhere. Soon after the completion of the rail connection between Cape Town and Port Elizabeth in 1913, for instance, a striking proportion of unskilled whites in both these centres was found to have come from the districts served by the new line.22

17 Ibid.
18 Transvaal, Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, par. 1271.
19 In the Orange Free State more than half a million cattle and some three and a half million sheep were lost: O'Meara, D., op. cit., pp. 25-6; in late 1901 the mortality rate in the concentration camps had risen to 344,1,000 - 27,927 inmates, some 22,000 of whom under the age of 16, were said to have perished: Davenport, T.R.H., South Africa, pp. 214-7.
20 The state viewed all such tenancy arrangements as obstacles to the growth of commercial farming (and to the supply of labour to the mines): O'Meara, D., op. cit., pp. 25-6; for the subsequent promotion of capitalist farming: ibid., p. 166; Keegan, T., op. cit., pp. 201-6.
21 Malan, D.F., The retrogression of our people, pp. 8-9, an abridged translation of Dr Malan's article 'De Achteuigang van ons volk' originally published in 'De Burger' in 1917.
23 For instance, a creature of the ostrich leather industry which collapsed in 1913: Berger, D.L., op. cit., p. 45; Carnegie Commission, Report on the Poor White Question, Part I, pp. 76, 186; there were 249 km of track in 1875; 2,928 in 1885; 5,678 in 1895; 9,677 in 1905; 15,384 in 1915 & 19,847 in 1925: from a series of maps by the Department of Lands, CM0100. 100-36.
Figure 7.3 reveals the magnitude of the urban migration of rural Afrikaners. While rural poverty pushed many people off the land and into the towns and cities, others left of their own accord, drawn by the prospect of earning higher incomes. Whereas in 1904 just over 6 per cent of South Africa's Afrikaners lived in towns, by 1936 no less than 44 per cent and by 1960 around 76 per cent were regarded as 'urbanised' for census purposes, nearly half of whom resided in 'dorps' or hamlets. Afrikaners thus became a predominantly urban people. In 1960, they constituted approximately 51 per cent of the white urban population as compared with 44 per cent in 1936.24

Nearly every town in the Transvaal was said to have had a number of poor whites squatting on its outskirts after the war. In the bigger centres poor white settlements had sprouted much earlier, turning the influx of rural indigents into a public issue in the early 1890s. Vrededorp, where most of Johannesburg's poor Afrikaners congregated, came into existence in 1893-96. The first poor white settlement established in Pretoria was that of Goedehoop, in 1896: land was granted at nominal rents, and the residents erected their own houses. Other early poor white areas in Pretoria were Donkey Camp and Meintjes Kop - the latter sprang up in the immediate post-war years.25

Towns, and Johannesburg in particular, were seen as evil places in the folklore of Afrikanerdom, 'the seats of an "English-Jewish" capitalism that was bent on ploughing the Afrikaner under', and 'hotbeds of vice and crime':


A legacy of conflict has coloured the whole process of Afrikaner urbanisation - it was the English who exploited the gold of the Transvaal and waxed rich in the land Afrikaners had opened up for white settlement. The South African War (1889-1902) had accelerated the process of rural dislocation, and forced thousands more impoverished Afrikaners off the land and into the towns. The bitterness and hardship involved in an upheaval of this dimension were, not unnaturally, projected on to the English. It is common for townspeople to have an unfavourable image of rural people, regarding them as slow-witted, ill-educated, gauche, and simple. In South Africa, the urban/rural cleavage among whites largely coincided with the English/Afrikaner cleavage, and the use of those stereotypes therefore often carried a racialist overtone. The reception that many Afrikaner immigrants from the rural areas received in the towns was not a friendly one...26

The poor white invasion converted the towns into the main arena of racial and class-based conflict. As a rule poorly educated, unskilled and unable to speak English, the displaced Afrikaners were confronted with rigid attitudes towards the allocation of jobs that had evolved from the early days of mining. Labour was organised - as was shown in Part I of this study - into a stratum of well-paid, chiefly imported, white artisans who zealously guarded their various trades, on the one hand, and, on the other, an unskilled labour market practically monopolised by a class of low-paid black labourers. Matters were aggravated by the widely held idea that unskilled labour was 'kaffir's work' and derogatory to the dignity of the white man. Poor whiteism, under these conditions, progressively became an unemployment problem.27

White poverty grew steadily worse during the first three decades of the twentieth century. No accurate statistics exist with regard to the actual number of poor whites but for the attempts at assessing the extent of the problem by commissions and individuals throughout this period. The Minister for Agriculture, addressing a Dutch Reformed Church conference held in 1916, estimated the number of poor whites at 106,000. In 1920, the Unemployed Commission put the number of poor whites at 120,000. By the mid-1920s a figure of 150,000 was often quoted. The only estimate claimed to have been based on scientific survey methods was that of the Carnegie Commission, at a total 300,000 for 1930.28


GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Although the poverty of landless whites had aroused concern among certain individuals before this time, public and official cognition of their plight only began to develop after 1890. Awareness of the problem changed to fear of the political consequences of poor whiteism when, towards the end of 1892, J.X. Merriman, Minister of Agriculture for the Cape, found widespread conditions of poverty while touring the eastern portions of the Colony. Addressing Parliament in 1894, he declared that 'all matters sink into insignificance when brought into contrast with the question of keeping the white population of this country up to the standard of a dominant race'.29

David Berger, in his study of the evolution of government involvement in the poor white problem, distinguishes between two 'partially distinct' phases, the first lasting from 1892 to 1914, followed by a transitional period (the war years from 1914-18), and the second lasting from 1918 to 1934.

The creation of a separate and superior system of compulsory primary education for whites formed the centre-piece of early government policy. It was the disclosure by the Cape Education Commission that less than a third of eligible white, school age children regularly attended school in 1891 which spurred Government into action. New school laws were passed, teacher training programmes were launched and hundreds of new schools were built for white children, particularly in the rural areas. Primary education was made compulsory in 1905. Other policies included free meals, subsidised school fees and transportation, the creation of central boarding schools and industrial schools, most of which were adopted in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in due course.30

A second distinct feature of early government policy was the creation of a number of land settlements or 'farm colonies' in irrigatable areas where displaced rural whites were taught intensive farming techniques, a policy designed to stabilise and improve family life for the benefit of the children. The first such settlement, Kakamas, was begun in 1899 on land along the Orange River in the northern Cape. It was financed by Government and managed by the Dutch Reformed Church. Settlers were given the use of plots (but no title), built their own homes and constructed the necessary irrigation works themselves. Selection, close supervision, discipline, religion and compulsory education for children formed an integral part of this settlement.31

30 The number of schools for poor whites in the Cape alone rose from 800 in 1892 to 1,550 in 1899; by which date almost twice as many children were enrolled than in 1891. For more detail: Berger, D.L., op. cit., pp. 66-95.
31 Kakamas had 3 schools in 1906 and about 400 settlers (3,000 people) by 1913: ibid., pp. 108-14; for more details on its origin and organisation: Greyling, P.F., Die Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerk en Armesorg, pp. 232-70; Hopkins, H.C., Kakamas - uit die wildernis 'n lusfok, passim.
FIGURE 7.4 Humble beginnings: an early Kakamas settler's thatched hartebeest dwelling built of reed and plastered with clay and chaff (CAD: R577, no date)

FIGURE 7.5 After the harvest, Kakamas (CAD: R576, no date)

FIGURE 7.6 Two later examples of houses at the Kakamas settlement, probably late 1920s (CAD: R559 & 560, both undated)
Kakamas became the model for other land settlements instituted by church and state after 1902, though none of these met with the same rate of success and acclaim: in the Orange Free State, the Kopjes and Goedemoed Settlements begun in 1909, and in the Transvaal, the Burgher Land Settlements at Potchefstroom, Heidelberg, Standerton, Middelburg and North Pretoria created by the post-war Repatriation Department in 1902, and the church settlement of De Lagersdrift established near Middelburg in 1907. The Transvaal Indigency Commission, while not recommending the discontinuation of this 'back to the land' policy altogether, promoted the idea of land settlements as a form of charitable enterprise. It advised the government no longer to defray the costs of such undertakings, stressing the limited scope thereof: 'They merely enable, as the result of the expenditure of much time and money, a small number of people who are already indigents to become self-supporting citizens.'

Another feature of government policy before 1914 was the creation of temporary employment - chiefly in the form of relief works in road and railway construction - to tide indigents over during periods of severe trade depression like that of 1906-08. This included replacing black labour with white on normally authorised jobs. Publication of the 1908 Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, as the next section illustrates, led to an important shift in the emphasis of state labour policy. Various government departments - the Railways, Police, Prisons and Defence Force - began recruiting local men, rather than immigrant workers, to fill vacancies on their permanent staff. Special night schools and on-the-job training programmes were also initiated to enable recruits to attain higher educational qualifications and skills.

A fourth feature of early government policy concerned the introduction of a number of social welfare programmes, the most important of which aimed to help orphaned, abandoned and neglected children. Special homes, schools and industrial training were provided and, in 1913, a Children's Protection Act was passed.

Most of the early policies were continued during the World War I period, 1914-18. In addition to the provision of primary education - which by 1914 catered for 80 per cent of white school age youths - a system of Juvenile Affairs Boards was initiated to guide school leavers into the best possible skilled employment, supplemented by an apprenticeship system to allow for their attainment of marketable industrial skills.

Despite general acknowledgement of its limited scope, the policy of land settlements persisted not only through the war years but well into the 1930s. Both state and church continued to advocate a form of 'closer settlement' on the land to facilitate the training of pastoralists as intensive agriculturalists. Among the later settlements established by church and state were those of Olifantshoek (1914) and Wildernis Heights (1919) outside George, Ohrigstad (1924), Olifantsrivier and Zanddrift (1926), Kanon Island and Mamagalieskraal (1927), Karos and Boegoeberg (1930). A few wage settlements, i.e. mainly forestry plantations in which settlers worked at fixed wages, were founded between 1917-26. Settlements of both kinds still in existence by 1930 accommodated around 2,200 families in all.

Like the 'back to the land' movement, the policies to assist juvenile school leavers and neglected children were continued after 1918, as were the efforts to complete the system of primary education for all white children.

The immediate post-war years brought increasing hardships for the rural poor in the form of the severe and widespread drought of 1919, intensifying the rural exodus and adding to the large numbers of white unemployed living in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in town and city slums. The 1918 influenza epidemic, the effects of which were most devastating among poor whites, propelled Government materially to expand measures aimed at improving the living conditions of poor whites living in multi-racial city slums. A Public Health Act and a Housing Act were passed towards this end in 1919 and 1920 respectively. Raised once again was the spectre of the erosion of white supremacy. As the Housing Committee appointed in 1919 to investigate whether or not the state should assume some responsibility for housing the urban poor asserted: 'The poor whites ... are living in the most degrading and undesirable conditions in many towns, and having regard to the preponderance of the black population and the importance, as all believe, of maintaining the prestige of the white race, this class of people cannot be permitted to remain as they are, but should be compelled to re-establish themselves in what must be their proper standing in the social scale.'

Based on the report of the 1919 Housing Committee, the Housing Act No. 35 of 1920 established the foundations of public housing in South Africa: it provided for the setting up of a Central Housing Board to provide loans from central government to local authority for the construction of dwellings for people of 'limited means.'


i.e. with a total monthly income not exceeding £50: Union of South Africa, op. cit., par. 3.
When, by 1930, these provisions had failed to ease the problem of the slums, the principle of subsidised housing was introduced, with the inauguration of a scheme for granting sub-economic loans towards the rehousing of poor whites from slums. The Slums Act passed in 1934 spawned a succession of programmes whereby the poor white slums were largely eradicated by the end of the 1940s. Like the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, which for the first time made local authorities responsible for the housing in segregated 'locations' of their black 'labour requirements', the Slums Act confirmed the current ideology of housing reform through segregation, i.e. the removal of blacks 'from close residential association with poor whites'.

The centre-piece of the period 1918 to 1934, however, was the greatly augmented policies of job creation through industrial growth and government provision, the basis for which was laid by the expansion of manufacturing during the war. Job creation by the State took the form of relief schemes introduced directly into government agencies, some of which were paid for by the Department of Labour. Subsidised employment, as will be shown in the Section 7.2, was begun in the Railways in 1932 - it was later extended to embrace Land Schemes such as anti-soil erosion schemes, the eradication of jointed cactus and noxious weeds, and rural rehabilitation and housing schemes. Among the most important unsubsidised schemes were the 'civilised labour' policy as practised by the Railways, parastatal jobs, irrigation works and forestry settlements.41

It was the poor white panic of the early 1920s, at a time when the economy suffered the effects of a world-wide depression, which invoked this quantitative change in state policy. In 1921 the Report of the Unemployment Commission revealed that, while the white population grew at a rate of 5.1 per cent between 1916 and 1920, the number of poor whites increased at a rate of 11.6 per cent. Public fear was compounded by the brutal way in which the white miners' strike of 1922 was suppressed, which cost the Smuts Government the 1924 election.42

The growing determination of the State after 1920 to eradicate the poor white problem altogether is well captured in Figures 7.7 and 7.8 (overleaf). State expenditure on unemployment relief measures, preventative and curative, is depicted in Figure 7.7 as a percentage of the annual budget, 1920-39. Total relief expenditure encompassed an incredible 15.8 per cent of the annual budget by 1934.43

Equally revealing is the estimated total employment created by the Government through direct job creation schemes as portrayed in Figure 7.8. While subsidised and non-subsidised relief measures both absorbed a fair number of poor whites by the mid- and later 1920s, the Railways remained the biggest employer of unskilled poor white labour by far. The situation changed dramatically towards the end of the Great Depression of 1929-32: in the latter year the number employed in subsidised works soared by 99 per cent (from 7,943 to 15,768) and that in the non-subsidised by a prodigious 213 per cent (from 6,982 to 21,856).44

The upward trend was maintained in 1933, when the number of poor white males engaged in the various State relief measures totalled 58,751. As Abedian and Standish point out, this suggests that the State had brought considerable relief to the plight of many poor whites even before the onset of the post-1933 economic recovery. Another astonishing statistic revealed in their study of state involvement in the poor white saga is the proportion of relief work employment relative to the total employment provided by central government: at 39 per cent of the overall figure of 98,000 for 1939.45

40 Berger, D.L., op. cit., pp. 451-2; Union of South Africa, Report of the Central Housing Board, 1940, par. 5; the Slums Act for the first time allowed for the financing of 'location schemes' for Africans by way of sub-economic interest loans (but only on the basis of slum clearance): Pigott, M.J.D., Housing for black workers in South Africa, pp. 21-2; also Davenport, T.R.H., The beginnings of urban segregation in South Africa, passim.

41 Abedian, I. & B. Standish, An economic enquiry into the poor white saga, pp. 41-7; the list of industrialisation measures included the introduction of tariff manipulation in 1921, the Wage Act of 1925 and the Iron and Steel Act of 1928: Berger, D.L., op. cit., pp. 312-91.

42 For more detail on the events of the years leading up to the 1924 election: Berger, D.L., op. cit., pp. 189-202.

43 For more detail on the introduction in 1920 and subsequent use of the 'Unemployment Vote' to finance the various relief works: Abedian, I. & B. Standish, op. cit., pp. 56-8.

44 Not 313% as quoted in ibid., p. 48. Figure 7.8 reflects only the number of poor whites in state employment at any one time, and not the number absorbed by private or public sector after having been trained to a semi-skilled status, the sum of which would represent the cumulative stock of poor whites assisted by the state - no data exist on this rate of labour turnover: ibid., p. 47.

Prior to 1907, Railway involvement with the needy section of the white population was in the main restricted to providing employment in the form of relief works to tide indigents over in times of depression. Isolated instances of the substitution of white for black labour in manual labour did occur, though. In the Uitenhage workshops of the Cape Railways, for example, the growing tide of white indigents into the town during the later 1890s resulted in the replacement of white workers in lieu of black - some 254 unskilled whites were thus engaged by 1906.48

In the Transvaal, the Central South African Railways began to experiment in the use of whites for purely labouring work in the closing days of the war. The ranks of white labour were bolstered when, at the end of 1903, the Milner regime decided to curtail its post-war relief works and consigned the men involved to the Railways - around 1,500 of these men were taken on as labourers on the building of the Klerksdorp-Fourteen Streams line. Failure of a CSAR scheme utilising imported British navvies during 1903 and 1904 led to the increased drafting of local white men as labourers.49

The return of depression in 1906 gave rise to a decision by the CSAR to replace a number of black labourers by whites, principally at Volksrust, while nearly 700 men were engaged on the construction of the Kimberley-Bloemfontein line. Enlisted on a piecework system of co-operative contracts, the men worked in small gangs of about six assigned to do specific sections of the works at schedule rates - one was appointed as ganger and acted as trustee for his gang. What initially was intended as a relief measure became defined policy with a resolution by the CSAR in 1907 - at the instance of the newly elected Transvaal Government - in future to employ white men 'on all new construction works and on maintenance works at stations and depots on open lines', classes of work hitherto performed almost entirely by blacks.50

The 1908 Report of the Indigency Commission served as a fillip to the new policy. Arguing that the 'virtual monopoly of the unskilled labour market by the coloured races, and their gradual encroachment, as they become more educated, on the skilled and semi-skilled fields of labour' could be prevented if the white man ceases 'to regard unskilled labour as being beneath him', the Commission propounded the creation of a class of unskilled white workers and exhorted Government to show the way.51

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46 Transvaal, Indigency Commission, par. 62.
48 Cape of Good Hope, Report of the Select Committee on the Poor White Question, pp. 41-2; also Berger, D.L., op. cit., pp. 122-3, 128: the Cape Railways also hired a number of poor whites for construction work as a relief measure in 1904 and 1905.
49 Transvaal, Indigency Commission, par. 69; also S.A.R., Report on unskilled European workers, par. 10.
51 'The position of the white man can only be made secure when there is a white working class upon which a part of the productive enterprise of the country depends': Transvaal, Indigency Commission, par. 88, also 62, 79, 88, 103, 161, 169, 181, 184,
After 1908, the Railway Administration steadily expanded its white labour policy. A total of 2,774 white labourers was employed on the open lines and on construction work by December 1909. A special White Labour Department was created to look after the interests of the workers, with a white inspector for each district. Numbering 4,022, white workers accounted for approximately one-seventh of the total labour force, white and black, after amalgamation of the CSAR and the Cape and Natal Railways to form the South African Railways and Harbours at the time of Union.52

The number of white labourers in regular employment of the amalgamated Railways remained fairly constant after 1910, averaging at just under 4,500 per annum for the period up to 1920. But while these figures display little variance, they obscure the fact that the number of workers employed on open lines showed a steady rise during these years, a labouring grade described as ‘the permanent side of the railways service’ by Sir W.W. Hoy, first General Manager of the amalgamated Railways.53

Improved conditions of employment for white labour were introduced in November 1911, under Special Notice No. 539. Starting at 3s. 6d. per day, the new scale of pay rose in increments of 6d. after every six months, up to a maximum of 5s. 0d. The only qualifications demanded of candidates were that they had to be between the ages of 18 and 40, of ‘good character and physique’, and ‘fit to undertake the work required’, i.e. using ‘pick, shovel and barrow on earthworks in connection with the maintenance of the permanent way and lines to be newly constructed’. Other conditions included the provision of free quarters where available, travel concessions, four days’ paid leave per annum, as well as free medical attendance and medicines for workers and their families.

