

BRITISH OPPOSITION TO THE BOER WAR

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PREFACE

This thesis focuses on the opposition in Great Britain to the British involvement in a war in South Africa between 1899-1902. The fact emerges that opposition to the foreign policy of the government came from several segments of society and for a variety of reasons. It also appears evident that this opposition resulted in changes of government policy during the war, but most important the faith of the British in their political power structure was shaken by the war and would never be the same.

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Despite the advice, consultation, and material aid provided, the final conclusions and presentation are the work of the author, and as such he takes full credit for any errors in fact or historical judgment that may appear in this study.

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CHAPTER I

NO MORE PARADES

The death of Queen Victoria in January, 1901, symbolized the main watershed in the history of nineteenth-century British imperialism. Up to this point, the British imperialist tide had been rushing in all over the world, but subsequent to 1901 it began to subside. The word "Imperialism" was seen in newspapers and magazine articles and heard in public speeches almost daily during the last years of Victoria's reign. All the powers of Europe as well as the United States were involved in defining imperialism or were in the active process of carrying out their definition. The years 1898-1902 mark the apogee of imperialistic efforts by the world's leading powers. Although the results of the First World War would occasion an expansion in the territory under the sway of the British Empire, the popular support of the imperialist idea would never again be so potent as it was at the turn of the century. As Wilfrid Scawen Blunt wrote caustically at the close of the nineteenth century,

The old century is very nearly out, and leaves the world in a pretty pass, and the British Empire is playing the devil in it as never an empire before on so large a scale...The whole white race is reveling openly in violence, as though it had never pretended to be Christian. God's equal curse on them all! So ends the famous nineteenth century into which we were so proud to have been born.¹

¹Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events 1888-1914 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), Pt. I, pp. 375-376.

Of all the nations that Blunt castigated, it was Great Britain that most closely identified with terms empire, imperial, and imperialism. At the turn of the century Great Britain ruled the greatest empire known to man. The British Empire increased by 9,631,000 square miles and 360,646,000 inhabitants between 1878 and 1903.² British subjects took enormous pride in the fact that such an immense amount of the global map was colored with the cartographer's red that the "sun never set" on British soil.

During the last twenty-five years of the century there was a great deal of searching for a proper definition of imperialism. It was the Earl of Carnarvon who gave the term a double meaning in a speech at Edinburgh in November, 1878. He held that there was a "true" imperialism and a "false" imperialism. False imperialism was the mere increasing of the bulk of territory and the multiplication of subjects. It involved militarism, personal rule, and vast standing armies, as exemplified by the powers on the Continent. True imperialism, on the other hand, solved problems of health, provided education for future self-government, and gained the loyalty of millions of natives who otherwise would never have understood nor shared in benefits of western civilization.³ Carnarvon's double definition was received warmly by the press. Imperialism, it seemed, could be a virtue or a vice, depending upon which side of the English Channel or which side of the English political fence you resided. In an effort to avoid the obvious pitfalls of

²John A. Hobson, Imperialism: A Study (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1902), p. 16.

³Annual Register: A Review of Public Events at Home and Abroad for the Year 1878 (London: Rivingtons, 1879), pp. 183-184.

Carnarvon's rather tendentious definition, in this study the term imperialism will be used to mean an aggressive, popularly supported policy of expansion for territorial control by the British government at the time of the Boer War.

The initial impetus for this nineteenth-century empire came in 1875 when Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli purchased shares in the Suez Canal Company from Khedive Ismail of Egypt. This provided a backbone which linked Great Britain with her possessions in Asia. The application of flesh to this skeletal structure began with the acquisition of Cyprus in 1878, the same year that Lord Carnarvon gave his definition of imperialism. From this point the British moved towards an imperialistic crescendo culminating in the Boer War. The motives for the acquisition of these domains were as varied as the nations and nationalities that were added to the imperial fold. Commercial interests, considerations of naval power, yellow journalism, the Christian missionary movement, emigration of surplus population, a spirit of adventure, and strategic considerations were but a few of the causative factors involved in building the Empire.⁴ Each of these factors can be seen in operation prior to and during the Boer War.

Out of the war, however, there emerged a changing attitude toward empire which was expressed in many ways. English literature at the turn of the century affords an example of this transformation. The literary prophet of imperialism in the nineteenth century was Rudyard Kipling. His short stories, poems, and novels filled the imagination of a

⁴William L. Langer, The Diplomacy of Imperialism (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1935), Vol. I, pp. 67-100.

generation of British youth with the desire to leave their mark on the world. The epitome of glorification and justification of Empire was Kipling's poem, "White Man's Burden," first published in February, 1899, just eight months before the Boer War began.

Take up the White Man's burden -
Send forth the best ye breed -
Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;⁵

Kipling's friend, H. Rider Haggard, wrote novels of the Dark Continent which immediately became best-sellers and inspired greater interest in British activities in Africa. His two best known novels, King Solomon's Mines (1885) and She (1886), were published in the very years when large gold deposits were discovered in the Witwatersrand of the Transvaal.

This interest and pride in empire was carried over into the children's textbooks of the time. A history of England popular before World War I attempts to show how the Boers were better off in the Empire:

The Boers had to admit that they were beaten and to lay down their arms....As we are never hard on people we have conquered, they were treated kindly, and as we have seen since, wisely. Though it is a bitter thing for a free people to be deprived of their independence there is little doubt that they were better off in the end.⁶

Thus were the glories of empire praised.

But the generation that grew up during this time of highly emotional nationalism was to leave behind literature that reflected the approaching demise of imperial enthusiasm. Even Kipling had his doubts

⁵Rudyard Kipling, A Choice of Kipling Verse, ed. by T. S. Eliot (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), p. 136.

⁶Maria Callcott, Little Arthur's History of England (London, 1937), p. 282, as quoted in Cynthia F. Behrman, "The Mythology of British Imperialism 1880-1914" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Boston, 1965), p. 51.

about the permanence of the Empire, as his "Recessional," first published in 1897, shows:

Far-called, our navies melt away;
On dune and headland sinks the fire:
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget--lest we forget!⁷

Kipling spent the winter of 1900 visiting the troops in South Africa and helping in the editing of an army newspaper. The visit did not change his views on the need for an empire, but he was appalled at the state of training the soldiers had received before leaving for South Africa. With the publication of the poem, "The Islanders," he alienated friends and readers, but he also made his point:

Sons of the sheltered city--unmade, unhandled,
unmeet--
Ye pushed them raw to the battle as ye
picked them raw from the street.⁸

The poet Robert Graves recalls that the Boer War caused "great tension at the breakfast table" between his eldest brother and his father.⁹ Graves was able to understand this emotionalism when he returned to England as one of the wounded during World War I.

England looked very strange to us returned soldiers. We could not understand the war-madness....The civilians talked a foreign language; and it was newspaper language. I found serious conversation with my parents all but impossible.¹⁰

And the poet Siegfried Sassoon, a friend of Graves, found no gold, God,

⁷Kipling, A Choice of Kipling Verse, p. 140.