Payment at the rate of time and a quarter for all weekly overtime, and time and a half for Sunday work, was subsequently granted. As the result of an endeavour to make the terms and conditions of employment more widely known in the country districts, the Railways were inundated with applications, some 1,400 in all, by the end of 1911.54

Few changes occurred in the terms of employment during the next couple of years. Improved wages were adopted in May 1917, followed by a substantial increase in October 1919 and another in January 1920.55

A noteworthy change in the status of white labourer accompanied the wage revision of 1920, when they were placed on the same footing as ordinary graded employees for all purposes, including leave privileges and membership of the Superannuation Fund. With the onset of depression, however, the higher rates of pay, coupled with a 10 per cent rise in the number of men employed in the financial year 1919-20 (to 5,045), obliged the transfer of white labourers from branch to main lines in 1922, as their retention on branch lines at the new wages impinged upon the financing of such lines. It was decided at the same time not to fill wastages in the ranks of white labour.56

By 1922, the number of white labourers had dropped to 3,703, and at the end of the following year to 3,220. The employment of white labour suffered a radical change in April 1923 with the decision henceforth to engage this class of labour on a purely casual basis - from day to day in accordance with the requirements of the work - and at rates of pay 30 per cent lower in the case of eighteen-year olds and 40 per cent in the case of twenty-year olds. The turnabout also involved the withdrawal of Railway privileges for casual workers, although those labourers who had joined before April 1923 were allowed to retain the old rates of pay and service conditions.57

The depression also led to the creation of a relief work system in November 1920, at the request of the Government. Between the date of inception and July 1923, the various Railway relief works provided employment for a total of 8,019 indigent men.58

THE POLICY OF ‘CIVILISED LABOUR’59

A circular issued by Government on 31 October 1924, in which all departments were enjoined to spare no effort in giving effect to the new policy of ‘civilised labour’, led to the revocation of the conditions introduced in April 1923. As from 25 November all white labourers were again entitled to appointment to the regular staff and enjoyed the same same privileges, but at a wage scale starting at a minimum of 3s. per day and between 38 and 46 per cent lower for the different age categories than those of 1920. The new wages were supplemented by free quarters or an allowance in lieu thereof to a prescribed scale for the different districts.60

54 The wage scale for the Cape was 6d. lower: S.A.R., Report on unskilled European workers, par. 15-9; on the open lines average earnings rose from 4s. 3d. per day in 1911 to around 5s. per day in 1918, by which time married men received an additional war bonus of 2s. 5d. per day: Annual Reports of the General Manager, 1911-18.
55 The latter decision was negated in April 1924: S.A.R., Report on unskilled European workers, par. 20-2, 24; Annual Report of the General Manager, UG 66-20, p. 78.
56 The new rates were: 20 years and under - 4s. 6d. per day; others: 5s. 6d. per day, rising to 6s. after 6 months: ibid., par. 23-4, also Annexure G.
58 i.e. the labour rendered by persons whose standard of living conforms to the standard generally recognised as tolerable from the usual European standpoint: Official Year Book of the Union of South Africa, 1927-28, as cited in Ahmed, J. & B. Standish, op. cit., p. 197.
59 Ranging from 1s. 0d. to 1s. 9d. for married men, and from 6d. to 10d. for singles: S.A.R., Report on unskilled European workers, par. 26.
While the number of regular railworkers gradually decreased in the period 1939-46, the annual totals for casual white labourers, i.e. those employed on a day-to-day basis, rose from 3,521 to 6,228. Casual workers were usually taken on to replace regular railworkers on leave or absent through indisposition, or to meet emergencies caused by 'sudden rushes of traffic' with which the regular staff of railworkers was unable to cope. A smaller number of casuals was hired intermittently to deal with depot traffic which often fluctuated considerably from day to day.62

Wage revisions after 1924 included a 6d. increase to 5s. 6d. per day in the maximum rate of pay applicable to the white labourer in 1928, followed by another in 1935. In 1938, the value of free quarters was incorporated in the wage rates, creating separate wage scales for married and single men of similar experience. The designation 'white labourer' or 'European labourer' was amended to 'railworker' from the same date. Further wage amendments were introduced in 1942, 1944 and 1945, by which time the commencing rate for a junior was 6s. per day, rising to a maximum of 11s. 6d. and 10s. 6d. for married and single men respectively.63

The wide-ranging conditions of service applicable to railworkers, both regular and casual, in 1945 were as follows: overtime payment at time and one-third for weekdays and double time for Sundays and public holidays; twelve days' paid leave per annum; substantial sick pay subject to certain requirements; free overalls and boots; refunds under a rent rebate scheme if occupying a private house the rent of which exceeds one-fifth of a worker's wages; participation of regular railworkers in the Superannuation Fund and in a house ownership scheme under which low-rate interest loans were made available to enable servants to purchase their own homes; membership of a Sick Fund (for which a small contribution was levied) entitled workers and their families to free medical, hospital and specialist attention; travel concessions; the usual cost-of-living allowance64 and free school books for children of railworkers involved in a transfer. Railworkers and their families in addition had recourse to extensive welfare and social services, special clubs providing vegetable and fruit at cost, state-aided milk and butter clubs (free milk for children and butter at privileged rates), regular baby, ante- and post-natal clinics, a midwifery service, etc.65

![Graph showing the number of white labourers (railworkers) in regular employment of the South African Railways in relation to ordinary white graded staff, 1910-46, as at 31 December of each year, with a peak in 1939 at 15,181 and a decline to 12,521 in March 1946.](image)

The effect of the civilised labour policy on the number of white labourers employed by the Railways can be seen in Figure 7.9. A rise of 98 per cent was recorded even before the close of 1924, when 6,363 men were in regular employment, and more than double that again by 1929, at 12,906: the ratio of white labourer to white graded members of staff at the later date was 1:3.3, compared with 1:10.4 in 1923. When during the Great Depression of 1929-33 the graded staff was reduced by 17 per cent (from 42,116 to 34,809), the corresponding cutback in the white labour force was only 6 per cent. By 1934, the white labourer/graded staff ratio amounted to 1:2.8, with white labourers constituting no less than 26.4 per cent of the white Railway staff establishment. The number of white labourers in the Railway service peaked in 1939, at 15,181, after which date a steady decline set in to reach 12,521 in March 1946.

Far from the result of cutbacks in the white labour establishment on the part of the Railway Administration, the reduction in the number of railworkers after 1939 was due to an acute shortage of white labour, first as a result of war conditions and later because of mounting difficulties experienced in recruiting on account of the rapid expansion of manufacturing in the post-war years. By 1946, severe shortages were encountered in all the principal railworker categories - permanent way maintenance gangs, mechanical workshops and goods depots - forcing the Railway Administration 'with the greatest reluctance' to engage black workers temporarily to fill 3,111 of the 5,618 existing vacancies in jobs normally reserved for railworkers.61

61 In June 1946, railworker distribution for the respective categories was 27%, 21% & 19%; the remaining 33% were employed on general station duties, etc.: ibid., par. 87-9, 91, 106, 118, 136.

62 Ibid., par. 83-5; the employment figures used in Figure 7.9 exclude casual labourers.


64 Intended 'to represent generally reasonable compensation for all the disabilities incidental to living in certain areas as compared primarily with the coast area, the practice of paying allowances (local, climatic, house, marriage or a combination of these) to all Railway servants over and above the standard remuneration was in operation in some form or another since 1899. In later years the high cost of living became the principal determining factor, and in 1913 house rent was singled out as the only factor of real consequence. For more detail: S.A.R., Supplement to the Report of the General Manager, UG 46-14, ill, passim.

65 For a complete list of privileges: S.A.R., Report on unskilled European workers, par. 53-77.

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Another important development occasioned by the Great Depression was the policy of subsidised labour introduced in 1932. White labourers, recruited and subsidised by the Labour Department, were utilised on various works such as the construction of new lines. When, early in 1934, a comprehensive scheme of railway improvements was sanctioned, arrangements were made for the heavy earthworks on the Natal main line to the north of Newcastle to be carried out with subsidised white labour. These workers, together with their families, were accommodated in model villages in the vicinity of the works. The story of how these portable Railway model villages came to outshine even the famous settlement of Kakamas in what they achieved in terms of the social and economic rehabilitation of poor white families is recounted in Chapter 9.

An artificial position

It was readily acknowledged from the onset that the policy of substituting white for black workers was difficult to defend on economic grounds. At a difference per head of 2s. per day in white/black wages in 1910, the increased expenditure on open lines alone amounted to an estimated £45,000 per annum, even if allowing for 'presumed differences in numbers, efficiency and cost of supervision'. A figure of £90,000 was quoted for 1913, and £300,000 for improvements in the conditions of white labourers introduced in 1924. But it is impossible to ascertain the true additional cost of the white labour policy, for the Railways ceased to 'maintain separate figures showing the cost of employing European labour ... or of the additional expense entailed in the replacement of non-European by European labour' due to the embarrassing high cost of the civilised labour policy by the late 1920s. The added cost involved was in the main shouldered by rail users, as it was charged against the Capital Accounts of the lines concerned, that is apart from a portion borne by the Unemployment Vote up to the end of 1924.

Higher wages were not the only drawback of the white labour policy. White workers were unaccustomed to heavy manual labour and to the discipline of continuous effort. It was believed that, given 'time and patience', they would acquire both, but until such time the process called for 'the artificial support which only a Government Department could furnish'. While it is debatable whether or not white labourers were more efficient in relation to black, they were regarded as far less docile and more difficult to manage, and exhibited a 'natural tendency ... to agitate and effort. It was believed that, given 'time and patience', they would acquire both, but

The emphasis on rehabilitation of both the worker and his family further added to the cost of the white labour policy. Over and above the extensive privileges outlined earlier, the provision of adequate housing - as will be shown in Chapter 8 - was seen as crucial to the success of the policy. The Railway Administration had also played a by no means insignificant role in the upgrading of poor white education in the Cape where, between 1897 and 1909, it part-financed and managed 2 boarding- and 37 day-schools. There were no railway schools in the other provinces, but 'every endeavour' was made 'to provide school facilities for children of white labourers' by locating parents living in outlying districts closer to schools and providing transport to and from schools. An abnormally high wastage was another major factor contributing to the high cost of the white labour experiment - 71 per cent in 1914, 69 per cent in 1915, and, in the relief schemes of 1923, 81 per cent. These figures were put down to, among other things, the number of unsuitable men offering their employment and the fact that many young men continued to regard railway work as a means of tiding over periods of depression in other employments. Some members of construction gangs arriving at the new lines disappeared even before the work was allotted, others absconded after a day or two or simply were unfit to do the work. It was the introduction of the model village system which brought the construction engineers' problems to an end.

ABSORPTION INTO THE GRADED ESTABLISHMENT

But the experiment on unskilled work was not an end in itself. The object was to utilize this work as a training ground and to reclaim the best of the labour for normal grades of industry, and in this respect the experiment has been conspicuously successful and has rendered a great service to the country.

After Union, white labourers not only came to be accepted as a group of staff forming an integral part of Railway organisation, but the white labour grade was increasingly viewed as 'a gateway of promotion to normal grades of railway employment to men who have had no industrial training', the 'natural reservoir' from which to fill vacancies in employee-graded positions.

The promotion of suitably qualified men from the ranks of the white labour force to graded positions in the Railways was recognised as one of the chief objectives of the white labour policy from a very early stage. In order to extend the policy to include the large proportion of white labourers debarred from promotion by lack of education, the Administration opened night schools at many of the principal centres. Five schools were in operation by 1912, with plans for 10 others. The cost of night schooling was borne by the Railways, except in the Cape Province and Orange Free State where a portion was defrayed by the relevant Education Departments. The scheme of providing for the education of white labourers was extended in the course of time. By 1930, it was reported that facilities existed 'for all white labourers to improve their education, either by attendance at continuation classes, or, in the case of those men stationed at the smaller centres, through the medium of correspondence courses'.

Upon having sat the required examination, the men who passed were promoted to graded positions as soon as possible. 'There is no reason why men should remain long in the white labour grade', wrote the General Manager in 1919. And later: 'Every facility is afforded these men to qualify for promotion to higher grades carrying better emoluments'. By the end of 1913, a total of 2,235 men had been promoted into the regular service, a substantial proportion of which through the agency of night school. By 1927 the total number of promotions had grown to 13,146. Data in respect of the grades to which men from the white labour ranks were promoted are not available, and the principal grades for the 501 men promoted in 1914 will have to suffice. They were: shunters (105), sub-gangers (68), engine-cleaners (65), porters (33), ganpers (32), checkers (29), truck repairers (13), numberrakers and pumpers (9 each), guards (8), foremen and firemen (7 each), motor-drivers and timekeepers (4 each), ticket examiners and carriage and wagon examiners (3 each), clerks (3), storemen (2) and telegraphists (1). The category of relief station master was the most senior among the principal grades of promotion in 1924.

In the early 1920s, concurrent with the growing concern about job opportunities for school leavers outlined earlier, the Railways began paying 'particular regards' to the policy in July 1937, April 1938 and April 1939, to enable Group B labourers who had joined the Railway service before those dates and met with the requisite educational qualifications, also to be considered for appointment to positions which had hitherto been filled by selection from the Group A.

A system of training for youths - the probationer scheme - was introduced in April 1927. The probationer scheme arose out of the recommendations made in late 1926 by the Organisation and Development Committee appointed to investigate 'the wider and more advantageous utilisation of civilised labour' in the Railway service. Under this scheme youths received intensive training as probationers for periods ranging from six months to two years, whereafter they were promoted to learner or junior positions in preparation for appointment later to graded posts. Subsequent vacancies in the graded establishment were to be filled, not just by way of suitable applicants for employment as in previous years, but by the promotion of suitably qualified probationers as well. Adult labourers already in the Railway service remained eligible for appointment to such posts provided they possessed the requisite educational qualifications.

Another crucial change in the white labour policy occurred in October 1934. Under the conditions set out in Special Notice No. 2234, all future appointments to positions in the employee grade, apart from certain grades in the artisan pay schedule, apprentices and a section of nautical grades, were to be confined to the promotion of 'individuals selected from the ranks of white labourers possessing the necessary educational and other qualifications'. This policy seriously affected the probationer scheme as a means of recruitment and led to its abolition in March 1940.

The new system had as its main object 'to ensure that youths suitably qualified for advancement and keen on making the Railways their career, would receive promotion to graded positions within a reasonable period'. White labourers were divided into two groups: Group A, comprising suitable unmarried recruits in possession of at least a Std VI school certificate and not over 21 years old (22 in the case of matriculants), and Group B, those between 21 and 35 years old at time of engagement and of whom no educational qualifications were required. Used on purely labouring work, such as in maintenance gangs, goods sheds, stores depots and mechanical workshops, Group B labourers, upon passing a departmental modified educational test equivalent to Std VI, were eligible for appointment to a limited range of lower grades only.

An acute shortage in the number of qualified probationers enforced departures from the policy in July 1937, April 1938 and April 1939, to enable Group B labourers who had joined the Railway service before those dates and met with the requisite educational qualifications, also to be considered for appointment to positions which had hitherto been filled by selection from the Group A.

74 2,182 of the 10,750 white labourers in Railway employ by March 1925 were youths: S.A.R., Annual Report of the General Manager, VG 50-'25, pp. 55, 116; UG 42-'26, p. 17.
75 Ibid., UG 34-'27, p. 106; S.A.R., Report on unskilled European workers, par. 28-9; for more detail: Union of South Africa, Statement by Minister of Railways and Harbours in connection with the proposals of the Organisation and Development Committee, April 1927.
77 e.g. gatekeeper, washoutman, squad ganger, etc.: ibid., par. 32-3, Annexure F, pp. 40-1 (full list).
78 Ibid., par. 34-5.
The Committee went on to recommend the abrogation of the provisions relating to the promotion of Group B railworkers. The Railway Administration was no longer to prescribe general age or educational barriers in recruiting staff for training purposes. A grade of adult trainee was to be created to complement the Trainee Scheme under which junior qualified railworkers (Group A) were gradually absorbed after October 1944: 'The appellation of trainee would be descriptive of the conception that such men are in the process of being trained for more responsible work ...

Occupational immobility

Though readily promoted from the unskilled labour grade (Staff Group 6), most Afrikaners found their way up the railway hierarchy obstructed. Entry into the well-paid staff groups, i.e. the English-dominated salaried staff (Staff Group 1: clerks, station masters, district inspectors, welfare officers, etc.), artisan staff (Group 2) and locomotive engineers and firemen (Group 3), was resisted by the eight railway unions then in existence. The bulk of promoted Afrikaners was employed in positions of low status and low pay in the running and operating staff (Group 4: ticket examiners, conductors, guards and locomotive cleaners) or in grades comprising 'other daily and monthly paid employees' (Staff Group 5: load checkers, station foremen, signallers, carriage and wagon inspectors, shamters, gangers, grain elevator personnel).