⁸Ibid., p. 129.

⁹Robert Graves, Goodbye to All That (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1929), p. 27.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 201.

or glory in the trenches of France which were costing Britain, France and Germany a full generation of men:

But when he'd told his tale, an old man said
That he'd seen soldiers pass along that hill;
'Poor silent things, they were the English dead
Who came to fight in France and got their fill.'¹¹

This revulsion against the old imperialistic shibboleths can be found in novels as well as poetry of the post-1900 era. Ford Madox Ford, in his tetralogy on Edwardian Britain, paints a picture of a society that was disappearing after 1900. Ford's main character, Christopher Tietjins, expresses the feeling in No More Parades. He tells of

the band playing 'Land of Hope and Glory,' and then the adjutant saying 'There will be no more parades'...No more Hope, no more Glory, no more parades for you and me any more. Nor for the country.¹²

George Orwell used his personal background as a former policeman in Burma for his anti-imperialist novel Burmese Days. The story revolves around the members of a small British garrison at a remote outpost in Burma who "sit in Kipling-haunted little Clubs" and slowly decay.¹³ In less than a generation after the Boer War the first shades of twilight had appeared over the British Empire.

But in its time, the Boer War was supported by a wave of patriotic enthusiasm fostered by the popular press and encouraged by the government. The Education Act of 1870 had produced a new class of readers with short memories and sensationalist appetites. The press, led by the

¹¹Siegfried Sassoon, Collected Poems (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1942), p. 23.

¹²Ford Madox Ford, No More Parades (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1925), p. 311.

¹³George Orwell, Burmese Days (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1934), p. 69.

prestigious London Times, was overwhelmingly in support of the war in the Transvaal. The Manchester Guardian and the Westminster Gazette were the only newspapers that were not swamped by the patriotic fervor that swept the country during the Boer War.

These two newspapers and W. T. Stead's Review of Reviews were the chief public organs of anti-imperialist sentiment. They opposed both the methods of empire building and policies of the government in relation to its maintenance. This opposition existed at all levels of society, from Parliament to the working men in the mines and shipyards. Their opposition also ran the gamut of emotions: from the clear reasoning of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to the bitter vituperation of the Blackburn Labor Journal. The Boer War became a contest between the actively aggressive imperialist faction and those less ambitious Britons who felt that closer ties should be forged within the existing Empire rather than expanding it indefinitely.

The character of the opposition was as diverse as the groups that composed it. This study will deal with opposition to the war between July, 1899 and June, 1902, and focus on three segments of the society: parliamentary opposition, socialist opposition, and the peace movement outside these two groups. As each of these segments is examined, the motive and character of its opposition will be assessed. The effect of the opposition of each segment on the wartime policy decisions of the government will be evaluated. Rayne Kruger argues that "the war had severely shaken people's confidence in the ruling class."¹⁴ This study will show how the opposition reflected this loss of confidence in the

¹⁴Rayne Kruger, Good-bye Dolly Gray: The Story of the Boer War (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1959), p. 509.

leadership, thus revealing the first cracks in the British power structure.

By promises of reform, the "Cecil dynasty" of Prime Minister Salisbury had won a decade of power for the Conservatives in the election of 1895. But the next ten years were to prove rather barren on the domestic scene, for vigorously expansive imperialism had caught the country's imagination. This was the area in which the Conservative Government would leave its mark. The man that would do this work was Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary.¹⁵

The position of Colonial Secretary had previously been a relatively minor one, but this vigorous man made the office much more prestigious. Prime Minister Salisbury¹⁶ and A. J. Balfour¹⁷, leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons, allowed Chamberlain a free hand in the Colonial Office as compensation for Chamberlain's desertion of the Liberals in 1885 and his consequent loss of a possible Liberal premiership. As early as 1893, Chamberlain had sounded the call for commercial imperialism in a speech to a Birmingham audience. There was, he said, a

¹⁵Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914). Liberal M.P. for Birmingham, 1876-85; Liberal Unionist M.P. for West Birmingham, 1885-1914. President, Board of Trade, 1880-85; President, Local Government Board, 1886; Secretary for Colonies, 1895-1903.

¹⁶Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne-Cecil (1830-1907). Third Marquess of Salisbury. Premier and Foreign Secretary, 1885-86, 1886-92, 1895-1902.

¹⁷Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930). Conservative M.P. for Hertford, 1874-85; for East Manchester, 1885-1906; for City of London, 1906-22. Earl Balfour 1922. President, Local Government Board, 1885-86; Secretary for Scotland, 1886-87; Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1887-91; First Lord of the Treasury, 1891-92; Leader of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons, 1891-1902; Leader of Conservative Party, 1902-11; Prime Minister, 1902-05; First Lord of the Admiralty, 1915-16; Foreign Secretary, 1916-19; Lord President of the Council, 1919-22, 1925-29.

"necessity for using every legitimate opportunity to extend our influence and control in that great African continent which is now being opened up to civilization and to commerce."¹⁸ Thus Chamberlain pointed to the area that was to feel much of the impact of his ideas for the ten years after 1895. Chamberlain felt that the government had done too little in aiding the colonies. Most of this work had been in the hands of private enterprise, and it was beyond their means to bring about improvement. For this reason Chamberlain felt that the Office of Colonial Secretary should take the initiative from the merchant and the investor.

His opponents in the Liberal Party had been in a weak position since the disruption caused by the Home Rule controversy in 1886. Gladstone did not stand for re-election in 1895, and the party leadership passed to Lord Rosebery¹⁹, whose primary contribution was the coining of the term "Commonwealth." The 1895 election, however, did place two Liberals in Commons who were to leave their mark in the future: Sir

¹⁸Speeches of Joseph Chamberlain (London, 1897), pp. 131 ff., as quoted in Louis L. Snyder, ed., The Imperialism Reader: Documents and Readings on Modern Expansionism (Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company Inc., 1962), p. 125.

¹⁹Archibald Philip Primrose (1847-1929). 5th Earl of Rosebery. Home Under-Secretary, 1881-83; Lord Privy Seal, 1885; Chief Commissioner of Works, 1885; Foreign Secretary, 1886, 1892-94; Prime Minister, 1894-95.

Henry Campbell-Bannerman²⁰ and David Lloyd George.²¹ Their party subscribed to the motto of "Peace, Retrenchment, and Reform": peace throughout the Empire; retrenchment in financial policy, with a surplus, or at worst, a balanced budget; and reform at home for the working population. They took the position that the Conservatives were following a "false" imperialism, in Lord Carnarvon's definition, and supported the laissez faire policy which had been given its most definitive form by Gladstone.