The proportional distribution of Afrikaners in the different staff groups is difficult to ascertain, but the Director of Census, in his Report on the Census of 1926, stated that Afrikaners formed 71 per cent of the railworker class, but only made up 38 per cent of the class of conductor and 8 per cent of Railway officials, station masters, etc.

Resentment at the discrimination against Afrikaners in the salaried staff culminated in the formation of the Spoorbond (Railway League) in March 1933. When it was refused recognition by the Administration, the Spoorbond solicited the support of the mass of Afrikaner employees by agitating for the continuation of the civilised labour policy and against the 'baasskap' (paramountcy) of 10 per cent of the staff (English-speakers) over 80 per cent of the Railway staff (Afrikaans-speakers). The cultural and economic redemption of the Afrikaner employee became one of its chief objectives. Representing 29,000 out of the 77,000 strong Railway staff establishment in 1942, the Spoorbond was finally granted recognition by the Railway Administration.

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79 No data could be found for the period 1944-48 other than the number of appointments to the position of probationer clerk, which totalled 4,328 until March 1949.
The development of Railway housing policy and practice relating to white labourers and their families in the period 1900 to 1948 forms the subject of enquiry in Chapter 8. Reference will be made to the housing arrangements for graded staff groups, especially those lower grades in the Railway hierarchy (Groups 4 & 5) progressively dominated by men promoted from the railworker establishment. It will further be shown how, in later years, the Administration looked to design and planning in an attempt to overcome the so-called 'Railway Camp complex', i.e. the association of railwayfolk, then mostly Afrikaans-speakers, with 'living on the wrong side of the tracks' in towns.

8.1 Railway housing provision for white labourers, 1900-30

In his report for the past year the White Labour Superintendent again draws attention to the importance of providing suitable accommodation, the lack of which, he states, constitutes the greatest drawback to the employment of a much larger number of white labourers, as experience shows that men will not remain in the Service for any length of time if bad accommodation - or none at all - is provided.\(^1\)

The Railway Administration pronounced itself 'fully alive to the necessity of providing for the increased comfort of white labourers and their families' from the earliest years of the white labour policy. Far from a mere adjunct to the policy of substituting white labour for black, the provision of adequate housing accommodation was singled out as 'the principal inducement to the men to settle down in the service.'\(^2\) Security of tenure offered a means of turning to good account an otherwise unviable experiment. Only if a substantial proportion of white labourers could be persuaded to make the railways their career would the white labour grade serve as a training ground where workers gained first-hand experience in railway operation, thereby creating what later was referred to as 'a large pool of men' upon which the Administration was able selectively to 'requisition in the filling of the many vacancies in the graded establishment caused by normal wastage and the rapid expansion' encountered from time to time.\(^3\)

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2 Ibid., UG 39-'11, p. 48.
The railway cottages illustrated in Figures 8.2 to 8.8 are selected examples dating from the NZASM era. Formed in 1887 to build the Pretoria-Delagoa Bay line, the Nederlandsch Zuid-Afrikaansche Spoorweg-Maatschappij (Netherlands South African Railway Company) was liquidated in the later years of the South African War after the takeover of the railway networks of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State by the Imperial Military Railways. This explains why most of the NZASM drawings bear the official imprint of the IMR, dated either 29 or 31 December 1900. Many of these houses were, however, designed and built in the mid-1890s.

The portable cottage types pictured in Figure 8.2 were for bridgemen and gangers. Identical cottages in stone or brick-nogged wood-and-iron were erected at many of the 25 stations established on the Transvaal section of the Delagoa Bay line, their rear lean-tos sometimes closed in to serve as bedrooms. Senior railway officials such as station masters lived in more elaborate dwellings - Figures 8.3 and 8.4 show how even these were derived from one standard design adapted to suit different requirements.

5 An attempt to connect the Transvaal with the coast without passing over British soil, this line was completed in 1894, 2 years after that of the Johannesburg-Cape Town railway, due to financial and other problems. Scores of workers died - it was said that there was a corpse buried under every sleeper from Waterval-Boven to Komatipoor: S.A.R., A century of transport, pp. 7-10.

6 As indicated by Railway rental records as well as the few NZASM drawings that are dated.

7 These cottages were often cladded with corrugated iron: SATS 313P/3, 24, 35, & 42.
Accommodation for workmen employed on the Delagoa Bay line, many of whom were imported from the Netherlands, took the form of rows of rooms for singles and small cottages for married men. The back-to-back single quarters depicted in Figure 8.5 were built at Komatipoort near the Transvaal-Portuguese border. These examples feature the continuous verandah and ventilated double roof used in the warm and humid low country of the Eastern Transvaal, an area plagued by fever. Verandahs were usually enclosed with mosquito-proof gauze.

The combined married and single quarters provided for the two classes of workmen on the highlands are illustrated in Figure 8.6. Built in 1895, the pretty single quarters at Waterval-Boven - the Railway administrative centre for the Eastern Transvaal - were later converted into married quarters (see Figures 8.7 and 8.8 overleaf).

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8 Men of 20 different nationalities were engaged on this project, with Dutchmen forming the largest and Afrikaners the second largest groups: Du Toit, P., Report of the National Conference on the Poor White Problem, p. 46.

9 The verandah was not a lean-to structure, but an extension of the main roof which was capped by a well-ventilated second roof: see Figure 8.18, vide infra, p. 238.

10 A unique example of a pioneering railway town, Waterval-Boven not only housed the regional offices of the Railways for many years, but was administered by Railways until 1946, when a local authority was created: Ploeger, J., 'Voorgenome spoorweg-restourasiewerksaamhede te Waterval-Boven', Simon van der Stel Foundation Bulletin, 28: 24-7, September 1973.
FIGURE 8.7 Proposed conversion of single into married quarters, Waterval-Boven, 1905. The original building was erected in 1895 and a smaller version of the quarters depicted below (after 313P/13, June 1905).

FIGURE 8.8 A recent photograph of one of Waterval-Boven’s several stone semi-detached married quarters - like the larger example above, this building dates back to 1895. Railway rental records show that some of these old semis have since been converted into single-family bungalows.

Soon after the Transvaal and Orange Free State railway lines were handed back to the Civil Government in July 1902, the Central South African Railways, forerunner of the South African Railways, came into being. It was the abandonment of the experimental use of imported British navvies by the CSAR in 1903 and 1904 which gave rise to the utilisation of local indigent whites as labourers on the railways.

The portable quarters shown in Figures 8.9 and 8.10 were removed from the open lines during the depression of 1906-08 and re-erected in bigger centres like Germiston and Pretoria where housing was becoming a severe problem. These would have been the type of structures adapted by the CSAR for use by white labourers in 1908 and 1909. The new tenements built for white labourers in 1909 and referred to earlier were almost all located in Germiston and Pretoria. While most members of staff occupying departmental quarters were required to pay schedule rentals determined on a floor-area basis, white labourers were provided with free accommodation, a concession usually reserved for employee grades such as ganger, platelayer, station foreman and station master, largely as compensation for being stationed in remote localities.

The spacious residence of the Germiston station master illustrated in Figure 8.11 was built at the height of the post-war economic boom and shortly before the onset of the 1906 depression.
HOUSING FOR WHITE LABOURERS, 1910-19

Railway housing assistance in the early years of the Union was continued in the same ad hoc fashion as before. Additional departmental quarters were erected when and where necessary. While no systematic attempt was made to provide all white labourers with suitable accommodation, the fact that no less than 959 out of a total of 1,974 new houses built for white railway staff between 1910 and 1919 were for white labourers speaks volumes: white labourers comprised an average of 13.6 per cent of the white Railway staff establishment during this period. The corresponding capital expenditure on the provision of new quarters for white labourers by the amalgamated South African Railways amounted to £157,559.11

A total of 136 new tenements for white labourers was erected in the first twelve months after Union, 71 on the Pretoria Division and 65 on the Johannesburg Division (see Figure 8.12). A further 96 tenements were in hand in the Orange Free State. These wood-and-iron tenements accommodated five or seven families, each with a living room, bedroom and kitchen, and a minimum floor space of 25.4 square metre (273.5 square feet). In addition, white labourers and their families were given leave to occupy vacant departmental houses.

Want of suitable accommodation was said to have hampered the advancement of the white labour policy after 1910. In December 1912, for example, it was estimated that on the open lines alone it would have been possible to employ 3,000 additional white labourers - over 50 per cent more than were engaged at the time - had it not been for the lack of housing. A total of £50,000 was authorised for new quarters in 1912/13, most of which were used to provide housing for men already in the service. Figure 8.13 shows the wood-and-iron semi-detached type quarters for white labourers adopted in 1912 and 1913. An adaptation of the tenement prototype, the two-roomed example allowed 25.8 square metre (278 square feet) floor space per family compared to 40 square metre (432 square feet) for the three-roomed type without kitchen. The portable type quarters in Figure 8.14 were utilised alongside the track at around the same time.

War conditions after 1914 severely curtailed the housing activities of the South African Railways. A mere £405 were spent on accommodation for white labourers in 1914/15, and £5,468 during the next two years. With building material in short supply, building costs soared to a prohibiting level, some 80 to 100 per cent up on pre-war prices by early 1919. In the fifteen months leading to March 1918, 153 houses for white graded staff and 28 houses for white labourers were completed, with an additional 124 white labourers' dwellings in course of erection. By the end of the following financial year, the aggregate number of railway houses built, sanctioned and/or still in hand came to 255 for graded staff and 221 for white labourers. In all, some 2,200 railway quarters were available for married white labourers by March 1919. Married men not housed by the Railways received an extra allowance of 1s. per day.14

Towards the end of 1918, a bungalow type brick dwelling was adopted as the norm for white labour accommodation. As shown in Figure 8.15, type P34 consisted of two bedrooms and a living room-cum-kitchen, with a floor area of 30.7 square metre (330 square feet). In April of 1919, a substantially larger type P44 of similar configuration was introduced,15 its floor area being 45.3 square metre (487.5 square feet). Provision was made for a future third bedroom, bringing the floor area to 58.7 square metre (631.5 square feet).

Gangers and sub-gangers, a grade of staff which formed the principal channel for the upward mobility of white labourers, lived in semi-detached railside quarters, mostly of wood-and-iron. Two layouts of gangers' cottages in use in the first years after Union are depicted in Figure 8.16, of which type 100/P43 was the more commonplace. Its three-roomed section was occupied by the ganger and his family, and had a floor area ranging from 22.8 square metre for the smallest version up to 28.3 square metre (245 & 305 square feet) for the largest. The two-roomed section was that of the sub-ganger and his family, with an area from 16.7 to 20.9 square metre (180 & 225 square feet). Type 100/P48 offered an additional bedroom for both ganger and sub-ganger, taking the respective floor areas to 32.6 and 21.6 square metre (351 and 233 square feet).16

A substantial improvement in the standard quarters used for gangers was effected with the adoption in 1919 of a brick bungalow comprising 'four good rooms and kitchen, pantry and bathroom'.17

In contrast, Figures 8.17 to 8.22 show some of standard dwelling-types built for higher graded Railway staff in the first decade after Union. They illustrate how the size and appearance of the various type quarters mirrored exactly the classification of the staff establishment into different subordinate grades, i.e. the larger and more lavish the dwelling, the more senior the ranking of its occupant. The imposing double-roofed Lowveld verandah house in Figure 8.17 was that of the Komatiport Resident Medical Officer. Built in 1913, it comprised three bedrooms, a living room, kitchen, pantry and bath, with a total floor area of 116.4 square metre (1,253 square feet).

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16 For the variations on type 100/P48 and other layouts used for gangers and platelayers cottages: S.A.R., Cavill Report, Annexures H, J, K, L, M, N, & O.
17 Ibid., par. 381: no plans of the new type could be found.
FIGURE 8.17 Resident Medical Officer's verandah house, type P12, Komatiport, c. 1913 - an outhouse containing a pail closet, fuel store and servant's room was located at the rear of the house (after SATS 313P/62, 29 April 1913)

FIGURE 8.18 Type of new Railway quarters (probably P1 or similar), Beaufort West, early 1919 (S.A.R., Annual Report of the General Manager, UG 59-19)

FIGURE 8.19 Type quarters P1 and P3 for senior officers, introduced in March 1912 and July 1917 respectively (after Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into and report upon the housing and living conditions of the Railway and Harbour staff of the Union, 1919, Annexure D)

Similar in size was type P1 (116.9 square metre), the standard dwelling adopted in 1912 for senior Railway officers, special and first grade station masters or similarly graded officers. Type P2 (overleaf) was almost identical in layout, but 18 square metre smaller, and used for second grade station masters and similarly graded officers. Built after 1917, type P3 was still smaller, at 81.8 square metre (881 square feet). This was the standard dwelling provided for lower-graded station masters and daily paid free quarter staff.
FIGURE 8.21 Plan layout of type quarters P53 as adopted in June 1919 (after Report of the Committee appointed to enquire into and report upon the housing and living conditions of the Railway and Harbour staff of the Union, 1919, Annexure B: for a corrugated iron version, see SATS 313P/68).

FIGURE 8.22 View of a mirrored P53 type dwelling in the Salvokop railway camp, Pretoria, one of many built in the early 1920s.
Type P53 superseded type P3 in 1919. Erected in both brick and wood-and-iron, type P53 was used for free quarter staff such as third and fourth grade station masters, station inspectors, senior grade foremen and some gangers. It had a larger floor area of 98.8 square metre (1,064 square feet), but at the expense of the back verandah. Improvements included a substantially bigger main bedroom and living room, and the placing within the house of the pantry and bathroom. Identical in layout, only somewhat larger and with the added luxury of a fireplace in the main bedroom and patio doors in the living room, type P54 (not illustrated) replaced P2 at around the same time.

A MORE SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

In the preceding chapter it was mentioned how after the war, and more specifically after the influenza epidemic of 1918, public concern about the insanitary living conditions of poor whites in the Union’s multi-racial urban slums led to the acceptance by the state - for the first time ever - of an obligation to house South Africa’s urban poor. Based on the findings of a Housing Committee submitted late in 1919, Housing Act No. 35 of 1920 was said to have established the foundations of public housing in South Africa. Significantly, the appointment of the Housing Committee in August 1919 coincided with the publication of the Report by a Railway Committee appointed to enquire into and report upon the housing and living conditions of Railway and Harbour staff. The findings and recommendations of this Committee, which began its enquiries in early January 1919 under the chairmanship of H.W. Cavill, gave new direction to the Railway organisation’s hitherto ad hoc housing policy.

The Cavill Report attributed the dearth of suitable accommodation in the towns and urban centres of the Union to, among other things, the townward migration of rural whites, the difficulty in procuring and the high cost of building materials during the war years, and the impossibility of obtaining rentals that would return a profit on the higher expenditure. The Committee warned that there was ‘no apparent likelihood of material relief from any other source than the Government’, as both private enterprise and local authorities had failed to meet urban housing requirements and seemed unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future. It described as equally applicable to South Africa the words of Lloyd George, namely that ‘It is as important to build houses as it had been in 1915 to make shells’, and went on to say that ‘the present abnormal times demand abnormal measures’ and that ‘it is the duty of the Administration as well as of the Government to make most of this opportunity of arresting and preventing the spread in South Africa of the appalling housing conditions which have been allowed to arise in other lands’.18

Arguing that such action would contribute towards ‘relieving the position as far as the general public is concerned’, the Cavill Report urged the Railway Administration to extend the policy hitherto pursued of meeting ‘the requirements of its staff at what are regarded as purely railway camps’ by also supplying ‘for its servants what may be considered its fair quota towards remedying the general shortage in towns and townships’. Held out as a cogent reason why the Railways should endeavour to provide houses for its servants was the fact that railwaymen generally are ‘much more subject to removal from place to place than most other classes of the community’.19

It was pointed out that the inadequacy of suitable housing accommodation had had ‘the effect of driving respectable families into slum localities, forcing them to live under insanitary conditions prejudicial to public health and morals’. High rents forced many employees to share a house with one or more families, while others had no alternative but to live in costly boarding houses or hotels, conditions described as ‘almost equally undesirable for the employees and for the Administration’.20

A great many cases were cited of Railway servants who were impelled to inhabit ramshackle quarters ‘hardly fit for natives to live in’, often situated in ‘Indian and native localities’ or ‘occupied partly by Indians and natives’. Those fortunate enough to reside in railway houses were found to be turning down promotion as it more often than not entailed removal to a place where no departmental quarters were available for their occupation.21

The Cavill Report estimated that the proportion of staff (excluding white labourers) ‘suffering hardship through the shortage of houses’ varied between 7 and 50.5 per cent in the various towns, townships and railway depots, a state of affairs which demanded the building of an additional 2,841 new houses, 1,603 of which as soon as possible to be built for under 5 per cent interest, the Railways would incur even greater losses on rentals, but described such losses as ‘a matter of policy’.22

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18 S.A.R., Cavill Report, par. 15, 21, 107-12, 116-9, 143.
20 Rents were said to have increased from 50-100% during the war years: ibid., par. 26-7.
21 Ibid., par. 28-30, 375; for descriptions of ‘individual cases of hardship’: par. 32-106.
22 Ibid., pp. 2-3, also par. 4, 17-8, 149; the estimates on hardship in the various centres were based on volunteered evidence furnished by the staff, and cannot be regarded as accurate.
23 The prevailing standard scale rents, calculated to return 6.5% on the book value of quarters, were based on a 3.5 per cent interest on capital. In relation to the 8% return required to cover bare cost (i.e. interest on capital and maintenance), the standard scale implied an annual loss of 36% in local allowance area A and 59% at the coast on a type P3 house: ibid., par. 157-81, 185.
Many reasons were enumerated in support of a policy to rent at a loss. Providing at
low rents comfortable housing for married employees would, for example, remove a
‘cause of discontent and unrest’ and ‘counteract Bolshevist propaganda’. It would also
prevent the necessity for residing in slums which impaired ‘the quality of a man’s
services by reducing his self-respect’, ‘attract the best class of man to the service’ and
ensure that full advantage could be taken of the schooling facilities available for railway
children who will largely ‘form the future staff of the South African Railways’.24

Turning to the housing of white labourers, the Committee conceded that much had
been done in providing for their accommodation but considered many still to be housed
under conditions of great hardship. This was put down to the policy of ‘engaging
married men long before there is the slightest possibility of finding suitable housing for
their families’. Accommodation had thus to be extemporised by such expedients as
‘assembling spare galvanised iron rooms or huts or by taking over rows of low stone,
brick or wooden rooms originally intended for and previously occupied by natives’.25

The conditions under which white labourers were accommodated in the towns in
the wood-and-iron tenements and semi-detached quarters (300P/129A & 134A) were
described as bordering on indecency. The usually large white labourer family not only
had to make do with just two small wood-and-iron rooms and kitchen ‘forming part of a
row in which the families are separated by only a few sheets of galvanised iron’, but
suffered a complete lack of privacy: ‘that which is done in the middle house is known
to all the neighbours, and spreads as quickly as influenza’.26

The type P44 brick quarters adopted in 1919 was found suitable, but the Committee
thought that the extended three-bedroomed version for all practical purposes was to be
regarded as ‘the minimum accommodation’ for white labourers. It also suggested that
the third bedroom was to be positioned flush with the other two so as to allow of a
pantry and bathroom to be added adjacent to the kitchen in future.27

If the white labour policy was to be ‘carried to its logical conclusion’, the Report
declared, the Railways had to proceed with the building of sufficient quarters for white
labourers. ‘This was essential for the sake of their children ‘who are being better
educated and whose sensitiveness to their home environment must be developing’. It
added: ‘It is to these men and their sons that the Administration will have to look for a
good many of the future gangers, sub-gangers and Permanent Way Inspectors’.28

24 A Ministry of Reconstruction pamphlet on housing in Scotland was quoted in length to stress
the relationship of bad housing and industrial unrest: ibid., par. 182-4.
25 Ibid., par. 404.
26 Ibid., par. 404-5, 410; for type 300P/129A: Figure 8.12, vide supra, p. 234.
27 Compare with Figure 8.15, vide supra, p. 236; S.A.R., Cavill Report, par. 268, 289, 409-10,
also Annexure G, p. 127: type P34 was said to be too small.