Upon Rosebery's resignation from the Liberal Party in 1896, leadership passed to Sir William Harcourt.²² Harcourt's resignation in December, 1898, caused a political sensation because it opened to public display the sharp internal disagreements over foreign affairs that could lead to a total collapse of the Liberal Party. Harcourt's successor was Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. It was hoped that as a moderate he could successfully bridge the gap between the left, dominated by Harcourt,

²⁰Henry Campbell-Bannerman (1836-1908). Liberal M.P. for Stirling, 1868-1908. Financial Secretary, War Office, 1871-74, 1880-82; Secretary to Admiralty, 1882-84; Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1884-85; Secretary for War, 1886, 1892-95; Prime Minister, 1905-8; Leader of the Liberal Party, 1899-1908. G.C.B., 1895.

²¹David Lloyd George (1863-1945). Liberal M.P. for Carnarvon Boroughs, 1890-1944. Earl Lloyd George of Dwyfor, 1945. President, Board of Trade, 1905-8; Chancellor of Exchequer, 1908-15; Minister of Munitions, 1915-16; Secretary for War, 1916; Prime Minister, 1916-22. Leader of the Liberal Party, 1926-31.

²²William George Granville Vernon Harcourt (1827-1904). Liberal M.P. for Oxford City, 1868-80; for Derby, 1880-95; for West Monmouthshire, 1895-1904. Solicitor General, 1873-74; Home Secretary, 1880-85; Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1886, 1892-95.

John Morley²³, and David Lloyd George, and the right, represented by Edward Grey²⁴ and H. H. Asquith²⁵.

The Boer War split the Liberal Party into three groups. The Liberal Imperialists, numbering about fifty and led by Grey and Asquith, supported the war to the extent of voting against their own party at times. The other extreme, tagged "pro-Boers" by the Conservatives, numbered between twenty and thirty in the House of Commons and were led by Harcourt, Morley and young Lloyd George. In the middle was Campbell-Bannerman and the majority of the Liberal Party. Because of Campbell-Bannerman's attempts to hold the party together and appease all sections, he was dubbed "Sir Facing-Both-Ways."²⁶

While the British political structure was experiencing these tensions in anticipation of the approaching conflict, the people of the Transvaal were looking at a world that was preparing to plunge into the twentieth century through sixteenth-century eyes. The white population, or Boers, were farmers of Dutch descent who had continually resented the encroachment of civilization. In order to escape British domination,

²³John Morley (1838-1923). Liberal M.P. for Newcastle-on Tyne, 1883-95, for Montrose Boroughs, 1896-1908. Viscount Morley, 1908. Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1886 and 1892-95. Secretary for India, 1905-10. Lord President of the Council, 1910-14.

²⁴Edward Grey (1862-1933). Liberal M.P. for Berwick-on-Tweed, 1885-1916. Viscount Grey, 1916. Foreign Under-Secretary, 1892-95; Foreign Secretary, 1905-16.

²⁵Herbert Henry Asquith (1852-1928). Liberal M.P. for East Fife-shire, 1886-1918; for Paisley, 1920-24. Earl of Oxford and Asquith, 1925. Home Secretary, 1892-95; Chancellor of Exchequer, 1905-8; Prime Minister, 1908-16. Leader of Liberal Party, 1908-26.

²⁶John S. Galbraith, "The Pamphlet Campaign On the Boer War," Journal of Modern History, XXIV (February, 1952), p. 114.

the Boers had moved into the interior of South Africa in a Great Trek which involved twelve thousand people and lasted from 1836 to 1843. The Transvaal had been peacefully annexed by Britain in 1877, but the victory of the Boers over the British at Majuba Hill in 1881 resulted in semi-independence for the Transvaal. There was still an element of confusion on the question of suzerainty in the relations between the two countries. The Boers contended that Britain's suzerainty no longer existed. The British, on the other hand, behaved as though they still exercised suzerain powers over the Transvaal.

The discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in 1886 was the key to the events which would culminate in war in October, 1899. The gold rush brought the usual tide of prospectors, speculators, and adventurers into the Transvaal. These persons were of both British and Continental descent, but the number of British was especially large due to the easy accessibility of the area from neighboring British-controlled territory. There are no definite figures available, but estimates range from 80,000 to 120,000 British citizens living in the Transvaal in 1899. All these foreigners were collectively called "Uitlanders," or foreigners by the Boers. It was inevitable that frictions would develop between the pious Boers and the boisterous Uitlanders.

In the eyes of the British subjects at home, the most serious grievance of the Uitlanders was their lack of political rights, but their complaints were many and varied. The miners had to contend with a government monopoly on the dynamite that was needed in their work. The tax records of 1896 showed that Uitlanders provided three-fourths of the entire state revenue in the form of custom duties, telegraph and railway receipts, mining taxes, and postal receipts. By holding the rights to

all the railways in the country, the monopolistic Netherlands Railway Company was able to charge exorbitant rates. With temperance reform in full swing at home, the British looked with alarm at the high rate of drunkenness among the native population. In British eyes, this represented a calculated demoralization of the blacks by the Boers. Moreover, the Boers reserved the right to expel any alien from the country upon two weeks notification.²⁷

The tensions between the Transvaal and Great Britain were heightened by the Jameson Raid in December of 1895. Dr. Leander S. Jameson was a close friend of Cecil Rhodes, business magnate and Prime Minister of Cape Colony. Jameson incorrectly believed that the Uitlanders would revolt if given armed support and attempted to provoke this revolt by his famous raid in December, 1895. The Boers captured Jameson's troop and turned the raiders over to the British Government for punishment. They were shipped off to England where they received light sentences. What particularly annoyed both the Boers and the Liberal Opposition in Britain was the exoneration of Cecil Rhodes by Joseph Chamberlain. The main results of the Raid were a stiffening of anti-British feeling, an increase in the stature of the President of the Transvaal, Paul Kruger, and an upsurge in Afrikaner nationalism. Figures show that the raid persuaded the Boers to increase their spending on armaments more than 500% in the year which followed. As the Liberal Manchester Guardian put it, if "the Transvaal is armed to the teeth...it was armed by Mr. Rhodes...whose attack upon it set it scouring Europe for guns,

²⁷James S. Worrall, "The British Press and the Transvaal Problem 1881-1899" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1930), passim.

ammunition, professional military skill, every means of protection against a second attack."²⁸

During the next three years vain attempts were made to settle Uitlanders' grievances by peaceful means, but the situation remained ripe for another incident. Just before Christmas, 1898, Boer police attempted to arrest a Johannesburg miner named Tom Edgar and shot him dead in a scuffle. The Uitlanders, incensed by the policeman's acquittal, submitted a petition of grievances to the British High Commissioner for the Cape Colony, Sir Alfred Milner, and to Queen Victoria. The British Government was forced to take action to ameliorate the grievances listed therein and demanded that the Transvaal ease its franchise and citizenship restrictions on the Uitlanders. Though the Liberals in London hoped that the guidelines established by the recent Hague Convention would be followed in settling the dispute, President Kruger was in no mood to make concessions to the British. By the end of August, 1899, it was apparent that both sides were resigned to a war. The British and the Boers had been increasing their troop strength throughout the summer, and it was but a matter of time before the blow fell.