An amount of between £500,000 and £600,000 was deemed necessary to bring the
existing accommodation for white labourers up to a standard similar to that of the P44.
White labourers were in addition to occupy the quarters vacated as new houses were
made available to gangers and sub-gangers. It was further surmised that ‘any quarters
put up for coloureds should be so designed and located as to be suitable for conversion
into white labourers’ houses if required’.29

The quarters occupied by gangers and sub-gangers, specifically those on old lines,
were judged to be ‘much below any decent minimum standard’ and quite inferior to the
P44 type laid down for white labourers. Describing the way in which these families were
‘herded together’ in their decrepit quarters as ‘neither healthy nor moral’, the
Committee continued: ‘Engineers comment seriously upon the difficulty of finding or
training efficient gangers and if, as is imperative, the best class of man is to be secured
and retained, decent housing must be afforded’. As it was ‘principally on their homes
that they have to depend for recreation and amusement’, the provision of proper
housing accommodation for gangers and sub-gangers had to take precedence even over
that of white labourers.30

The Cavill Committee criticised the practice of closely huddling together Railway
quarters in remote localities on the open lines. In order to prevent their inhabitants
becoming a nuisance to each other, the quarters of white labourers and black labourers
were in future to be placed a reasonable distance away from the gangers’ house and
from each other. Gangers and sub-gangers were to be housed separately as well, in
three-bedroomed bungalows with a floor area of no less than 800 square feet.31

Much of the departmental accommodation provided for other lower-grade staff like
pumpers and station foremen was deemed inadequate. The improved type plans that
were recommended are shown in Figure 8.23 (overleaf). Not to exceed 74.3 square
metre (800 square feet), the smaller example was for rent-paying grades like shunters,
firemen, checkers, pumpers and lower salaried and free quarter staff (such as sub-
gangers). The larger plan was not to exceed 88.2 square metre (950 square feet) and
was suitable for rent paying grades such as drivers, guards, ticket examiners, salaried
staff of equivalent grades, and in some cases for free quarter staff like station foremen
and gangers. A third type plan of an area not exceeding 102.2 square metre (1,100
square feet) was proposed (not illustrated). It was meant for rent-paying staff with
large families, permanent way inspectors, third grade station masters and station
inspectors of similar grade.32

29 Ibid., par. 409-10, 418.
30 Ibid., par. 374-81, 414.
31 Ibid., par. 382-3, 438; 404 new quarters were needed, 154 immediately and 250 in the near future.
32 Ibid., par. 273-6, 286, 382: ‘veranda h types’ of corresponding sizes were also proposed.
For a detailed account of staff complaints, included the absence of through passages and of a fireplace in the main bedroom, the location of bathrooms outside the house, faulty orientation and so forth. Other complaints were of rooms, in particular the living room, main bedroom and kitchen, and the general lack of verandahs, parlours, pantries and/or bathrooms. Other complaints included the use of a type of portable room in cases where low-paid servants with large families occupied standard quarters too small for their needs. It also suggested the use of a type of portable room in cases where low-paid servants with large families occupied standard quarters too small for their needs.33

Whilst commending the 'excellent types' of departmental dwellings built latterly - in some centres 'recognised as being the best in the district' - the Cavill Committee strongly disapproved of some of the older stone railway cottages. These were said to 'baffle all attempts at adaptation or improvement' and were recommended, along with other old houses of wood, wood and iron or brick too difficult to modernise, for demolition as soon as practicable. It was further proposed that no wood-and-iron dwellings, brick-lined or not, should be built in future 'where there is justification for strong disapproval of some of the older stone railway cottages. These were said to 'baffle all attempts at adaptation or improvement' and were recommended, along with other old houses of wood, wood and iron or brick too difficult to modernise, for demolition as soon as practicable. It was further proposed that no wood-and-iron dwellings, brick-lined or not, should be built in future 'where there is justification for expecting that permanent quarters will be provided'.34

Staff complaints with regards to their quarters centred around the smallness of the rooms, in particular the living room, main bedroom and kitchen, and the general lack of verandahs, parlours, pantries and/or bathrooms. Other complaints included the absence of through passages and of a fireplace in the main bedroom, the location of bathrooms outside the house, faulty orientation and so forth.35

The Committee endorsed these complaints and estimated that a total of £252,000 was needed to rectify these faults. Overall, the figure required to be spent 'immediately and over a period of years' if the serious housing deficiencies suffered by many railway employees were to be remedied was put at approximately £4,000,000.36

The result of a recommendation submitted by the Cavill Committee during the first month of its enquiry, an amount of £377,440 was placed on the 1919/20 estimates for the provision of housing for Railway staff and subsequently sanctioned by Parliament. In the words of the Minister of Railways and Harbours, 'it was the intention to go in for a huge building programme'. In 1920 an additional £1,100,000 were authorised, described as 'the first instalment of a £4,000,000 programme' aimed at putting railway housing for white staff on a sound footing.37

In March 1920 the General Manager of the Railways reported that the erection of houses was being proceeded with 'as rapidly as the limitations imposed by shortage of skilled labour and building materials will permit'. No less than 1,478 departmental quarters were authorised between March 1919 and March 1921, of which 720 were completed by the latter date. Construction took place on a national scale, as the pattern of house construction for this period evinces: the erection was approved of one house in each of 282 centres, two houses in 103 centres, three houses in 47 centres and four houses in 24 centres. Construction of five houses or more was authorised in only 50 centres, where just over half of the new dwellings were to be located.38

By March 1921 a total of 9,654 railway houses was occupied by white staff, 3,683 of which by free quarter staff (which until January 1920 had included white labourers). The remaining 5,971 were lived in by rent-paying staff like drivers, ticket examiners, guards, firemen, shunters, pumpers, and so forth, who were charged rentals on a scale introduced in January 1917. Based on those operating in the Transvaal and Orange Free State prior to 1910, the scale was so graduated as to place the staff throughout the Union on practically the same basis, i.e. by applying the higher rates in the inland divisions where local allowances were in force. As a special concession to lower-paid staff, it was decided that no-one in receipt of a wage less than £20 per month was to pay increased rent until such time as they received an increase in substantive pay, and then only to the extent of one-half of the increase. The loss on rented accommodation incurred by the Railways during the period 1916 to 1923 averaged at over £100,000 per annum.39

33 Ibid., par. 272, 284, 299; P53: vide supra, p. 241.
34 Ibid., par. 231-3; for additional comments on wood-and-iron houses: par. 172, 305, 311.
35 For a detailed account of staff complaints: ibid., par. 238-67.
36 Ibid., pp. 2-3.
37 S.A.R., Annual Report of the General Manager, UG 66-20, p. 54; Cavill Report, par. 139-40.
38 S.A.R., Annual Report of the General Manager, UG 66-20, p. 54; authorisations: General Manager's statement on housing authorisations, 31 March 1921.
A revised rental scale was introduced in February 1924. Calculated to return close to 7.5 per cent on the book value instead of the usual 6.5 per cent, the new scale was to reduce the recurring rental losses suffered by the Railways to an anticipated £40,000 per year. The maximum rental charged under the new scale was restricted to one-sixth of the servant's salary in the coastal area, and one-sixth of the salary and two-fifths of the local allowance elsewhere. As in previous years, these rental charges were tied to the floor area of the particular house.40

While white labourers were required to pay schedule rent after 1 January 1920 (but received local allowances on the prescribed scale), they were again granted free quarters or an allowance in lieu thereof after the introduction of the 'civilised labour' policy in late 1924. They remained entitled to free accommodation until April 1938, when the value of free quarters was incorporated in their wage rates, after which date those in occupation of departmental quarters were charged schedule rentals as outlined above.41

The degree to which white labourers benefited from the post-1919 house-building initiative is difficult to ascertain. As will be recalled, white labourers were placed on an identical footing as ordinary employees after 1920, except for the short period between April 1923 and November 1924, and statistics on the progress of the new programme no longer differentiated between white labour and the rest of the staff establishment. Similarly, no records could be found as regards the type of houses built, and whether or not the new type plans put forward by the Cavill Report were adopted. While it can be assumed that the quarters built for white labourers in the early 1920s were of the type P44, rental records for the Transvaal, though not always indicating the type of quarters, do reveal that the most common type erected for white labourers in the later 1920s was the P86. No plans could be found of this type, but indications are that it was very similar to the type P100A with which it was replaced in 1930.

Type P100A is depicted in Figure 8.24. Comprising three bedrooms, a combined living room and kitchen, pantry, and bathroom, it had a floor area of 60.9 square metre (656 square feet). A portable wood-and-iron version of the same plan, type P100A/1, and an adapted version for water-borne sewerage, type P100B, were also used. A separate kitchen was incorporated in the latter house, giving it a floor area of 72.5 square metre (780 square feet). It was smaller but identical in layout to type P95A (81.3 square metre) shown in Figures 8.25 and 8.26, which after 1930 was used for station foremen, guards, gangers, pumpers, firemen and shunters, i.e. lower grades of staff increasingly dominated by those promoted from the white labourer ranks.

40 Ranging from £3 13s. 5d. at the coast to £5 10s. 2d. on the Witwatersrand for a four-room brick house with a floor area of 85m2: ibid., UG 43-24, pp. 74-5; also vide supra, note 23.
42 Vide supra, p. 216f.
FIGURE 8.26 Two of the many P95A type quarters built in the 1930s, one in Waterval-Boven (top) and the other in the Salvokop railway camp in Pretoria (bottom).

Rental records for the Transvaal show that the quarters erected after 1920 for higher grades such as station masters and station inspectors were of the P53 and P54 types discussed earlier. Plans of the type quarters P79/3 provided for this group of staff after 1924 could not be found. It was superseded by a new type P97 in 1930. Though very similar in plan to the earlier types, type P97 had a smaller floor area of 82.9 square metre (893 square feet). As will be shown shortly, elevational variations like those used in types P95 and P97 became a distinct feature of railway housing after 1937.

FIGURE 8.27 Type quarters P97 for station masters, station inspectors and similarly graded staff, 1930 (after SATS Type P97, March 1930)
Illustrated in Figures 9.28 and 8.29 are the equivalents for the P95 and P97 used in fever districts after 1930.

The introduction of the probationer scheme in 1927 gave rise to an important departure in the housing policy of the South African Railways. Whereas previously housing provision for single men was deemed secondary to that for married men, a hostel system for 'junior servants who are unable to reside with their parents' was introduced in 1928. In time ten such hostels were established in all the major centres including Germiston, Pretoria, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Bloemfontein, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and East London, accommodating just under 1,500 young men by 1939. Under the supervision of a house father, later assisted by a matron, the young inmates of these hostels were provided a 'homely accommodation, together with opportunities for educational advancement and social relaxation'.

*FIGURE 8.28 Type quarters P99 for use in fever districts by lower grades of employees like station foremen and guards, 1938 (after SATS Type P99, 1938)*

Time and again hailed 'an unqualified success', the hostel policy was said to protect 'potential members of the graded staff from the evils of slum localities and the like', an indirect gain that in the long run would 'outweigh the direct expenditure incurred'.

Another interesting development of the late 1920s was the creation in Wentworth near Durban of a railway camp for 'married European labourers and other employees in receipt of low rates of pay'. Established in 1929, 'Opwaarts' (Upwards) was under the direct supervision of a superintendent who, together with his wife, was responsible for 'the general control of the camp' and took 'an active interest in the social welfare of the residents'. The precursor of the railway model villages discussed in Chapter 9, the Opwaarts camp was described as a model example of low-income housing in 1934 by the Chief Commissioner of the Railways. No photographic records or plans of this camp could be located.

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8.2 Post-1930 housing assistance and the role of design

Railway involvement in the provision of employee housing took on new dimensions during the period 1930-48. Particularly significant was the switch from Railways' accepted role as a constructor of houses to that of housing financier after 1937.

RAILWAY HOUSING POLICY, 1930-48

The housing and living conditions of the Railway staff establishment after the Great Depression of 1929-1933 formed the subject of two separate enquiries, both of which had an important bearing on the subsequent course of Railway housing policy. The first investigation was that of a Housing Committee appointed early in 1935 under the chairmanship of P.D. Troskie, the Chief Superintendent of Staff. Published in March 1937, the Troskie Report described the conditions under which white labourers and low-paid staff members were housed in most of the major centres of the Union as 'most undesirable' and their dwellings 'unfit for human habitation'. The Committee's remarks on the conditions in individual centres varied from 'distinctly dissatisfactory' and 'shocking' to 'the most appalling imaginable'. White labourer families were found squatting in 'backyards', in 'shacks and hovels outside the Municipal boundary', and in dilapidated warehouses 'with boarded-up windows and floors in a state of decay'.

The Troskie Committee strongly endorsed the Railway hostel policy for unmarried railworkers and other junior members of the graded staff. It urged the extension of the policy and asserted: 'To allow the youths to reside in squalor during the initial years of their service, when their characters are being formed and their outlook on life shaped, is most undesirable' and their dwellings 'unfit for human habitation'. The Committee's remarks on the conditions in individual centres varied from 'distinctly dissatisfactory' and 'shocking' to 'the most appalling imaginable'. White labourer families were found squatting in 'backyards', in 'shacks and hovels outside the Municipal boundary', and in dilapidated warehouses 'with boarded-up windows and floors in a state of decay'.

Unlike its predecessors, however, the Troskie Committee was not called upon to evolve departmental housing schemes but to 'endeavour by negotiation to persuade local authorities to exercise the responsibilities of local authorities and itself embark on housing schemes of a sub-economic nature was accepted and led to the suspension of all as yet unresolved departmental sub-economic housing programmes had to be deferred indefinitely. Local authorities, as was pointed out in Chapter 8, were empowered under the 1920 Act to build houses for people of 'limited means' out of monies borrowed from the State. When, by 1930, it became evident that the hope of easing the problem of the slums by 'a process of filtering up' had failed and that the housing conditions of the poor were rapidly deteriorating, sub-economic loans with interest at 3 per cent were introduced for the carrying out of letting schemes. But the stipulation that rentals had to be fixed so that local authorities would incur an annual loss of 2 per cent on the cost of the schemes proved a major deterrent. In the event, the interest on loans was first reduced to 2 per cent and then, in 1936, to 0.75 per cent before a favourable response could be elicited from local authorities. Under the latter arrangement, local authorities were required to make an annual loss equal to half of that incurred by the state.

Representations on behalf of the Railway Administration were thus made to local authorities at twenty-four centres up and down the country. Based on a maximum figure of 50 per cent of the married white labourers at the various centres, a total of 1,587 sub-economic houses was requested by the Troskie Committee. A guarantee of tenancy for the redemption period of loans raised for the purpose of the contemplated schemes was offered in each case. In many instances the donation of land owned by the Railways was held out as an additional incentive. When after two years of continuous negotiation the only material result achieved was the erection of 30 houses by the Town Council of Ladysmith, the foot-dragging by local authorities eventuated in the appointment by the Railways of a Housing Commission with a view to reassess the general question of the housing of the Administration's staff.

Published in December 1937, the Commission's Second Interim Report dealt with the issue of sub-economic housing. Its recommendation that the Administration was to assume the responsibilities of local authorities and itself embark on housing schemes of a sub-economic nature was accepted and led to the suspension of all as yet unresolved negotiations with local authorities. Instead of guaranteeing tenancy to local authorities, the Railway Administration was to provide housing for 50 per cent of labouring staff. Servants earning up to £17 10s. 0d. per month were to be regarded as 'sub-economic' units. The new housing schemes were to have been financed by way of sub-economic loans procured through central government, prerequisite to which was the constitution of the Railways as a local authority. As things turned out, this proved impracticable and departmental sub-economic housing programmes had to be deferred indefinitely.