The Boers delivered an ultimatum to the British Government on October 9, 1899, demanding that all points of difference be settled by arbitration. In addition, all troops on the borders of the Republic and all reinforcements that had landed in South Africa since the first of June were to be withdrawn. All troops that were presently en route on the high seas were not to be landed. Kruger warned that if these demands were not answered affirmatively within forty-eight hours the Transvaal

²⁸The Manchester Guardian, February 1, 1900, p. 7.

Government would "be compelled to regard the action of Her Majesty's Government as a formal declaration of war."²⁹ There was no hope of compliance. On October 12, 1899, the Boers invaded Cape Colony.

In Britain, the spirit for war was at a fever pitch. The world had just witnessed the United States defeat Spain in a neat, six-months' war. Britain, it was believed, would have no trouble routing a group of poorly organized farmers. Yet this war would drag on for an agonizing two years and eight months before a final peace was achieved. The conflict would pass through four separate phases. The period October to December, 1899, was one of confidence and optimism in London until the mood was shattered by a series of defeats in mid-December. The second phase, from January to May, 1900, was one which could be described as a "girding of the loins." It was marked by heavy fighting and the successful relief by the British of the three beleaguered cities of Ladysmith, Kimberley, and Mafeking. The conclusion seemed near during the third phase between May and September, 1900. The capitals of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State were captured, and the British controlled the lines of communications. To the military and civilian leaders in Britain, the war appeared virtually over, inasmuch as the objectives of any conventional war had been achieved. But in the months after October, 1900, the war turned into a guerrilla action; the Boers dealt serious and repeated blows to their enemy but were at last forced to surrender by sheer weight of numbers in June, 1902. From October, 1900, to the end of the war, Britons experienced a growing disillusionment toward the glories of empire and the capabilities of the nation's leaders.

²⁹Ibid., October 11, 1899, p. 4.

These periods will be examined in greater detail to give an overall picture of the military operations during the war.

At the beginning of the war the British found themselves under siege in three places. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Baden-Powell was blockaded at Mafeking, and Colonel R. G. Kekewick was in command of a force in Kimberley. The Boers controlled the entire railway line from the Orange River to Rhodesia, and with the British bottled up in these two towns, their enemies could thrust into the western Cape. The situation was especially critical in Natal where the main British forces were invested in Ladysmith under constant pounding by the heavy Long Tom cannons of the Boers. In all three sieges, the Boers felt that nothing could be gained by bloody assaults on the encircled towns; they prepared to sit back and wait for the ripened fruit to fall into their hands. But by December, 1899, the offensive was shifting to the British.

Englishmen were still enthusiastic about the war. Baden-Powell had captured British hearts with his cheerful messages from besieged Mafeking, and it was generally agreed that open conflict rather than sieges would decide the course of the war. This complacency was soon to suffer a rude shattering in "Black December." On December 10, 1899, Major General William Gatacre's force of 3,000 men were defeated at Stormberg Junction with the loss of six hundred captured. This was startling enough, but the next day witnessed the even more dismal defeat of 13,000 crack British troops. This group, under the command of Lord Methuen, was on its way to Kimberley when attacked by Boers led by Piet Cronje at Magersfontein Hill. Upwards of a thousand men were killed, wounded, captured, or listed as missing. In the meantime, the commander-in-chief of British forces, General Redver Buller, was on the march in Natal to

relieve Ladysmith when the Boers fell on him at Colenso on December 15. Buller saw five V.C.'s and eighteen D.C.M.'s won on the battlefield that day, but he was nevertheless forced to abandon his march to Ladysmith after suffering 1,127 casualties.³⁰ These defeats left no doubt that it would now be a long war.

These setbacks of December marked the beginning of the second phase. Strategy was predicated on the dictum that wars were won by occupying the principal cities of the enemy, and every effort was now directed toward the relief of Kimberley, Ladysmith, and Mafeking, and the occupation of the capitals of the Transvaal and Orange Free State, Pretoria and Bloemfontein. Certain changes of command were felt necessary before these objectives could be attained. Field Marshal Viscount Roberts had offered to take over the command of South Africa in December, 1899. Roberts was 67 years old and had made his record in India. After the "Black Week" of December it was decided a change was needed, and Roberts' offer was accepted. Roberts' Chief of Staff was the younger Major General Kitchener, who had caught the public's fancy by his defeat of the Sudanese at Khartoum.

Roberts' strategy was to execute a flank march up to Kimberley, then a cross country movement to Bloemfontein and Pretoria. He began his move toward Kimberley on February 13, 1900, and relieved the town two days later. The officers of the relief force were served champagne by the most notable member of the lately besieged garrison, Cecil Rhodes. Twelve days later, on the nineteenth anniversary of Majuba Hill, Piet Cronje surrendered with four thousand Boer troops to General

³⁰Kruger, Good-Bye Dolly Gray, p. 143.

Roberts. Word came the next day that General Buller had finally managed to break the siege of Ladysmith after taking four months to defeat an army that was only a third of his strength.

Early in March, Roberts turned his forces toward Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State. Unlike the Transvaal, this little republic was fully independent of British control, but joined the Transvaal out of a common sense of danger when the conflict began. On March 13, after feeble resistance by the Boers, Roberts marched into Bloemfontein. Pretoria, capital of the Transvaal, was the next target. While making plans for the march on Pretoria, Roberts ordered General Hunter to relieve Mafeking. After a five day march, Hunter relieved the city which had been under siege for seven months. The defense of Mafeking had become a symbol of British doggedness that far outweighed any military significance it may have had. In Great Britain the streets were filled with people rejoicing, and college students ran riot in an orgy of jubilation. The relief of the siege of Mafeking gave a boost to British morale and a new word to the English language.³¹

The war moved into its third phase when Pretoria was occupied on June 5, 1900. To the British way of thinking, the war was over. The capital cities of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State had been occupied. The army was busy mopping up and chasing the commando units of Christian de Wet and Louis Botha, and it appeared but a matter of time before these two guerrilla leaders would be captured. Roberts formally annexed the Transvaal on September 1, 1900, declared the war over, and

³¹"Maf'fick: to celebrate hilariously, as the English did after the relief of Mafeking." Websters New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass.: G. and C. Merriam Co., 1953), p. 504.

ordered farms to be burned to destroy the harboring places of the Boer commando units.

In October, 1900, the "khaki election" was held in Britain. The opposition charged that the election had been called simply to exploit the war to extend the Conservative Government's term of office. By law, parliamentary elections were to be held at least every six years, and though the Conservatives had been in office only five years and one month, they timed the election to coincide with the military successes in South Africa. After a harsh, mud-slinging electoral campaign, the Conservatives won 402 seats and 2,428,492 votes, while the Liberal and Irish parties won a total of 268 seats with 2,105,518 votes.³²

While the Conservatives were basking in the glory of a comfortable majority, events were taking an ominous turn on the South African front as the war shifted into its last stage. A new kind of warfare was beginning to appear which portended nothing but evil to the Liberal press: "People are getting tired of hearing that the war is over,"³³ The Manchester Guardian intoned at the end of October. The war would drag on for yet another eighteen months.

Roberts left Africa in December, 1900, to take the position of Commander-in-Chief, leaving Kitchener in command of South Africa. Kitchener realized he would exhaust his command by chasing the elusive commando units. To avoid this, Kitchener introduced the blockhouse system to the war. These blockhouses were built along the railroads to protect the supply lines. After securing the railroads they were pushed across

³²Edgar Holt, The Boer War (London: Putnam, 1958), p. 184.

³³The Manchester Guardian, October 26, 1900, p. 5.

the open veldt until there were 8,000 separate installations at a distance of a mile to a mile and a half apart. The blockhouse lines were not impenetrable, but they restricted Boer movements to the night.

The policy of farm-burning produced a problem of what to do with the dependents of the Boers. They were moved into refugee camps that came to be called "concentration camps." The term was innocuous at this time and simply designated a place where persons were collected or concentrated. Due to poor planning, poor supplies, and overcrowding, however, the death rate among the women and children rose to alarming proportions. Disclosure of these conditions caused a great stir of protest at home. The conditions in the camps did improve, but they continued to provide a source of ammunition for the Liberal opposition.

Within a year, Kitchener's draconian methods began to produce results, and in March, 1902, the belligerents opened negotiations for a settlement. The Boers still demanded their independence, but this was totally ruled out by the British. The Boer leaders finally accepted the British proposals by a vote of fifty-four to six and signed the Treaty of Vereeniging on May 31, 1902, in a spirit of reconciliation. "We are good friends now,"³⁴ said Kitchener confidently at the signatory ceremony. This war cost the British 22,000 dead at a cost of 200,000 pounds, while the Boers' costs totalled 24,000 dead with untold property damage due to Kitchener's methods.

In wartime a nation generally presents a united front to all outsiders, friend and foe alike. A casual survey of the British newspapers during this time would suggest that this was true of Great Britain. But

³⁴Holt, The Boer War, p. 290.

there were elements in British society that opposed the war both prior to its beginning and throughout the duration of the war to the peace treaty. Opposition prior to the war had centered on achieving a peaceful settlement of the crisis, but the Boer aggression had frustrated this pacific effort. As the war moved into its second phase after January, 1900, the opposition built up a steady torrent of criticism that peaked during the khaki election in the fall of 1900. As the war dragged on into its guerrilla phase, opposition continued almost unabated to the end of the war. Anti-war sentiment emanated from many different segments of English society, but it was in Parliament that the opposition voice was most effective. It is in the House of Commons, therefore, that an examination of the forces opposing the war must begin.

CHAPTER II

LIBERAL OPPOSITION

Since 1895, when Gladstone let the mantle of the Liberal Party command fall, and Conservatives won their resounding victory at the polls, the Liberals had not been able to reestablish an effective leadership. The party had been weakened by the resignation of its previous leader, Sir William Harcourt, in December, 1898. Harcourt had resigned in protest over the Government's aggressive foreign policy, a policy which he felt was damaging the nation's fiscal stability. Criticism of the Government's course had caused divisions within the Liberal ranks, and Harcourt saw that it was important to preserve party unity rather than cause a complete rupture which would have destroyed any possibility of an effective opposition. His successor, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, therefore, had to "sit on the fence" in the hope of maintaining party unity. Throughout the summer of 1899, Campbell-Bannerman led the moderate center of the Liberal Party and tried to keep dissension to a minimum in the face of worsening relations with the Transvaal.

The left wing of the Liberal Party was led by Harcourt, John Morley, and David Lloyd George. Harcourt's opposition was directed against Government extravagance, and, while Morley agreed with Harcourt and joined him in voicing strong opposition to the government policy in South Africa, Morley's opposition found its basis in humanitarian grounds. In Morley's opinion, the Liberal Party had to make up its mind

"Whether it would be a party for militarism or a party against militarism."¹ Lloyd George confronted the Government with attacks rooted in a humanitarian concern tinged with Welsh nationalism. He aimed many of his arguments directly at the person of the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain. The Irish Nationalists, led by John Dillon of county Mayo and John E. Redmond of Waterford, heatedly fought the Government and displayed strong Irish nationalism in their arguments against the war. In return, Government leaders subjected them to the harshest of accusations, including that of treason.

The failure of the Bloemfontein Conference in June, 1899, marked the end of any hope for a peaceful settlement. The breakdown of negotiations occurred over the question of granting the franchise to the Uitlanders. Lord Milner, the British High Commissioner for South Africa, had demanded that the Uitlanders be granted citizenship and the franchise after five years of residency. President Kruger refused to accept this and countered with a proposal to grant the rights of naturalization and franchise after two years to those miners who had settled in the Transvaal prior to 1890. For the post-1890 settlers it would require two years before citizenship would be granted and five additional years for the granting of the franchise. This offer was immediately rejected by Her Majesty's Government. The Liberals and Irish Nationalists took delight in pointing out that British law itself required an alien to reside in the country for five years before naturalization and exercise of the franchise. It struck Campbell-Bannerman as ludicrous "that we should go to war in order to hurry our own fellow-citizens into

¹The Manchester Guardian, June 7, 1899, p. 4.

another citizenship."² The opposition viewed the disagreement as a minor quarrel over a two-year difference between the two disputants.

The jingoist spirit in Great Britain rose rapidly during the four-month interval between the end of the Bloemfontein Conference in June and the outbreak of hostilities in October. Throughout the summer of 1899, the British newspapers were filled with stories about troop movements to the Cape Colony. When Campbell-Bannerman inquired if these plans for troop movements marked a change in Government policy, A. J. Balfour, the First Lord of the Treasury, coolly replied that the War Office was preparing for any emergency, however undesirable.³

With the question of the franchise the central point of the discussion, the Opposition labored manfully to show the inconsistencies of the Government's position. They pointed out that universal manhood suffrage was not a reality even in Britain and not even a remote possibility in India. When the Government was asked why they were not as concerned about giving the franchise to the people of India as they were about the rights of the Uitlanders, a spokesman replied, "If you have a thoroughly good government without the franchise, then possibly the franchise is not required."⁴ Campbell-Bannerman took great delight in quoting Chamberlain's prophecy on the results of a war with South Africa. On May 8, 1896, Chamberlain had said, "A war in South Africa would be one of the most serious wars that could possibly be waged. It would be a long war, a bitter war, and a costly war, and...it would leave behind impressions

²Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. LXXV (1899), p. 695.

³Ibid., Vol. LXXII (1899), p. 186.

⁴Ibid., Vol. LXXV (1899), p. 764.

of strife which...generations would hardly be able to blot out."⁵ This criticism by the Liberals had no effect on a Government that was bound by a tradition to protect the British citizen no matter where he might reside.