47 Ibid., par. 249-52.
48 Ibid., par. 2.
A crucial change in Railway housing policy occurred in 1937 with the adoption of the recommendations contained in the First Interim Report of the Housing Commission (often referred to as the Hoffe Commission after its chairman) with regard to the creation of a house ownership scheme. The principle underlying this scheme was the establishment of a Railway fund from which monies were to be advanced to servants, subject to certain conditions, for the purchase or erection of their own houses. Loans were redeemable over periods from 10 to 30 years, and had to be liquidated before the employee reached the statutory retiring age. No initial deposit was required. Interest was charged at a rate of 3.5 per cent per year on the outstanding monthly balance. The maximum loan permissible was that on which total repayments, inclusive of insurance, rates and taxes, did not exceed 35 per cent of the applicant's basic salary or wage.52

Soon after its inauguration it was found that low-paid staff members were unable to benefit much from the scheme as the amount of loan available to them was insufficient to acquire a suitable property. It was thus decided to grant, in respect of those whose emoluments did not exceed 1 ls. 6d. per day, loans at 1.25 per cent interest for periods of redemption extending beyond the normal statutory retiring age. The Administration also undertook to bear the cost of insurance. The latter two concessions also applied to members of staff in receipt of emoluments above 1 ls. 6d. but not exceeding 14s. 6d. per day, only they were granted loans at the normal interest rate.53

Subsequent modifications to the house ownership scheme included the lowering in 1945 of the rate of interest to 3 per cent and of the qualifying 10 years' contributory service to 6 years. The simultaneous waiving of the initial restriction that permanent staff only were eligible enabled members of the temporary staff also to participate, but only after 5 years' contributory service.54

Described as 'a permanent feature of railway life' in 1947, the house ownership scheme was said to have had the effect of creating 'better and more contented servants, which in the long run reacts to the decided advantage of the Administration'. Although hampered by the onset of war conditions after 1939, loans granted from the inception of the scheme up to March 1948 amounted to £7,555,775. The total number of houses acquired under the scheme came to 4,608: 2,797 were ready built, 1,405 newly erected and 406 properties of applicants which were taken over.55

Another important development in Railway housing initiative was the introduction in November 1937 of a rent rebate scheme intended as an interim arrangement to ease the housing position before the home ownership scheme took effect. Under this scheme financial assistance was rendered to members of staff in private accommodation paying rentals in excess of one-fifth of their basic salary or wage, subject to a maximum rebate of £4 per month. 'Apart from affording relief in the matter of house rent in existing conditions', the General Manager reported in 1938, 'the scheme is intended to assist those members of the staff who were, or still are, unsatisfactorily housed by enabling them to improve their housing conditions by moving into more suitable houses and/or to better residential localities'. Phased out after January 1946, the rent rebate scheme benefited more than 17,000 railway servants in all and involved the Railways in an expenditure of close to £8 million.56

52 S.A.R., Annual Report of the General Manager, UG 40-38, pp. 42-3; Housing Commission, Interim Report No. 1, passim; Report on Housing of Railway Staff, 1947, pp. 1-4; moosed as early as 1912, the issue of house loans for Railway staff was later raised by several housing committees: see for example 'The question of rent', South African Railway Magazine, January 1912, pp. 11-3; S.A.R., Cavill Report, par. 465, 485-99; Troskie Report, par. 165-9, 265-70.


56 Servants who owned or were in course of acquiring their own properties were also granted rent rebates until January 1946: S.A.R., Report on Housing of Railway Staff, 1947, pp. 7-8; Annual Report of the General Manager, UG 40-38, pp. 43-4; Pitarie, G.H., op. cit., Table 1, p. 147.
did not imply a let-up in the house-building activities of the Railway Department in any way. The extent to which the systematic provision of new departmental quarters within the towns, townships and railway depots of the Union was continued during the period under review is illustrated in Figure 8.31. The downturn in the number of new houses from 407 in the financial year 1930/31 to just 7 for the year ending 31 March 1934 was necessitated by the deepening depression after 1930. Having risen to 453 in 1938, the number of houses built annually fell again to 137 in 1944 as a result of onset of war conditions after 1939. A steep rise was recorded in the next four years, peaking at 825 dwellings for the year ending 31 March 1948. Overall, a total of 6,195 departmental houses were constructed in the twenty-year period leading to 31 March 1949.7

The number of houses owned by the Railways totalled 16,190 in 1951. Of these, 78.2 per cent were occupied by rent-paying staff (including railworkers) and 20 per cent by free quarter staff - 1.8 per cent were vacant. With an annual loss on rental of some £283,000 in 1937, the introduction of a revised rental scale based on a ceiling of one-fifth of a servant's salary was contemplated in 1937, but was held in abeyance in view of the circumstances occasioned by the outbreak of war. The number of houses at the disposal of railworkers in 1951 is not known, but the allocation of houses in 1946 reveals that a total of 3,333 houses was available to this class of employee then. Of these, 37.6 per cent were located in urban or suburban areas and 62.4 in the country.58

An attempt was also made to bring into conformity the diverse procedures practised by the various Railway Camp Committees in the allocation of departmental quarters. A 'points' system was introduced in concurrence with the recommendation of the 1937 Housing Commission. Under the system a quota of 40 per cent of all houses available was set aside for members of the running staff (Group 4, i.e. drivers, firemen, ticket examiners, guards and members of the breakdown gang). The factors determining the allocation of the remaining 60 per cent included length of service, size of family and the desirability of the applicant as tenant.59

In the preceding section it was illustrated how, in the years leading to 1930, the standard accommodation provided for married white labourers in the Railway service progressed from a twin-roomed wood-and-iron tenement type with a floor area of 25.8 square metre to a wood-and-iron semi-detached type, followed by a three-roomed brick bungalow of 30.7 and then of 45.3 square metre in which provision was made for a future third bedroom, bringing its floor area to 58.7 square metre. This in turn was superseded by a three-bedroomed type P100A of 60.9 square metre, which for the first time included a through passage, bathroom and pantry. An even larger type P100B with the added novelty of a separate kitchen was adopted in 1935, at the instance of the Troskie Committee, for use in urban areas where water-borne sewage systems were in operation. Type P100B had a floor area of 72.5 square metre.

Like the type P44 built after 1919, the new house for white labourers gave rise to a great deal of discontent among lower-paid members of the graded staff, many of whom were residing in distinctly inferior quarters of an older generation. The 1937 Housing Commission therefore recommended the removal of the existing distinctions between houses provided for graded staff and for white labourers. Designated the 'sub-economic' type for the purpose of obviating these distinctions, a new standard house was to be evolved for use by members of all grades whose substantive emoluments did not exceed £17. 10s. per month. The new type was to vary both in style and in the amount of bedroom accommodation. Having questioned in an interim report the fact that new departmental quarters without exception provided for at least three bedrooms, the Commission went on to suggest that, as a temporary expedient, a practice be followed of providing three two-bedroomed houses in every ten departmental houses built. A plan of the proposed house was subjoined in its report. What was intended as a 'sub-economic' house in the end was utilised as a standard type quarters for white labourers when the Railways' sub-economic housing programme was put on ice.60

The 'sub-economic' house was to be built using black instead of 'civilised' labour, which was the accepted practice: ibid., par. 63-4, also Interim Report No. 2, par. 68-71, and Interim Report No. 3, par. 26-7.

57 This figure does not reflect the number of redundant or unsuitable houses demolished in this period, which was in excess of 600 - the exact figure could not be ascertained.

58 S.A.R., Report of a Committee of Investigation into rentals and allocation of departmental quarters, 1951, pp. 9-13; in 1946, 70% of railworkers in the urban and suburban areas and 80% of those employed in the country were married: Report on unskilled European labour, par. 145, 147.
Known as P100C, the new house had an area of 61.2 square metre (659 square feet). Provision was made for a future third bedroom. As shown in Figure 8.32, the entrance verandah was positioned either in front or on the side of the house. A three-bedroomed version of the same plan, type P100D, was also used (71 square metre).

ELIMINATING THE "MARK OF THE "BROAD ARROW"

A most intriguing aspect of railway housing after 1937 was the attempt by the Railways to eliminate the prevailing association of railwayfolk, then predominantly Afrikaans-speakers, with 'living on the wrong side of the tracks' in towns. The result of 'the old practice of arranging houses as a jacket tightly enclosing the station emplacement' or in a row on the opposite side of the railway line to the town, the so-called 'Railway Camp complex' manifested itself in the early years of the Union. The 1919 Cavill Report, for example, pointed out that in some towns clerical staff did not care to live in Railway camps and urged that efforts had to be made 'to get rid of cause for what the men term the mark of the "Broad Arrow" - not only architecturally but in appellations'.

61 S.A.R., Cavill Report, par. 357, 362. Shaped like a broad arrowhead, the mark of the 'Broad Arrow' was used to designate government property - its former use on prison clothing gave rise to the Afrikaans expression 'die hoenderspoor dra' (i.e. to be in prison).

Whilst alluding to the fact that addresses such as 'No. 813 Railway Reserve' were felt by many camp-dwellers to convey 'a kind of stigma - a hint of being compounded from the rest of the community', the Cavill Committee made no specific proposals in terms of the renaming of Railway Camps. It did, however, proffer guidelines in the matter both of the planning of new camps and of the design of new railway quarters.

The Cavill Committee propounded the drawing up of a town-planning scheme for new camps in which careful consideration was to be accorded to the arranging of roads in a manner 'agreeable to natural contours'. Where possible, sites for new camps were to be chosen carefully to allow of the camp to merge into and be 'indistinguishable from some good quarter of the town'. It continued: 'Modern designs and modern practice demonstrate that pleasing effects can be obtained by departing from the monotony of straight roads and right angles and by breaking the customary plumb alignment of house frontages'. Arguing that the standard set for railway camps was not in any case to be inferior to that of the adjoining Municipality, the Committee stressed that 'Ashpit Avenues' had to disappear and that roads, footpaths and curbing had to be made up. It also urged the introduction of water-borne sewage where possible.

Turning to the subject of houses, the Cavill Report advocated the need for 'variation in architectural features' when large numbers of houses were erected in Railway camps. 'Variety of elevation should evolve naturally and simply from the plan', it went on to say: 'we do not want the meaningless ornamentation, redundant, bogus, bastard or grotesque, which disfigures so many private houses'. Railway quarters were so much in the public eye, it stated, and therefore needed to be 'models of exterior as well as of interior design combined with economy of construction in its best sense'.

Many of the ideas on the design of houses put forward in the Cavill Report were inspired by the 1918 Tudor Walters Report on the provision of working-class housing in England, Wales and Scotland. For example, the Cavill Committee concurred with the notion that a demand for an increasingly higher standard of accommodation and equipment in their dwellings existed among the working-classes. Quoting in length the arguments of the Tudor Walters Report in favour of the provision of parlours, the Cavill Report contended that the use of a sitting room for receiving visitors was 'a custom of the country' which would have to be complied with as far as practicable. It also recommended that sculleries were to be given a trial in the smallest type of house where a combined living room and kitchen was provided.

62 Ibid., par. 362.
63 Ibid., par. 328, 358-61, 363: it also proposed the establishment of housing in 'garden cities' for those members of staff who were averse to living in the camps and could afford rentals in excess of the standard scale: ibid., par. 458.
64 Ibid., par. 236.
65 Ibid., par. 228-9, 242, 282: sculleries were not in general use in South Africa at the time.
The recommendation that the number of houses per acre be restricted to eight or ten, preferably eight, was another derivation from the Tudor Walters Report. On the need to provide cupboards and shelving in houses, the comments of the Women's Housing Committees in Great Britain were cited. The Cavill Committee held out the example of a housing scheme for 'Commonwealth workmen at Lithgow' to support its suggestion that ceiling heights should 'not be less than 10' to 10'6" [3 to 3.2m] and preferably more in the hotter parts'. It added that ventilation was to be 'good above as well as below the ceiling'. Other improvements put forward in its report included the need for a fireplace in both the living room and main bedroom, for wooden floors, for at least two verandahs in the case of up-country houses, fitted with railings or dwarf walls where needed, and for sufficient garden ground. The Report criticised the practice of placing the kitchen fireplace against a half-brick interior wall as occupants complained of the heat in the adjoining room. 66

Despite the rhetoric of the Cavill Committee about 'the beginning of a new order' in Railway house architecture, 67 few of its recommendations appear to have been heeded before the early 1930s. The use of a scullery and the introduction of linen cupboards as proposed in its 'stoep type' quarters for the lower grades of staff (Figure 8.23, p. 246), for instance, did not find favour before the late 1930s. Some attempts were made to instil a measure of variance in the house frontages of standard quarters built in the early 1920s, as Figure 8.33 shows, although the entire row on either side of the street still was of a single type.

It was, however, not before the concerted attempts of late 1930s and early 1940s that the persisting problem of the 'Railway Camp complex' received its quietus. Fierce in its reproof of the perpetuation of 'the camp system ... to which the staff as a whole is strenuously opposed, for the reason that it means segregation from the rest of the community', the 1937 Housing Commission strongly recommended that every effort be made 'to depart from the "railway camp" practice'. All departmental housing was in future to be erected in different parts of the towns, either on individual sites or in small groups, but under no circumstances concentrated in one area. Where it was impossible to build dispersedly, new railway quarters were to be planned 'as extensions to and yet part of an existing township'. The appellation 'Railway camp' was to be replaced by the more desirable term 'railway township'. Each township was to be given 'a specific and appropriate name' by which it could be known to 'the community in general'. 68

66 Ibid., par. 237, 248, 253-6, 258, 263-4, 305(e).
67 Ibid., par. 229.
68 It was suggested that negotiations were to be entered into with local authorities for the donation of individual properties in various parts of the towns: S.A.R., Housing Commission, Final Report, par. 54-6, 61-2, 87, 148, 223, 309, 556, also Interim Report No. 4, par. 12.
Exhorting adherence to 'town planning principles', the Hoffe Report went on to prescribe a density of no more than six houses to the acre. It denounced 'the policy of erecting rows of identical houses along monotonously straight and bare streets' and spoke disapprovingly of the fact that, generally speaking, 'no effort appears to have been made to beautify the streets in the majority of the railway camps'. Camp streets were to 'curve' and be 'made up properly, bordered with trees'. Houses were to vary in design and be positioned 'at different angles'. As regards the proper maintenance of roads, the Commission emphasised that this responsibility did not devolve upon the Railways in those camps where the Administration paid assessment rates and taxes in respect of its properties, a matter which had to be impressed on local authorities.69

In some of the railway camps visited by the Hoffe Commission, it was suggested that painting work be put in hand to help overcome the 'Railway Camp' complex. In De Aar, for instance, the use of 'different shades of red, green, etc.' was laid down, while in Johannesburg 'more suitable and attractive tones of colour' instead of the current dark grey colour were dictated. In addition, the advice of officers of the State Forestry Department was to be sought in the planting of trees in the various camps. The Troskie Report had earlier advised that arrangements be made for the Railways' gardeners and nurserymen to visit the various camps and instruct residents in 'the art of gardening'. It had also submitted that the Railway health staff be made responsible for the inspection of railway quarters on a three-monthly basis.70

The various adaptations employed in terms of the standard quarters provided for the respective grades of Railway staff in the period 1937-48, as illustrated in Figures 8.34 to 8.42, are no doubt what the Cavill Committee had in mind when in 1919 it declared that 'variety of elevation should evolve naturally and simply from the plan'. The new generation of Railway houses was, where possible, built in small groups in dispersed localities in different towns and cities of the Union in accordance with the advice of the Hoffe Commission. In the Pretoria suburbs of Capital Park, Villieria, Rietfontein, Gezina and Mayville, for example, new quarters were erected in batches ranging from two to eight. In centres like Johannesburg, where problems in realising the new policy were foreseen, the design of houses and layouts of Railway townships received special attention, as did the allocation of houses in accordance with class distinctions, a practice introduced in 1919. Where objections against proposed housing schemes for white labourers were lodged by local residents, as in Port Elizabeth, dwellings of a 'better class' were built so as to face 'privately owned properties in the vicinity'.71

69 Ibid., Final Report, par. 57-60, 602.
70 Ibid., par. 58-9, 200, 373; S.A.R., Troskie Report, par. 247.

FIGURE 8.34 Type quarters P1038 for 'newly-weds or small families', probably white labourers, 1952 (after SATS Type P1038, February 1952)

Figures 8.34 to 8.39 depict some of the houses erected for lower-graded staff after 1937. It will be recalled how the 'sub-economic' house type put forward in the Hoffe Report in the end was adopted for use by white labourers. The plan of the new type P100C (see Figure 8.32, p. 260) reflected the Commission's insistence that the front rooms of quarters for lowly-paid staff members on no account were to take the form of a combined kitchen and living room as in previous years, as this arrangement created an inferiority complex among the tenants. Other standard plans utilised in the 1930s and 1940s included the P100A, B & D types discussed earlier. Use was made in all cases of alternative frontages (by moving the front verandah) and finishes (face brick only or face brick up to the lintel and rendering above). Tiled roofs do not appear to have been proposed for the houses of this class of employee in the 1940s. Adopted in 1952, type P1038 illustrated above was the earliest example found in which a tiled roof was one of the options. The flower box was a suburban fancy typical of the late 1930s.72

72 See for example Mooi Annie's letter in 'Ons Vrouewereld', Die Skakel, March 1939, pp. 21-7.
FIGURE 8.36 Type quarters P1022 for gangers, shunters, pumpers, firemen, drivers, etc., introduced in 1948 (after SATS Type P1022, October 1948)

Some of the simple but effective elevational differences employed in the flower-box version of the P95A type quarters for Staff Groups 4 & 5, i.e. station foremen, guards, gangers, pumpers, firemen and shunters, are pictured in Figure 8.35 - variation D was a mirrored image of C.73 Roofs were of corrugated iron, walls of face brick up to the lintel and rendered above. Shown in Figure 8.36 is the new P1022 house type built for these groups of staff after 1948. The new houses had an area some 40 square metres larger than the old P95A, and came with either tiled or corrugated iron roofs, combined with either rendered or face-brick walls.

Figures 8.37 to 8.39 depict six variations employed in houses provided for marine artisans (Staff Group 2). Type P95B/3 was almost identical to the old P95A, the only difference being the small rear verandah. In addition to alternative elevations, use was made of different coloured brick for plinths, pillars and flower boxes. Alternative 1, for instance, had a steel blue plinth, a dark biscuit flower box and dark brown pillars, while No. 5 had a red plinth, steel blue dwarf walls and light biscuit pillars.