Parliament was prorogued on August 9, 1899, and was to convene again on October 27. This two-month interval was a period of scant public pronouncements except for a few speeches by Chamberlain and Balfour. On August 26, 1899, Chamberlain entertained a group of Liberal Unionists at his home in Birmingham. Responding to requests for a statement on affairs in South Africa, Chamberlain said that Great Britain had made all the concessions it could make at the Bloemfontein Conference and warned President Kruger that "the sands are running down in the glass," and that the issue was now in Kruger's hands.⁶ The jingos welcomed this speech with great enthusiasm, but to the Opposition it appeared that Chamberlain was closing the door on a peaceful settlement. The Liberals felt that the Government was "publicly washing one's hands, as it were, of one's own obligations to labour for peace,"⁷ and demanded a special session of Parliament lest the nation go to war without the Opposition having a voice in the matter. However, the aggressive attack by the Boers on October 12, 1899, took Britain by surprise and caused a temporary silencing of the Opposition.

A special session of Parliament was called in October to provide appropriations for the war. In the Commons, Campbell-Bannerman did not

⁵Ibid., p. 691.

⁶The Manchester Guardian, August 28, 1899, p. 5.

⁷Ibid., p. 4.

openly oppose any money bills needed for the war but continued to attack the pre-war policies of the Government as the cause of the conflict. He deplored the necessity for fighting a white, European, and Christian government in the Transvaal.⁸ To the extreme element in the Opposition, the Government was acting without regard to the 1884 Convention which ended Great Britain's suzerainty in the Transvaal or the recent Hague Convention which called for arbitration of disputes between nations. The supporters of the Government viewed the situation as a case of the Boers being overconfident since defeating the British at Majuba Hill in 1881. To this group it appeared that Majuba Hill was "coming home to roost."⁹ The Opposition sadly stated that "if the land had been a potato field instead of a gold field there would have been no war."¹⁰

During the special session from October 17 to October 27, 1899, the Liberals limited their attacks to the Government's handling of the South African policy prior to the outbreak of hostilities. However, the Irish Nationalists indulged in much sharper criticism of the Government's policy. John Redmond, an Irish member, felt that the "calling together of Parliament at all is simply a farce" when the Government asked for a vote on a money bill without allowing the Opposition to voice an opinion.¹¹ Redmond, like other Irish members, persisted in comparing British actions in South Africa to her earlier oppressive acts in Ireland. This finally resulted in Redmond's ejection from the House of Commons on

⁸Ibid., November 28, 1899, p. 8.

⁹Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. LXXV (1899), p. 721.

¹⁰Ibid., Vol. LXXVII (1899), p. 534.

¹¹Ibid., p. 131.

October 20, 1899.¹²

Replying to these continuous challenges by the Irish members, Chamberlain and Balfour declared that it was not a time for criticism but a time for solidarity. Bills were put forward by the Government asking for ten million pounds out of the consolidated fund, eight million pounds to be raised by issuing treasury bills, and the power to call up the reserve and militia units. Sir William Harcourt opposed the methods used in raising funds because too much reliance was placed on the revenue of the mines after the war. He felt that an increase in the income tax was necessary and argued that a time limit be placed on the repayment of the extra debts that the Government incurred. The income tax was bitterly opposed by the upper income groups in the country, and the opposition sarcastically said they hated to see the "privations endured at Chatsworth, Blenheim, and other famine districts" increased.¹³

The remainder of the year was spent in a cautious attitude of "wait and see." Campbell-Bannerman continued to attack the Government's policy as the real cause of the war. The early conviction that it would only be a matter of time before the British arms would triumph was rudely shattered with the events of Black Week in December, 1899. By the end of December, there was considerable doubt whether "the class of men who have muddled into war are the most competent leaders to muddle out of it."¹⁴ The British stiffened their upper lips as the war moved into

¹²Ibid., p. 466.

¹³The Manchester Guardian, October 25, 1899, p. 7.

¹⁴Morning Post quoted in The Manchester Guardian, December 26, 1899, p. 4.

its second stage: the lifting of the sieges of Kimberley, Ladysmith, and Mafeking and the seizure of the enemy's capitals.

The debate on the budget clearly showed the differences of opinion between the moderates and the radicals in the Liberal party. The Queen's Speech opening Parliament on January 30, 1900, requested increased expenditure for the South African war and the naval armaments race that was developing among the great powers. It specifically postponed domestic reforms involving large expenditures. Campbell-Bannerman supported military expenditures that would correct deficiencies but opposed any alteration that would "facilitate an aggressive or ambitious policy."¹⁵ The left wing element of the party under Harcourt's leadership assailed the war as increasing the public debt to unreasonable heights. Harcourt's statistics showed that during the Crimean War forty-one million pounds were raised by taxation as compared to only twelve million pounds during the present war, though the country was far wealthier. The country was singing "pay, pay, pay," in the music halls but it sounded like "borrow, borrow, borrow," to Harcourt.¹⁶ To meet his budget Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, the Chancellor for the Exchequer, proposed a one shilling income tax with additional taxes placed on beer, tea, spirits, and tobacco. The prestigious Times opposed these measures, and instead called for a tax on corn and sugar to lighten the load of the rich. The Guardian sardonically said that to the Times' way of thinking, taxing the poor was "'broadening the bases of taxation,'

¹⁵Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. LXXXIX (1900), pp. 248-249.

¹⁶Ibid., Vol. LXXX (1900), p. 226.

there being more poor persons than rich ones."¹⁷ The Liberal press, upon learning of the increased expenditures proposed in the Army and Navy estimates, caustically inquired of the Government, "If your preparations were not up to your diplomacy why not reduce your diplomacy to the level of your preparations?"¹⁸

The conduct of the war was criticized in an amendment to the Queen's Speech expressing regret at the lack of "knowledge, foresight, and judgment" by Her Majesty's Government in the "cause and conduct of the war."¹⁹ The Government's answer to this attack was a call for unity throughout the country during the war and a declaration that there had been no lack of men, materials, or money in the prosecution of the war. The Opposition agreed that "there was no lack of anything--except brains."²⁰ Harcourt laid the responsibility for the war at the door of the jingoist newspaper establishment. Quoting Prince Bismarck, Harcourt charged that "the panes of glass which the press have broken we have to pay for."²¹ This amendment to the speech was defeated, but in a rare act of unity leaders of all three Liberal factions, Grey, Campbell-Bannerman, and Lloyd George, voted for the amendment.

Another element of controversy was the Liberal defense of the right of dissent. Groups holding meetings in opposition to the war had been subjected to violence from unruly crowds. The Opposition declared that

¹⁷The Manchester Guardian, March 7, 1900, p. 5.

¹⁸Ibid., February 3, 1900, p. 10.

¹⁹Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. LXXXVIII (1900), p. 134.

²⁰Ibid., p. 545.