73 For plan of P95A: Figure 8.25, vide supra, p. 249: Railway rental records for the Transvaal indicate that some P95A/5's were built after 1946 but more commonly in the early 1950s.
FIGURE 8.37 Alternatives 1 & 2 of type quarters P95B/3 proposed for marine artisans at Congella in 1943 (after SATS Type P95B/3, 1943)

FIGURE 8.38 Alternatives 3 & 4 of type quarters P95B/3 proposed for marine artisans at Congella in 1943 (after SATS Type P95B/3, 1943)
Moving further up the hierarchy, Figures 8.40 to 8.42 show some of the different types of houses built for senior staff groups after 1937. These designs reflect several elements then in vogue in suburban residential architecture. Notable whims of fashion included the use of twin columns to support a usually flat-roofed verandah, fewer and smaller 'stoeps', and a kitchen with access to the outside only through the scullery.

In a rubric letter published in Die Skakel, magazine of the Spoorbond, in 1939, for example, the writer described in great detail her new house. The design was one of the standard plans available from the South African Service Buro in Johannesburg, and 'Mooi Annie' urged readers to avail themselves of this service. She went on to say that large verandahs were difficult to keep clean ('Dis net daar om vuilgetrap te word en vir die kinders om goed op te laat rondlo') and praised the convenience of having a scullery and no back door in the kitchen as servants no longer had to trudge to and fro through the kitchen! ('Julie weet hoe die bediendes daar kan raas met die in- en uitloper. Nou is die kombuis so privaat en geen onnodige geraas nie'). Also evident is her aversion to the idea of a corrugated iron roof. Corrugated iron even today is still deemed a symbol of poverty among the working-classes, especially in the urban areas.

The three-bedroomed type P1003 illustrated in Figure 8.40 (overleaf) was intended for Grade II & III station masters or similarly graded employees. It had a floor area of 95 square metre (1,023 square feet). Two alternative front verandahs were proposed, one with dwarf walls and brick pillars with decorative diagonal supports, the other with concrete twin columns. A corrugated iron 'flat roof' was used for the verandah, while both corrugated iron and tiles were proposed as an alternative for the main roof.75

The house for Grade I station masters in Figure 8.41, type P1002, had the added luxuries of an entrance lobby and a lounge. Its floor area came to 109.8 square metre (1,182 square feet). Note also the small verandahs.

Finally, type P1001 shown in Figure 8.42 was the quarters provided for Senior 1 and Senior 2 station masters after 1937. This house had a floor area of 131.5 square metre (1,415 square feet). An interesting feature here was the provision of a sliding door between the lounge and dining room. A large room serving both purposes, partly separated by a room divider or shelves of some sort (usually a permanent fixture, as in Mooi Annie's house), became very fashionable in the late 1930s. Another fancy of the time, and one alluded to in the 1937 Hoffe Report, was the 'modern practice' of placing windows in the outside corners of front rooms.76

74 It is thought that the tile-roof versions of Railway houses were built only in urban and suburban areas. Groups of wood-and-iron houses - 'Tim-Town' in Germiston and the 'Gypsy Camp' in Queenstown - were demolished: S.A.R., Housing Commission, Final Report, par. 312, 591. For Mooi Annie's letter: 'Ons Vrouewereld', Die Skakel, March 1939, pp. 21-7.
75 A similar four-bedroomed house was used for 'special cases' (113.9m²): SATS Type P1003, 1938.
FIGURE 8.40 New type quarters P1003 for Grade II & III station masters, 1937 (after SATS Type P1003, July 1937)

FIGURE 8.41 New type quarters P1002 for Grade I station masters, 1937 (after SATS Type P1002, June 1937)
CHAPTER 9 - PORTABLE RAILWAY MODEL VILLAGES

By far the most conspicuous manifestation of the use of housing as the pivot for the social rehabilitation of non-graded white Railway employees and their dependents is to be found in the portable model villages of the 1930s and 1940s. Later described as 'a very timely and important contribution to poor-white rehabilitation', the model village system confirmed that, 'on certain construction works' and 'under correct conditions', white manual labour could be 'more economical and satisfactory' than black labour:

The experience of the three years during which the model villages have existed has proved not only that immediate results from the rehabilitative work itself can be secured, but that such work is instrumental in bringing about economic benefits to the employer ... The initial outlay costs for such villages are admittedly high, but even if the whole is debited to the policy of national social rehabilitation, experience has proved that the resulting labour force, from the purely economical (sic) outlook is by far cheaper, more efficient and reliable than that of uncivilised labour.1

9.1 The Natal and Cape model villages

The railway model village system was introduced as part of an extensive programme of reconstruction work on the Natal main line sanctioned in 1934 with a view to speeding up and increasing the loads of trains crossing the Drakensberg mountains. Estimated at a total cost of £589,014, the project involved the construction of deviations, tunnels, the elimination of reverses, as well as many heavy cuttings and high embankments.

ARBEIDSLUS AND WERKGENOT3

The first of the two villages which for the next four years served the Uithoek-Volksrust works, that of 'Arbeidslus', was ready for occupation in March 1935. It was situated two miles from Ingogo Station near the Transvaal-Natal border (Figure 9.1). Built on identical lines to Arbeidslus, the village of 'Werkgenot', located twelve miles distant, near Mount Prospect Station, was completed late in 1935.

3 Or, roughly translated, 'Labour Zest' and 'Diligence Delight'.

FIGURE 8.42 New type quarters P1001 for Senior 1 & Senior 2 Grade station masters, 1937 (after SATS Type P1001, June 1937)
Use was made of subsidised white labour on the new works at the instance of the Department of Labour. The State was to contribute a subsidy of 5s. 9d. per head per day in respect of each pieceworker recruited by the Department and accommodated in the model villages, and 4s per day in the case of men recruited by the Railway District Engineer and not accommodated in the villages.

The Natal model villages were planned by the Railway Administration’s Architect, Mr C.C. Deuchar, and built in stages under the supervision of the Germiston Works Inspector. Catering for the married worker only, Arbeidslus and Werkgenot by the end of 1935 provided residency to 550 and 1,122 men, women and children respectively, and to 885 and 1,184 in May 1938.

Situated against a sloping hillside at the top of a valley, the village of Arbeidslus covered 65 acres. Its houses were set in fenced-off plots of 30 by 23 metres, with water from a nearby spring laid on to each. Residents were encouraged to cultivate their plots. Roads in the village were planted with jacaranda trees.

Upon completion, the village comprised some 200 wood-and-iron labourers’ cottages, a house and offices for the camp superintendent, a primary school and a house for its principal, accommodation for single teachers, an assembly hall with a capacity of 300, a dispensary, a rugby ground, tennis courts and a playground for children.

The labourers’ cottages contained either two or three bedrooms (4.9 x 3.6m), a living room (4.9 x 3.6m), a kitchen (3.6 x 2.7m) equipped with a coal stove, a small utility room and a front verandah. Bathrooms and a wash-house for domestic washing were provided communally. The floors of the first batch of houses were surfaced with asphalt, while those built later had wooden and their kitchens concrete floors.

The 250 houses and centrally located incidental buildings at Werkgenot were identical to those at Arbeidgenot. The school building, for example, contained four classrooms (6.7 x 6m) with a day-room for teachers, an office for the principal and two ante-rooms for the children. No plans of either the villages or the labourers' cottages appear to have survived. It is known, however, that the latter were similar in layout and identical in construction to the portable cottage depicted in Figure 9.3. All buildings in the villages were lined with match boarding up to the dado and with pulp boards above. The H-shaped house illustrated in Figures 9.4 and 9.5 was probably that occupied by either the camp superintendent or the school principal.

The model villages on the Uithoek-Volksrust line remained in existence until late in 1938 when, according to the Railway Health Officer, the Railway Administration was confronted with a 'task unprecedented in South African Railways history':

... on completion of the Natal main line improvements, the two model villages, their occupants and belongings were transferred to the Cape Eastern System for further extensive works on the main line. Families were transferred in batches of about 50 on special trains over a period of approximately 9 months without a hitch and with a minimum of inconvenience to the men, women and children, a creditable performance on the part of the construction engineers and others of the staff concerned, especially in view of the concurrent transfer of the housing. 8

9 Or 'Progress' and 'Rest Delight', an interesting renaming exercise: vide supra, note 3.
12 Ibid., pp. 41-2.
Another improvement concerned the location of kitchens and bathrooms - originally positioned in the front portion of the houses, these were moved to the rear and entrance verandas were added to the front façades.

Other alterations included providing communicating doors between bedrooms, the lack of which in a number of Natal houses necessitated access to some rooms via the verandah. Floors previously surfaced with asphalt were replaced with wood. Water taps were fitted to all kitchen sinks, while a garden tap was installed in each garden.13

Another defect of the Natal system was the absence of stores where residents could procure daily household requisites at reasonable prices. A clothing and provision store - under the auspices of the Railway Catering Department - was therefore established at each of the Cape villages. The Department also operated a butchery at Vooruitgang, and delivered per motor-conveyance meat to the residents of Rusgenot on a daily basis. A library containing some 3,000 books was put at the disposal of both adults and children in each of the villages in addition to the school libraries.14

Liberal provision was also made for recreation in both villages - tennis, rugby, cricket, netball, hockey, boxing and rifle shooting were among the sports catered for.

Water for the Vooruitgang village was piped from the nearby Stutterheim Municipal reservoir. The Rusgenot supply was drawn from an adjacent stream and chlorinated before distribution to the village. As in Natal, a pit latrine system was adopted in both the Cape villages. Liquid wastes were disposed of by means of French drains.15

The population of the villages totalled 2,136 in May 1939: 1,1012 at Vooruitgang, and 1,035 at Rusgenot. Some 79 per cent of the families resident in the new villages were transferred from the Natal villages - the remaining 21 per cent were either from the works at Glencoe or obtained through the Department of Labour. Of the 450 workers' quarters in the villages in 1939, a total of 361 was occupied by rail workers, most of whom were pieceworkers. The balance was occupied by casual graded staff, such as excavating plant operators, handymen in charge of compressors, road vehicle drivers and so on. These men were charged schedule rent, calculated on a floor area basis less 25 per cent allowance for temporary construction houses.16

13 Ibid.; these changes were effected at a total cost of £3,950: S.A.R., Report on Model Villages, par. 17(a).
14 S.A.R., Annual Report of the Railway Health Officer, 1938/39, p. 44.
15 Ibid., pp. 43-4: monthly samples for bacteriological examination were taken from both water supplies.
16 Ibid., p. 42; rentals were £1.8.9. and £1.14.4: S.A.R., Report on Model Villages, par. 15 & 19.
The high overall cost of transferring and re-erecting the villages on the Cape Eastern System - just over 45 per cent of the original cost of the Natal village - was ascribed to the poor portability of the house types employed and the skilled labour these required to dismantle and reassemble. Labour costs represented some 62 per cent of the cost of moving the villages.17

Not all pieceworkers involved in the £1,000,000 regrading programme for the Cape Eastern main line lived in Vooruitgang and Rusgenot. Work 'beyond reasonable transport distance of the two villages' was carried out by single men and married men living away from their families. Around 200 men were employed in the neighbourhood of Thomas River and 100 at Cathcart. A camp consisting of 51 four-bed huts, a mess and communal bathrooms was established at the former in 1939. Accommodation was free, with three meals per day provided at £2.10s. per head per month.18

A third village was originally envisaged for Cathcart but never materialised owing to the intervention of war. Instead, on completion of the works in the neighbourhood of Toise River during the latter part of 1942, the village of Rusgenot was moved to Cathcart. The new village had a population of 790 in 1943.19

9.2 'Most useful centres for the pursuance of social rehabilitative measures'20

What the railway model villages lacked in architectural character was more than made up for by their resounding success in terms of creating - for the first time since the adoption by the Railways organisation of a white labour policy - a disciplined, efficient and economically viable white construction workforce, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the concurrent social rehabilitation of these workers and their families.

Families for the villages were, according to the 1945 Report on Model Villages, drawn from the 'uneducated classes displaced from agriculture'. They were Afrikaans speakers on the whole and 'unadapted to community life'. Their physical and mental health having suffered through the 'hardships of poverty, lack of nourishment and poor health conditions', they were said to have reached the stage where they realised their precarious position and were prepared to accept any assistance offered to them.21

Family ties were described as strong, with the interests of the family centred around the father and his occupation. The breadwinner of the family was said never to have been 'subjected to discipline, regular hours of work and hard, continuous muscular labour', had not 'been trained physically for construction work and had never earned a regular income'. They furthermore regarded pick and shovel work as 'native labour', and lacked the 'team spirit' which required in construction work. No longer sure of their own powers and abilities to provide the financial needs of their families, these men were 'quite willing to transfer this responsibility to the State'.22

The mother of the family was said to have lost 'many of her ideals and much of her pride in home and family'. As a result, most of the women arriving at the villages were 'apparently dull, disinterested and slovenly'. Anxiety for the future of her husband and children brought about 'a restlessness which ends in apathy'.23

The children of these parents were accustomed to a 'nomadic existence, without any contacts with the outside world'. They suffered as a result of 'the dictatorship of the patriarchal family, the lack of education and poor upbringing'. Most had to 'forego the pleasures of childhood' and were left without ambition and despondent 'long before they had reached adulthood'. A 'lack of food, cleanliness, suitable clothing and social amenities', contended the 1945 Report, had left the child population with 'a permanent disability, both physically and intellectually'.24

The model village system, in the light of the above, besides providing employment to poor whites, served as a training ground for communal living to the workers and their families. Indeed, a 'high degree of socialisation' was identified as a chief problem in adjusting to the urban way of living, a process in which the railway model villages were deemed a 'first stepping-stone between isolation and socialisation'. The scheme aimed not only to rehabilitate white railworkers and their families by providing financial and social security, but sought to save them from the 'crippling effects of dependence', to recreate a spirit of self-help and to restore lost ideals and self-esteem. Weighing up the ten years of model village experience in 1945, the Committee of Investigation into the Model Villages concluded:

As a rehabilitation measure the model villages, in serving the multiple factors of providing work, the supervision of health, ensuring education and social uplift, and last, but not least, the instilling of a measure of discipline, have proved to be one of the most effective instruments which could have been utilised.25

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17 The original cost of the Natal model villages totalled £107,464, i.e. an average cost of £238.80 per house compared to the £108,30 per re-erected house: S.A.R., Report on Model Villages, par. 11; S.A.R., Annual Report of the Railway Health Officer, 1939/40, p. 43.
21 S.A.R., Report on Model Villages, par. 60, 64.
22 Ibid., par. 64, 86.
23 Ibid., par. 65.
24 Ibid., par. 66.
25 Ibid., par. 124, also par. 80, 81, 86-8.
'A MEASURE OF DISCIPLINE'

Life on the works and in the model villages of the Eastern Cape was governed by two sets of rules framed by the Chief Civil Engineer’s Department of the Railways. These - the general conditions of employment and residence as set out in the official ‘Labour Agreement’ and ‘Rules, Village Hygiene and Occupation’ - were presented to and had to be signed by all new recruits. Ultimate authority, whether on the works or in the villages, was vested in the Engineer-in-Charge.26

Conditions of employment

The men employed on the Cape Eastern main line were, like those in Natal, subsidised by the Department of Labour, but at a reduced subsidy of 5s. for married men recruited by that Department and resident in the two model villages. The subsidy for men living outside the villages was withdrawn.27

Payment for work performed was strictly on a piecework basis. As in Natal, the minimum daily rate of payment was fixed at 5s. 6d.- men who failed to earn this amount at piecework rates were liable to dismissal. The subsidy mentioned above was payable only in respect of men whose basic wages did not exceed 10s. per day.28

Pieceworkers worked in gangs under a headman they elected from among their own ranks. His appointment was subject to the approval of the Engineer-in-Charge, who also determined the number of men in each gang and allocated work to the various gangs. Answerable to the Engineer-in-Charge in all matters relating to his gang, the headman was required to keep a ‘time book’ in which the time worked by each member was recorded on a daily basis. Performance was measured by the Engineer-in-Charge, and payment made to the headman of each gang whose job it was to apportion the money among his men according to the time worked by each.29

The workers were not provided with departmental transport, and proceeded to and from work on own steam. Those working beyond walking distance used bicycles or arranged among themselves for motor conveyance. A distance of five miles from the villages was considered the furthest the men could be expected to work. When wartime petrol restrictions rendered the use of motor vehicles impossible, the works beyond this limit were provided with huts where the men lived for the duration of the week.30

Gangs were required to pay out of their earnings hire charges ‘at economic rates’ for the use of all tram-plant provided by their employer. The Administration delivered tram-plant to the site of work free of charge. The cost of damages to the plant other than ‘fair wear and tear’ was deducted from the gangs’ monthly certificates, as were the wages of the departmental graded staff who operated the plant. ‘Consumable goods’ used on the works - i.e. smithy coal, firewood, sleepers, explosives, fuel and oils for plant - were made available to the gangs at ‘cost price plus 10 per cent’. They were likewise expected to buy from the Department tools - picks, shovels, wheelbarrows, etc. - on a similar basis. Such expenses were also recovered by way of the certificates. Water was supplied only if not available within half a mile of the work, and then free of charge.31

Gangs were not permitted to employ African labour except as ‘cooks and leaders of teams’. Other stipulations of the Labour Agreement included the responsibility of gangs for veld fires arising out of their irresponsibility, as well as for any damage sustained by farmers due to the careless acts of gang members (like leaving gates open or the damaging of fences).32

Men absent from work without permission from the Assistant Engineer, or without a medical certificate and unable to furnish a satisfactory excuse, were liable to a fine not exceeding 5s. for each day of absence. Sick pay amounted to 2s. 6d. per day for a period not exceeding three months, while the rate of pay for injury on duty was fixed under the Workmen’s Compensation Act of 1934.33