²¹Ibid., p. 608.

the traditions of free speech were not being upheld and asked if the Government was taking steps to protect the life and property of these participants at these meetings. Replying for the Government, A. J. Balfour admitted that such outbreaks were deplorable, but pointed out that the local authorities were responsible for maintenance of order. Anti-war speakers should be aware, he said, that they were asking a great deal of human nature in times of high public emotion.²² The Government was winking an eye at its groundling supporters.

A series of dispatches between British commanders in the field were published in April, 1900, which gave substance to Liberal charges of incompetence and further exacerbated the controversy. The dispatches were concerned with the British defeat at Spion Kop during the last week of January, 1900, and implied that serious tactical errors had occurred. The messages included one in which General Roberts censured General Buller and another which revealed Buller's suggestion that Colonel White surrender Ladysmith. The nation was shocked by this admission by the Government that perhaps some of the generals in South Africa were incompetent. What was astonishing was that even though the generals had been censured, they had been retained in positions of command.

While the budget was being debated the floor was opened for debate on the Spion Kop dispatches by means of a motion to reduce the salary of the Secretary of State. The Government was as dismayed as the Opposition by the revelations disclosed. There appeared to be no logical reason at all for publishing them. "Was it to reassure the public...that some of our best generals are incapable?...Will it console the relatives

²²Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, LXXX (1900), pp. 928-929.

of those who fell...at Spion Kop?" the Opposition inquired.²³ The amendment was defeated with several abstentions by Conservative members, but Grey, Campbell-Bannerman, and Lloyd George supported the motion. To prevent such unpleasant disclosures in the future, the Government tightened censorship, leaving it open to charges of withholding information during the remainder of the war.

In June, 1900, another storm of criticism swirled around the Government's conduct of the war. William Burdett-Coutts, M.P. for Westminster, had made a trip to South Africa to inspect the medical facilities. Upon his return, he published a series of articles in the Times based on his findings. Burdett-Coutts described scenes of overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and poor transportation which increased the suffering of the wounded. Patients with typhoid were jammed into bell tents with non-typhoid patients. He saw men lying on the ground with nothing but a thin rubber sheet or a layer of straw to protect them from the dampness and the chill of the night.²⁴ A scandal comparable to those of the Crimean War appeared to be developing.

The Government replied to these charges by waving the flag and charging that Burdett-Coutts' report was slander on the brave British soldier. They argued that these conditions were inevitable in a war that moved so rapidly over the countryside; General Roberts had more important things to worry about than hospital conditions. Burdett-Coutts was charged with not having the House's permission to go to South Africa. He was accused of acting merely as a newspaper correspondent

²³Ibid., LXXXII (1900), p. 796.

²⁴The Manchester Guardian, June 28, 1900, p. 5.

looking for a sensational story. General Roberts saved the Government from further humiliation by personally requesting a commission to come to South Africa and examine the medical facilities.

A three-man commission composed of two doctors and a lawyer was appointed in July, 1900. The Liberals objected to this commission as being too small and prejudiced in favor of the medical profession. Campbell-Bannerman did not want to see this issue develop into a party fight, but he did want laymen on the commission, and succeeded in having two additional members appointed.²⁵ Still Liberal opinion was not satisfied. Objections were raised to the new members because they were receiving salaries from the War Department. It was pointed out that the commission lacked the power to examine witnesses under oath, to call witnesses, or have documents produced for examination. Upon being told that the funds for the commission would come out of the Army Estimates under the title of temporary commissions, an Irish member puckishly asked, "Will an item for whitewash be included?"²⁶

By coincidence, the report of the Commission on the Care of the Sick and Wounded was issued on the day of Queen Victoria's death, January 23, 1901. The conclusion of the report was that the treatment of the sick and wounded was generally satisfactory and there was nothing that could be called scandalous.²⁷ Any neglect which might have occurred was owing to the fact that the Army Medical Department had not expanded to keep up with the rapid military build-up caused by the war.

²⁵Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. LXXXV (1900), p. 656.

²⁶Ibid., Vol. LXXXVII (1900), p. 629.

²⁷The Manchester Guardian, January 23, 1901, p. 8.

Recommendations by the Commission to the Army Medical Department included better training, appointment of qualified sanitary officers, relaxation of the harsh military discipline in the hospitals, and the use of female nurses; the patients preferred them to the customary male orderlies. Burdett-Coutts agreed with much of the Commission's report, but he was angered by their cursory treatment of the actual conditions. The Commission felt that the dampness did not cause any suffering and the bugs had never been in sufficient numbers to affect the patients. Burdett-Coutts suggested that the Commissioners ought to lie on the damp ground before making such a judgment and inquired sarcastically as to "how many bugs must browse upon a patient's body before he can be officially described as uncomfortable?"²⁸ Improvements were made, but it took a public disclosure of the medical conditions to produce the changes, and this gave the Government a black mark.

In August and September, 1900, the capitals of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State were occupied, and Britons presumed the war to be over. Roberts announced the formal annexation of the Transvaal on September 4, 1900.²⁹ In response to Liberal inquiries concerning the terms of peace, Chamberlain and Salisbury had already made it clear that Britain would not "offer a shred of really independent government to either State."³⁰ Chamberlain was calling a spade a spade when he said, in reference to the future status of the Transvaal, "You may call it, if you like, a military administration. I prefer to call it a Crown Colony

²⁸Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. LXXXIX (1901), pp. 268-269.

²⁹The Manchester Guardian, September 4, 1900, p. 5.

³⁰Ibid., May 30, 1900, p. 6.

Government.³¹ These humiliating terms the Transvaal refused to accept, and the war began to turn into a guerrilla conflict. In September, 1900, it became apparent how ugly this could become when Roberts issued orders to burn Boer farms near points where attempted sabotage of trains had occurred.³²

The main issue of the elections in October, 1900, was the war. The campaign was marked by much bitterness on both sides. The use of campaign posters that portrayed Liberal candidates in the act of helping President Kruger haul down the British flag was common. In reply to the Conservatives' claim that the Liberal party motto was out of date, Harcourt replied, "as we left them peace, we left them a full exchequer." The war, he charged, had occasioned "a condition of finance which makes the performance of those promises [of social reform] impossible in the future."³³ The Liberals concentrated their attacks on Chamberlain. As Campbell-Bannerman put it, "we hear dim echoes of some other members of the Government making speeches, but it is Mr. Chamberlain alone--he is the Government for the purposes of this election."³⁴

Despite Opposition efforts, the success of the troops in South Africa and the lack of desire to change horses in midstream resulted in an easy majority for the Conservatives. The 334 Conservatives plus 68 Liberal Unionists gave the Government a majority of 134. After the election there was a reshuffling of cabinet positions and a number of

³¹Ibid., May 12, 1900, p. 11.

³²Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. LXXXVIII (1900), p. 624.

³³The Manchester Guardian, September 27, 1900, p. 8.