A wide range of travelling concessions was extended to resident railworkers, their wives and children under 17 years of age. They were granted, whenever required, a ‘privilege ticket order’ limited to 100 miles until after three months of service, a ‘market pass’ once a month and, after twelve months of continuous service, one free pass per annum over the lines of the South African Railways. Those who stayed in employment until the completion of the works were allowed free rail passes back to their homes or places of recruitment, whichever distance was the shorter.34

Conditions of residence in the model villages

Residency in the model villages was, as stated before, restricted to married railworkers. Workers desirous of obtaining a house had to apply in writing to either the Engineer-in-Charge or the Supervisor, upon which their names were placed on a waiting list.31

26 For copies of the relevant documents: ibid., Annexures I & J, p. 191f.
27 Ibid., par. 12; vide supra, p. 276.
28 Piecework wages determined by the schedule of prices under cover of the Chief Civil Engineer’s letter C. 12159/34 of 26 July 1938: S.A.R., Report on Model Villages, par. 7, 12, 33.
29 The headman received an amount equal to 1% of the nett earnings of his gang over and above normal wages: ibid., Annexure I, ‘Labour Agreement’, General Conditions nos. 15-7, 20.
30 Ibid., par. 24.
32 Ibid., nos. 22, 23.
33 Ibid., nos. 18, 25, 26.
34 Non-residents had fewer concessions (and none before 12 months of continuous employment): ibid., nos. 28, 29.
Married pieceworkers not resident in the villages were forbidden to bring their families within 10 miles of the works - non-compliance with this rule entailed possible dismissal. Their housing arrangements, along with those for single men, took the shape of rent-free four-man tents or wood-and-iron huts near the site of work.35

Residents were selected in order of merit. Taken into consideration were factors such as the length of service, size of family, and so on. Applicants, together with their wives and families, were interviewed by the Supervisor in consultation with a Social Worker before being subjected to a medical examination by the Construction Medical Officer. The Supervisor then made a recommendation to the Engineer-in-Charge for final approval.36

New residents were required upon entry to the villages to have all their household effects fumigated by specially appointed officers. Houses were allocated by the Village Supervisors, who managed their respective villages under the direction of the Engineer-in-Charge. Residents had to observe their Supervisor's instructions relating to matters affecting the village and residence therein. Those guilty of serious misconduct risked being turned out.37

A 'spirit of co-operation' was expected of all residents in terms of the day-to-day running of the villages. Occupiers were held responsible for any wilful or unnecessary damage to Railway property and were not allowed to alter or add structurally to their dwellings. Tenure of occupation was at the entire discretion of the Engineer-in-Charge and an occupier had to vacate on demand any quarters allocated to him.38

Residents were required to keep themselves, their possessions, homes and gardens clean and tidy. The Supervisor had 'the right of entry and inspection at all reasonable hours' of dwellings and outbuildings, and conducted regular inspections to see that cleanliness was being observed. Occupants were instructed daily to clean lavatories and scrub seats - pits had to be sprinkled regularly with a disinfectant powder provided. Household waste had to be placed in bins which were emptied once or twice per week by a scavenging gang. Kitchen and washing water was to be poured down the drains - these too had to be regularly cleaned by the occupants. Villagers were strongly advised to cultivate their plots and to keep them free from noxious weeds and rubbish.39

Village rules prohibited the employment of black servants. Domestic help was permitted in special cases only, and then upon certification by the Construction Medical Officer that a resident's wife was unable to do her own work.40

The villages were proclaimed private property and notices to this effect were erected at the entrance gate of each. Public entrance to the village could be obtained only with the permission of the Supervisor. Permission to accommodate visitors or relatives for any period of time was granted under exceptional circumstances only. Traders and commercial travellers were allowed to call on householders only with the Supervisor's written permission.41

Debts were strongly discouraged. Those incurring unjustifiable debt ran the risk of discharge. Persons wishing to enter into hire-purchase agreements in excess of £5 had to consult and obtain the permission of the Supervisor. Any such agreements had to be drawn up in his presence and had to be witnessed by him. Another taboo in the village was intoxicating liquor. Those guilty of 'drunkenness, disorderly conduct, immorality, insubordination, or other serious misdemeanour' were summarily dismissed.42

Villagers were permitted to keep poultry, cats and dogs. Poultry had to be kept in suitable and tidy runs. The keeping of goats, cows, sheep, pigs, etc., was forbidden. Horses could be kept in a nearby grazing camp with the permission of the Supervisor. Residents were not allowed to possess motor-cars or motor-cycles, irrespective of whether these were kept within or outside the villages. Infringement of this regulation meant expulsion. Motor-lorries used in connection with the work could be kept in the villages with the Supervisor's approval.43

Medical treatment and medicine were available to all pieceworkers, their wives and children under the age of 18 resident in the villages, at an obligatory charge of 3s. 6d. per family per month.44

Village children were, on reaching the prescribed school-going age, required to attend school regularly. Those over the age of seven had to attend an hour-long parade every Saturday morning. All boys were to report to the Supervisor at 9 a.m. for drilling or light duties round about the village. Girls reported to the Resident Nursing Sister at 10 a.m. to be instructed in the elementary principles of domestic science and nursing, or carried out light work at the surgery or in the village. The children of residents were expected to obtain work elsewhere upon reaching the age of 18 years.45

35 Ibid., no. 4; the mess was a later addition: ibid., Annexure A, Extract - Inspection Report, Chief Clerk 'B' Division, Department of Labour, B. 602/13/80, 1939; for the rules used by those in breach of the 10 mile restriction to escape detection: ibid., Annexure A, par. 4.
36 Ibid., Annexure J, 'Rules, Village Hygiene and Occupation', Rule no.1.
37 Ibid., Rule nos. 6, 8, 30.
38 Ibid., Rule nos. 2, 4, 5, 7: houses for subsidised workers were rent-free; graded staff paid schedule rent.
39 Sanitary regulations went as far as to stipulate the cutting into squares and sticking on a skewer of lavatory paper: ibid., Rule nos. 6, 9-12, 22.

40 Ibid., Rule no. 14; black labour was used for other menial tasks within and outside the villages - a compound was included in the schedule of costs for the model villages: ibid., par. 17(a).
41 Ibid., Rules, Annexure J, 'Village Hygiene and Occupation', Rule nos. 15, 16.
42 Ibid., Rule nos. 17, 18.
43 Ibid., Rule nos. 19-21.
44 Ibid., 'Medical Privileges'; also ibid., Annexure I, 'Labour Agreement', General Condition no. 25.
HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

The supervision of health, health education and social welfare formed a vital part of village administration, the responsibility for which rested with the Railways Health and Social Welfare Organisation. The formal schooling of both children and adults were seen to by the relevant Local Education Authorities.46

Health care
The comprehensive medical benefits enjoyed by pieceworkers and their families living in the Cape model villages - at the rates quoted earlier - included the services of a full-time medical practitioner and two qualified nurses in residence, one in each village.47

The Construction Medical Officer conducted a two-hour surgery three times per week in both of the villages. His responsibilities encompassed prescribing, attendance and advice in cases of 'sickness, accident, or midwifery', also 'minor or emergency surgery and the extraction of painful teeth'. Arrangements were made for other surgical work to be performed at Frere Hospital in East London. This service, and any specialist services recommended by the Medical Officer, were available at no extra cost to the villagers. Medicine was supplied free of charge too.48

Special care was taken, beyond the controls guarding sanitation, hygiene and pest control as outlined earlier, to impart as much health knowledge as possible to residents. Families taking up residence were visited by the Nursing Sister, who instructed them in cleanliness, the use of the clinic and other facilities in the village. First in attendance in case of illness, she decided whether or not the doctor had to be called in. She visited the homes of patients unable to attend the consulting room and administered a regular ante and post-natal clinic. The Nursing Sister also advised mothers on child care and took charge of the vaccination and immunisation of incoming children and those born in the villages. Another of her many duties included the arranging of regular lectures on health related subjects such as 'cleanliness in the house', 'body cleanliness of the child' and 'the need and value of proper diet'.49

Nutrition was accorded a prominent place in the health-care of village residents too. Fruit and vegetables were supplied under the Railways' own nutrition scheme. Local farmers were permitted to hawk fresh eggs, fruit and vegetables to residents. A large number of villagers produced their own vegetables. Arrangements were made with approved nearby dairies for the daily delivery of fresh milk, the cost of which was debited against pay-sheets. A state-aided milk and butter scheme operated in the villages - children received half a pint of milk daily and were weighed monthly. School-feeding was introduced in the mid-1940s, with raisins, nuts, milk and fruit provided during the lunch-hour. School medical inspections were carried out regularly.50

Formal education
The model village schools were bigger than the local primary schools at Stutterheim and Cathcart. Staff at Vooruitgang consisted of a principal and nine assistants, and that at Rusgenot of a principal and eight assistants. Each teacher had charge of a single class only. Teaching was up to the sixth standard and took place in both Afrikaans and English until the mid-1940s, whereafter the former became the medium. The syllabus was based on that for the Cape, and included religious instruction, physical exercises, nature study, hygiene, domestic science, woodwork, needlework and agriculture. Attendance amounted to 318 children at Vooruitgang and 302 at Rusgenot in 1939.51

Older children attending Stutterheim High School were transported there and back by Railway bus. Continuation classes approved of by the Department of Education were conducted by certain of the school-teachers for those rail workers or spouses who desired to pass the sixth, seventh and eighth standards.52

Recreational and social amenities
The variety of outdoor sports catered for in the villages was outlined before. To these were added the traditional game of 'jukieskei' in 1939. Inter-village rugby, 'jukieskei' and boxing matches for children and adults were staged and meetings against neighbouring towns were arranged. 'Physical culture classes' for ladies, men and children were inaugurated at Vooruitgang in 1939.53

Bazaars, concerts, 'braaiwlaeisande' (barbecues), 'tiekieaande' and 'volkspeletjies' (folk dancing) were held frequently to augment the funds of the various sports clubs. Each village had its own debating societies for juveniles and adults. Opportunity was taken to deliver lectures on hygiene as part of the many social evenings held. Given by

46 The S.A.R. & H. Health Organisation was established in 1932, to which a Social Welfare section comprising a field staff of 16 was added in 1938: besides Social Welfare, the other sections which comprised the Health Organisation were the Transportation, Catering and Mechanical Departments; for more detail: S.A.R., Annual Report of the Railway Health Officer, 1937/38, p. 11.

47 Ibid., 1938/39, p. 43; both Natal villages had a resident Medical Officer: ibid., 1936/37, p. 21.


of the Supervisors, their wives, school-teachers and others, these also covered subjects like 'thrift in the house', 'the duty of the parent towards the child' and 'the child after school hours'. The Vooruitgang debating society had a membership of 201 in 1940, and had as its chief aim the furthering of Afrikaans culture amongst its members. The 'Voortrekker' movement (Scouts) for boys and girls was strong and regular meetings were held. A women's institute and 'Huisvlyttak' (Homecraft Branch) met once every month. Demonstrations were given and competitions arranged in needlework, knitting, baking, the renovation of clothing and other homecrafts. Matters pertaining to household management, personal hygiene, the art of wise spending, and so on, were discussed among members. A women's aid society was formed in Vooruitgang in 1939. Its members from time to time visited the 'more backward families', giving mothers advice in household management, cleanliness, etc. They also visited the sick.54

As stated earlier, every village was served by two free libraries. These were well patronised. The Railway Publicity Department operated a bookstall through each of the Village Supervisors for the distribution of newspapers, periodicals and so on.55

Around 70 per cent of the inhabitants of the model villages were members of the Dutch Reformed Church. The Rev. G.F. Malan took up post as minister for the two Cape villages in November 1938. Resident in Vooruitgang, he conducted services every Sunday at both Vooruitgang and Rusgenot. Members of other denominations were served by visiting ministers. An average of 500 children attended Sunday school every Sunday at both Vooruitgang and Rusgenot. Members of other denominations were served by visiting ministers. An average of 500 children attended Sunday school regularly. Classes were taken by residents under the direction of the Supervisors. 'Christelike Strewersverenigings' (Christian Endeavour Societies) under the auspices of the Dutch Reformed Church were inaugurated at both villages in 1940 and prayer meetings were held periodically. A choir met twice weekly in both of the villages.56

AN 'UNQUALIFIED SUCCESS'57

Perusal of the Annual Reports of the Railway Health Officer after 1935 provides a good picture of the effectiveness of the railway model village system in rehabilitating poor white railworkers and their dependants.

Social adaptation started from the very beginning of village life. One of the first signs of improvement was said to have been the attendance, after the third or fourth month, of church services and social gatherings by new resident families. At this time also school attendance of children became more regular.58

Having arrived at the villages with very few household and other possessions, the families during the first and second years of residence spent almost their entire earnings in providing the necessities of life. The Health Officer in 1937 observed how packing cases were gradually substituted for 'simple, good furniture'. The improvement in the standard of house furnishings was said to have continued during the third year, by which time many families were 'exercising thrift through the medium of Post Office savings accounts at the village Post Offices'.59

An appreciation of the necessity for regular attendance of the children at school was a first sign of rehabilitation among women. A greater interest was shown in the care of home and family after the first four months: the home was kept clean and tidy and the family provided with clean clothing and good food. Friendships were soon formed and participation in social activities increased. The extent to which permanent rehabilitation took place among the women was said to have been reflected in the fact that, unassisted by their husbands, most women whose husbands went on active service during the war managed to save substantial sums of money, in one case as much as £1,000.60

It was found that, by the time the men and their families had to leave the security of village life upon transfer to positions on the open lines, their 'training in socialisation' stood them in good stead and enabled them to meet the challenges of urban life. Commenting on the model village experience, the Health Officer in 1938 wrote: 'It has been amply demonstrated that [poor whites] are able not only to provide for their families, but also to adapt themselves to present day conditions and to improve their position by industry, care and intelligence if given the opportunity'.61

A good sign of the rehabilitation of men was their rate of promotion. Of the men employed on the Cape Eastern System between 1938 and 1945, a total of 46 per cent was promoted on the works, 6 per cent were transferred to the open lines and 11 per cent found employment elsewhere. Also significant was the low labour wastage due to misconduct. Described by Health Officer as 'virtually negligible', the low wastage was

54 Ibid., p. 46; 1939/40, p. 46; 1940/41, p. 52.
55 Ibid., 1938/39, p. 45.
56 Ibid., pp. 45-6; 1939/40, p. 46.
57 A general view of the model village system: S.A.R., Annual Report of the General Manager, UG 47-56, p. 31; Annual Report of the Railway Health Officer, 1938/39, p. 47; see also the comparison drawn with the successful Dutch Reformed Church Settlement of Kakamas: Report on Model Villages, par. 70.
58 S.A.R., Report on Model Villages, par. 70.
59 S.A.R., Annual Report of the Railway Health Officer, 1938/39, p. 47; that the families were able to save even on their small incomes was deemed 'a very healthy position indeed': Report on Model Villages, par. 70.
indicative 'that the moral standard [had] improved and that the stabilised conditions of life [were] being inculcated in the minds of the residents through the many social amenities which offer a wide scope for self-realisation and self-expression'.

Pieceworkers showed a 'gradual improvement in stamina' during the first year of employment which, according to the 1945 Report on Model Villages, was reflected in their monthly earnings. Earnings peaked during the second year. A notable decline in earnings and stamina was evident after the age of forty-five.

The example set by the railway model system in terms of health care was equally impressive. The incidence of infectious disease was kept at a very low level. For example, only two cases of diphtheria occurred between 1939 and 1945 despite its prevalence in the Eastern Province and the fact that, on several occasions, the villages were surrounded with outbreaks of the disease. During a general outbreak of infantile paralysis in the Union, not a single case was recorded in the model villages.

A good index to the health and welfare of the village communities was that provided by infantile mortality rates: at 51.5 per thousand live births, the infantile mortality rate in the villages compared very favourably with a national average for whites of 65, and more so in view of the substantially higher than national birth rate experienced in the model villages. The figure for the villages was claimed to have been the second lowest in the world, surpassed only by that of New Zealand.

Another record the Railway Administration was well proud of was that, with 489 births recorded in the villages between 1939 and 1945, no mother had died, the result of a confinement policy adopted in the villages - the white maternal mortality rate for the Union at the time was 5 per thousand live births per annum.

The achievements in terms of the education of both children and adults were another indication of the success of the model village system. As the Health Officer observed in 1938: 'Children who were reported upon as backward on arrival have made up the lost time and on arrival at Standard VI compare favourably with the average in other schools'. Quoting the average percentage of passes at the model village schools as 92...
So acute was the railworker shortage that the Railway Administration had to resort to advertising in the newspapers for applicants, and even then the response was meagre. It then became necessary 'temporarily to convert a number of European permanent way gangs into non-European gangs'.

Another upshot of the intervention of war conditions was the introduction of a bonus system in lieu of piecework in January 1945. Unreliable plant, fluctuations in the cost of consumable stores, increased pay and the rising cost of living allowances for graded staff working with the gangs meant that 'the nett earnings of the gangs bore no constant relationship to the output and gross earnings'. A new bonus system based on actual output was thus introduced. Machines, consumable stores and graded staff were henceforth provided free of charge.

Special Notice No. 2874 of 20 September 1944 entitled bonusworkers to a minimum wage of 10s. per day, plus a cost of living allowance of 5s.1.5d. per day and a bonus based on output. This increase in the basic wage was later thought greatly to have reduced the incentive to work as the men were 'more or less content to earn no more' (or simply were no longer fit to perform bonuswork): the average bonus over the period January 1945 to August 1945 amounted to ls.7.5d. per day.

Arguing that the cost of earthworks employing white labour under model village conditions had risen to a figure which made it prohibitive, the 1945 Committee went on to recommend the abandonment of both Vooruitgang and Rusgenot on completion of the works - while a number of houses could be retained to accommodate remaining graded staff, the bulk was to have been transferred for re-erection at the points to which the railworkers were to be relocated and where accommodation was not available. It was submitted that, insofar as the Administration was concerned, 'the model villages were not introduced as a "rehabilitation measure"', and that the Railways could no longer be expected 'to shoulder the burden of an uneconomic undertaking, simply on the grounds that it has proved its efficiency as a social uplifting medium':

At the same time sight must not be lost of the fact that rehabilitation work is not wholly and solely confined to the moral side of the individual: the teaching of proper nutrition and medical attention is a real factor in the building up of an improved standard of stamina, and from that angle it would be to the advantage of the Administration to encourage the work at present being done in that connection in the villages ...

Instead of abandoning the scheme altogether, the 1945 Committee thought it should be continued 'but under somewhat different conditions'. It went on to propose the introduction of a scheme 'on the lines of the model villages' but situated in selected localities in or near large urban centres - such as Germiston and Cape Town - 'where extensive works are in progress or are likely to be commenced soon'.

Accommodation in the new villages was to take the form of suitable types of brick houses, for which normal schedule rent would be extracted from occupants. Payment of rental was to be exhorted on the grounds that 'the granting of free accommodation, plus various other benefits extended to the men', had been 'one of the weak points' in the model village scheme 'inasmuch as their income is thereby raised to an unduly high figure in relation to their position in the service'.

Residents for the new villages were to be selected for eventual transfer to lower graded positions on open lines, on permanent way works, at stations, in good sheds, and so on. The villages were to serve as training grounds for an effective labour force, where men could receive the 'necessary medical attention, with a view to remedying any physical defect from which they may be suffering ... in short, their physique would be built up as far as possible, so that by the time they are transferred to open lines, they will be sound in wind and limb'.

It is not clear to what extent - if at all - these proposals were realised.

72 Ibid., par. 29-32, 88, 130, 131; Annual Report of the Railway Health Officer, 1941/42, p. 51.
73 S.A.R., Report on Model Villages, par. 34, 38.
74 Ibid., par. 35, 37, 128.
75 Ibid., par. 140; also 132-4, 139.
76 Ibid., par. 141, 144, 145.
77 And to avoid their becoming discontented upon transfer to the open lines where they would have to pay towards rent: Ibid., par. 144.
78 It was suggested that the State Departments of Labour and Social Welfare were to be approached with a design to their subsidising the 'rehabilitation part' of the new scheme: Ibid., par. 145, 148; compare with the idea mooted by the Dutch Reformed Church in 1934 of state subsidised labour settlements on the outskirts of cities to serve as 'deurgangshuise' (transit-centres) to permanent jobs for unemployed and unemployable poor whites: Du Toit, P., Report of the National Conference on the poor white problem, pp. 281-2.
CONCLUSION

This study began by observing the need for a better understanding of, on the one hand, the manner in which different forms of workers' housing may be manipulated to satisfy ideological objectives of an economic and/or political nature, and, on the other, the way in which design - 'the silent testimony of inarticulate objects' - may be wielded as one of the 'ideological apparatuses' of society. In the South African context, the innovation of the closed compound was pointed to as epitomising the former, and the model village of Kenilworth and housing for white railworkers as examples of the latter.

In the opening study the creation of the closed compound and the model village of Kenilworth was shown to have been integrally related to the structural conditions of capital accumulation at the Kimberley Diamond Fields. Closed compounding was said to have been the effective form in which the diamond mineowners came to terms with African migrant labour, and Kenilworth the means of coming to terms with the potential and absolute power of white labour.

The introduction of a universal system of closed compounding after 1887 furnished mining capital with a directly coercive method of controlling and disciplining black mineworkers at the crucial time of switching from open-cast to full-scale underground production. With its key objective the total isolation from the rest of the community of African labourers for the entire period of their contracts, the closed compound in time came to resemble a total institution, i.e. 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the rest of the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered life'.

Far from the models of social welfare they were claimed to have been, Kimberley's early closed compounds were models of labour control instead. Rather than improving the lives of black workers, they were notable chiefly for what they achieved in terms of creating a disciplined, experienced and cheap African workforce for the underground works. Tangible improvements in the living conditions of inmates were, however, effected during the reconstruction of compound housing in 1903/04. Reflecting some fifteen years' experience in compound planning, the new generation of compounds was assemblages of standardised elements like the thirty-bunk dormitory unit, latrines raised from the ground on stilts, a church, hospital, detention rooms and an incline tunnel linking mine and compound. It was by virtue of these model compounds that De Beers Consolidated Mines was able to reduce dramatically the hitherto dire death-rate among African mineworkers. Likened to a 'Kaffir Valhalla' in the report of the 1903 Rand Mines Commission, Kimberley's new closed compounds came to serve as a model for compound housing on the Witwatersrand and elsewhere in southern Africa.
The construction of Kenilworth Village after 1889 provided mining capital with a way in which to sustain its dominance over white workers, not in a directly coercive manner as with African workers, but through their ‘acquiescence’. The conspicuous superiority of Kenilworth relative to the closed compound served to obscure its true function as a parallel institution. The good quality, low-rent housing on offer in the attractive surroundings of Kenilworth appeared a far cry from the repressive disposition of the closed compound. While in the compounds black men lived thirty to a room and were denied all forms of contact with the outside world, in Kenilworth single men lived one to a room and married men were encouraged to settle there with their families.

Nonetheless, the miners who chose to settle in Kenilworth surrendered their spatial independence outside the work-place, for residing in company houses on a company estate meant enduring the constant scrutiny of their employer. It further entailed separation from the rest of the community, albeit not behind a high compound fence of corrugated iron, but by barriers to intercourse like the De Beers depositing floors and physical distance. Like their black counterparts, white workers found most of their institutional needs provided by their employer in the form of a school, church, library, post-office and so forth, while a club and recreational facilities promoted healthfully occupied leisure hours away from the canteens of Kimberley. Kenilworth Village, not unlike the closed compound, rendered its inhabitants wholly dependent on De Beers Consolidated Mines for their livelihood and submitted them to stricter discipline: 'drawing their wages from De Beers, living in houses owned by De Beers, trading with shops controlled by De Beers, they are the political and social serfs of the company'.

Whilst the introduction of closed compounding was couched in the ideologies of the African worker as a presumptive thief and as a 'child' in need of protection against the contaminating influences of a new environment, the creation of Kenilworth Village was presented as a giant philanthropic gesture. It served a function analogous to that of the model villages built in Britain in the late nineteenth century in that it offered a way of making the workforce more contented (and thus more productive) without affecting the basic relationships of capitalist production. Its trappings sought to induce white workers into becoming loyal employees of the very company blamed for the insecurity, mass unemployment, poor living conditions and growing indigence in Kimberley. The tranquil village, its pretty houses, gardens, orchard and plantations were all intended to palliate the post-amalgamation rationalisation policies which had made Cecil Rhodes so unpopular that, for a time, he dared to visit Kimberley only under police protection. It was therefore to design that De Beers Consolidated Mines had looked to carry the ideological function behind the creation of Kenilworth, i.e. to serve as visible evidence to the arrival of a new era for white labour and for Kimberley as a whole.

Even though Kenilworth Village in no way resembled a total institution, it was strikingly effective in sustaining a marked degree of control over white miners. When white wage rates reached an all-time low in 1893, for instance, the Knights of Labour tried in vain to wean white employees from loyalty to De Beers. The splendour of the village and its surroundings never failed to impress overseas visitors and was perceived as 'evidence of the generosity of this company'. 'Papa De Beers' was described as the source of Kimberley's 'roads and trees and electric light, water, model villages, and heaven knows what else'.

By institutionalising differential standards of housing for white and black miners, the twin institutions of the closed compound and model village bolstered the authority of white workers in the work-place and ruled out the potential danger of an alliance across racial divisions which so alarmed the Kimberley mineowners during the strikes of 1883 and 1884. The extent to which the Kimberley labour experience served as practicable models in the spheres of labour control and social management to gold mining and other large employers of labour in southern Africa bears eloquent witness to the significance of the Kimberley housing policy and the way in which it lent itself to reinforcing the newly-forged industrial hierarchy.

Housing provision was shown in Part II of this study in like manner to have lent countenance to the more diverse staff hierarchy of the South Africa's State Railways. The size and quality of the various standard types of Railway quarters mirrored exactly the classification of the staff establishment into different subordinate grades, i.e. the larger and more lavish the dwelling, the more senior the ranking of its occupant. A strategy of worker control was evident in Railway housing provision, especially with regard to black 'singles' accommodation.

The Railways were one of the many large employers of black labour to have availed themselves of the Kimberley labour experience. Compounds loosely modelled on the rectangular Kimberley compound formed the central thrust of black railway housing provision from the early 1900s. Like the Witwatersrand mine compounds, the railway compounds were of the 'open' type, often combined with married accommodation. In both cases the aim was not only to provide shelter, but to supervise diet and the way in which the workers wielded away their leisure hours. When in later years an impending labour shortage propelled the Railways to adopt a more uniform black housing policy, 'up-to-date' mine compounds on the Rand served as models for a new generation of railway compounds placed under the charge of a compound manager if housing more than 250 inmates. Growing labour unrest also gave rise to an attempt to use compound housing in isolating railway workers from militant elements - the 'riff-raff, professional agitators and out-of-works' - in the urban slums and townships.
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The Railways were one of the many large employers of black labour to have availed themselves of the Kimberley labour experience. Compounds loosely modelled on the rectangular Kimberley compound formed the central thrust of black railway housing provision from the early 1900s. Like the Witwatersrand mine compounds, the railway compounds were of the 'open' type, often combined with married accommodation. In both cases the aim was not only to provide shelter, but to supervise diet and the way in which the workers wiled away their leisure hours. When in later years an impending labour shortage propelled the Railways to adopt a more uniform black housing policy, 'up-to-date' mine compounds on the Rand served as models for a new generation of railway compounds placed under the charge of a compound manager if housing more than 250 inmates. Growing labour unrest also gave rise to an attempt to use compound housing in isolating railway workers from militant elements - the 'riff-raff, professional agitators and out-of-works' - in the urban slums and townships.
Worker control and a desire to protect 'potential members of the graded staff' from the evils of slum localities and the like' can be said to have underpinned the introduction in 1928 of the Railway hostel system for junior employees and single white labourers who came from a rural background and were 'unaccustomed to town and city life' or were unable to reside with their parents. Under the supervision of a house father, later assisted by a matron, hostel inmates were provided 'homely accommodation', together with facilities for 'educational advancement and social relaxation'. From the Railway point of view, the expenditure incurred in establishing and maintaining a number of hostels up and down the country was more than compensated for by the indirect gains of the scheme.

The construction of railway hostels was just one consequence of the white labour policy pursued by the South African Railways after 1907. The provision of adequate housing accommodation was regarded as central to the success of both this policy and the civilised labour policy adopted in 1924. These policies formed an important part of the protracted government-orchestrated attack whereby a major poor white problem in South Africa during the first three decades of this century was largely eliminated by the 1950s. While the Railway organisation's salient role as a chief source of employment and shelter for poor whites was in the main the outcome of a concern voiced in public and by successive governments about the 'question of keeping the white population of this country up to a standard of a dominant race', the fact that the vast majority of poor whites was Afrikaners added a strong white nationalist flavour to Railway involvement in the provision of employee housing. With one in eleven of all adult male Afrikaners in its employment by 1939, South Africa's State Railway organisation established itself as the largest single employer of Afrikaners in the urban areas.

In contrast to the way in which housing for workers in Kimberley was manipulated chiefly to the benefit of the employer, the chief underlying motive of housing provision for white labourers in the Railways was the social and economic upliftment of this class of employee. 'The decision to provide white labourers with free accommodation where possible was at the same time informed by the realisation that security of tenure was of employee. The decision to provide white labourers with free accommodation where quarters provided for married white labourers were shown to have progressed from the chiefly to the benefit of the employer, the chief underlying motive of housing provision cramped twin - roomed wood-and - iron tenements built at the time of Union to three-bedroomed brick bungalows in 1935, each with a kitchen, bathroom and pantry (and a floor area almost three times that of the old tenement). Unlike most members of the Railway staff, white labourers generally remained entitled to free quarters until 1938, when the value of free quarters was incorporated in their wage rates and they were required to pay schedule rent based on one-sixth of their basic rate of pay.

Far and away the most conspicuous manifestation of the use of housing as the pivot for the social and economic rehabilitation of non-graded white employees was shown to have been the portable Railway model villages.

Forming part of a major programme of railway reconstruction work sanctioned in 1934, the model village system was the pride and joy of the Railways as it had proved that, subject to certain preconditions, 'civilised labour' could be 'more economical and satisfactory' than 'uncivilised labour'. Moreover, as a rehabilitation measure the model villages, 'in serving the multiple factors of providing work, the supervision of health, ensuring the education and social uplift, and last, but not least, the instilling of a measure of discipline, have proved to be one of the most effective instruments which could have been utilised'.

Model villages were regarded by the Railway Administration as a training ground for communal living to the workers and their families. A 'high degree of socialisation' was identified as a chief problem in adjusting to the urban way of life, a process in which the railway model villages were deemed a 'first stepping-stone between isolation and socialisation'.

Developments in general Railway housing policy after 1937 was of benefit not just to the graded staff but also to white labourers. These included the increased involvement of the Railways in the urban housing market after 1919, the continuation of the time-honoured policy of renting at a loss, as well as the house ownership and rent rebate schemes initiated in 1937.

Besides utilising unskilled white indigents in relief works and in manual labouring jobs previously occupied by Africans, the Railway Administration went out of its way to ensure that every facility was afforded these men to qualify for promotion to higher grades carrying better emoluments. White labourers not only came to be accepted as an integral part of Railway organisation, forming around one-quarter of the Railway staff establishment during the 1930s, but the white labour grade was increasingly viewed as a 'gateway of promotion to normal grades of railway employment to men who have had no industrial training', a 'natural reservoir' from which to fill vacancies in employee-graded positions. To help the large proportion of men debarred from promotion by their lack of education, the Railways initiated a night-school system in all of the major centres of the Union.

In the period 1908-43 no less than 54,507 white labourers were promoted to positions in the graded staff establishment. Men promoted from the ranks of white labour, chiefly Afrikaans-speakers, dominated the lower-paid Railway grades as their progress up the hierarchy was blocked by the English-dominated salaried and artisan staff groups.
A most interesting development in Railway housing policy after 1937 was shown to have been the way in which house design and 'town planning principles' were used to eliminate the so-called 'Railway Camp complex'. It was the custom of housing staff on the Railway reserve on the opposite side to the town which gave rise to the association of railway folk with 'living on the wrong side of the tracks' and caused camp-dwellers to feel segregated from the rest of the community.

In accordance with new Railway policy, all new departmental housing was erected in different parts of the towns, either on individual sites or in small groups. Where it was impossible to build dispersely, new railway quarters were constructed as extensions to existing townships. In centres where even this proved impracticable, special attention was paid to 'town planning principles' in the layout of new 'Railway townships', the term adopted in preference to the old 'Railway camp'. An effort was made to depart from erecting rows of identical houses along monotonously straight and bare streets by allowing streets to follow the contours of the site and by using houses of varied designs positioned at different angles. Streets were lined with trees and properly made up and residents were instructed in the art of gardening.

Relevance of study

Housing stands out as the most visible expression of inequality in present-day South Africa. The manner in which housing has been utilised as the social pivot for black labour control throughout the country's history of industrial development has been well documented. This manipulative use of worker housing has found spatial expression in the compounds and the segregated township, described in the introduction to this study as two of the so-called 'essential institutions' of apartheid. Compounds, and latterly hostels, have formed the central thrust of the housing arrangements for 'single' black workers at South Africa's mines and in its industries, while the segregated townships, with their endless rows of almost identical technically-functional houses, have been the typical form assumed by black family accommodation in the urban areas. Quarantined within 180 metre wide 'buffer zones' and physically separated from the white suburbs by means of industrial areas, these badly kept and impoverished townships must be singled out as the most distinctive element in the South African urban landscape.

One of the highly interesting departures in recent urban housing policy with regard to this study is the central role accorded to aesthetics in the design of township houses and their physical environment in the wake of the civil unrest which swept South Africa's black townships after 1976. This shift in emphasis away from the 51/6 and 51/9 standard houses is all the more significant in view of the generally acknowledged fact that the woeful 'quality of life' in the townships was not a prime cause of unrest.

In contrast to the concerted township programme of the immediate post-1948 era, the new housing campaign stems from the acceptance by the state of the permanence of a section of the black urban population and forms part of the 'overall national strategy' of creating a 'black middle class which can be co-opted to the support of government and business'. Previously, the emphasis was on the application of 'scientific' methods and industrial techniques to a large-scale state-sponsored housing programme, the underlying strategy of which was to 'homogenise the socio-economic circumstances of the township population around a norm appropriate to its status as a "temporary" reservoir of wage labour'. A prominent feature of the new strategy is the attempts by the state to depoliticise the housing question by, for example, endeavouring to mobilise private sector resources in tackling the housing crisis and by putting up for sale almost half a million state-owned township houses at bargain prices.1

The physical products of the new housing policy are unmistakably different from the housing to which the overwhelming majority of the black urban population has been accustomed. Though not insubstantial, the so-called 'government dispensations' which have accompanied the new housing initiative do not, however, go far enough to dispel the notion that the state's endeavours to effect a dramatic improvement in black housing conditions are aimed primarily at reconciling the urban black population with a status quo that is, in essence, unchanged.

With the new housing initiative, ideology can be seen to operate through design. It is through the design of the new generation of houses and townships that the state is hoping to instil into the population - and the international community - ideas favourable to the continuing existence of the old social order. While such use of design as one of the 'ideological apparatuses' of society has been shown to have a historical precedent in the model village of Kenilworth, the new urban policy is the first occasion on which the design of black housing have been used to such telling ideological purpose.

Of course, the idea of utilising housing to encourage 'stabilisation' and the creation of an African middle class with property rights in the towns arose not only in the political domain but also in the industrial, underlining again the complex relationship between state and capital in South Africa. It is debatable whether or not the primary determinant of the new dimension to state intervention in the sphere of housing came from the political and ideological levels rather than the economic.

The central role accorded to the aesthetics of housing and the physical environment in the new urban strategy supports the evidence of this study, namely that design cannot be treated as a question divorced from politics and/or housing policy.

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1 Quotations from Wilkinson, P., The sale of the century?, p. 12, & Mabin, A. & S. Parnell, Recommmodifcation and working-class home ownership, p. 151.
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