³⁴Ibid., October 9, 1900, p. 9.

the Prime Minister's relatives were appointed to the cabinet. Wags referred to the new ministry as "The Hotel Cecil Unlimited."³⁵ Campbell-Bannerman humorously said, "The stable remains the same; the horses are the same; but every horse is in a new stall."³⁶

Disillusionment began to set in during the post-election period as it became clearer that war would continue. Letters of protest against the farm burnings and the use of concentration camps began to appear in the Liberal press.³⁷ Parliament was not due to convene until February, 1901, but a special session was called in December, 1900, to pass needed money bills for the war. Campbell-Bannerman felt that the Queen's Speech opening the session left something to be desired with its request for more money at this time and its omission of a statement on the condition of relations with other powers. Moreover, a conflict of interest controversy reared its head. Lloyd George made a direct attack on Chamberlain in a motion which provided that ministers "ought to have no interest direct or indirect in any firm or company competing for contracts with the Crown."³⁸ The occasion for this motion lay in the fact that the firm of Kynoch and Company, a supplier of explosives to the Crown, was directed by Arthur Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary's brother. Campbell-Bannerman supported Lloyd George's motion on the grounds that

³⁵The Annual Register 1900 (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1901), p. 234.

³⁶The Manchester Guardian, November 16, 1900, p. 6.

³⁷Ibid., November 12, 1900, p. 6.

³⁸Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. LXXXVIII (1900), p. 421.

such connections could sway a man from his public duty.³⁹ In his defense, Chamberlain gave an emotion-charged reply claiming that he had dissolved all such ties before assuming his ministerial position. His family had been in commercial activities for two hundred years, he said; it appeared that all his relatives would have to quit business to satisfy this proviso.⁴⁰ The motion was defeated 253 to 105. The Government's request for an additional eleven million pounds was granted with little opposition save that of the Irish Nationalists and Harcourt. On December 15, 1900, Parliament was prorogued for two months.

The King's Speech on February 14, 1901, expressed regret that the war was not concluded and confidence that the end was not far off. After all, British troops were occupying the capitals and the principal lines of communications of the enemy.⁴¹ In reply to the speech, Campbell-Bannerman denounced the Government for its lack of social legislation and for making political hay out of the supposed end of the war.⁴²

The budget for 1901-02 was presented in April, 1901. The war was costing about one million to one and a quarter million pounds per week,⁴³ and it was an accepted fact that there would have to be an increase in expenditures. But how was this money to be raised? The belief that increased taxation would be but temporary and that peace in South Africa would bring a remission had to be discarded. Harcourt

³⁹Ibid., p. 460.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹The Manchester Guardian, February 15, 1901, p. 6.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³The Manchester Guardian, February 23, 1901, p. 8.

expressed regret that the five years of Conservative government had increased the Army and Navy Estimates by twenty-five million pounds. The blame for this militaristic extravagance had to be shared "partly by responsible members and greatly by the press."⁴⁴

To meet the increased expenditures, Sir Michael Hicks-Beach proposed an increased income tax, a year's extension of the duties on tobacco, beer, and spirits, and two new duties: one on sugar and an export tax on coal.⁴⁵ The Liberals accepted these proposals except for the coal duty. The question was who would ultimately bear this one-shilling export duty on coal: the foreign consumer or the British miner in the form of a wage reduction? Delegations from the mining areas came to London and made personal appeals to Hicks-Beach against the coal duty. The Government argued that the coal industry had made such vast increases in profits during the previous two years that a one-shilling duty was negligible. In the debate on the coal duty, Sir William Harcourt begged the House's forgiveness for discussing such elementary economics, but pointed out that the Government was violating the fundamental law of supply and demand. The export duty on coal, he argued, gives "the foreign competitor the advantage and damnifies the trade of your own country."⁴⁶ These arguments were of no avail, and the coal duty was passed.

A plan for increasing the size of the standing army was presented by the Government in May. Six army corps were to be formed with a fifty

⁴⁴Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. XC (1901), pp. 1637-38.

⁴⁵Ibid., Vol. XCII (1901), pp. 652, 1394, 1410, 1412.

⁴⁶Ibid., Vol. XCIII (1901), p. 476.

thousand-man Reserve and a thirty-five thousand-man yeomanry as a first step in the reorganization of the entire military system. This brought opposition from within the Conservative party as well as from the opposite bench. The new M.P. from Oldham, Winston Churchill, was in favor of army reform, but this was "not army reform, but army increase."⁴⁷ Churchill looked upon the navy as the right arm of the Empire, while the army was only an "umbrella that is needed from time to time."⁴⁸ The main concern was that an increase in the army would mean a reduction in the navy and that conscription would appear with all the attendant evils of militarism that were seen on the Continent. Campbell-Bannerman argued that the proposals were not adapted to the wants of the Empire and would "increase the burdens of the nation without adding substantially to its military strength."⁴⁹ Nevertheless, a Government majority of over one hundred supported military reform, thus clearing the way for a complete reorganization.

In June and July, 1901, the Liberal party went through a period of crisis which was precipitated by the British evacuation of the South African native population and Boer dependents into internment camps. The camps had a dual purpose: they removed the women and children from the battlefield and deprived the Boer commando units of a means of supply. These camps were poorly planned and hastily erected, and the result was a rising death rate among the women and children. Further confirmation of the Opposition's charges was furnished by the publication

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 1571.

⁴⁸The Manchester Guardian, May 20, 1901, p. 12.

⁴⁹Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. XCIV (1901), p. 278.

of a report by Miss Emily Hobhouse when she returned from an on-the-spot examination of the camps.⁵⁰ This Government internment policy caused Campbell-Bannerman to make a statement which almost provoked a collapse of the Liberal Party.

Addressing the National Reform Union on June 15, 1901, Campbell-Bannerman charged the Government of using "methods of barbarism in South Africa."⁵¹ This phrase, "methods of barbarism," shocked the more moderate Liberal leaders. It appeared that Campbell-Bannerman was making a direct attack on the military leaders in South Africa, and a complete schism appeared to be developing in the Liberal Party.

A meeting of the Opposition party was set for July 9, 1901, for the purpose of resolving these differences through a vote of confidence in Campbell-Bannerman as the party leader. At this meeting Campbell-Bannerman asserted that the party was not divided on any real difference of opinion but because of "certain personal antagonisms, which...have disturbed and paralyzed the Liberal Party in Parliament."⁵² In regards to the war, the party had an obligation to oppose and question the present administration and the future policy in South Africa. In carrying out this obligation, he felt that four-fifths of the party would support him. Asquith and Grey both made speeches deprecating the sectional cliques of the party but indicated at the same time that the Liberal Imperialists would voice views opposing the party whenever it was felt necessary. After these statements, a resolution was passed unanimously

⁵⁰The Manchester Guardian, June 19, 1901, p. 10.

⁵¹Ibid., June 15, 1901, p. 7.

⁵²Ibid., July 10, 1901, p. 8.

in support of Campbell-Bannerman's leadership.⁵³

The reaction to this meeting was mixed. In Liberal circles it was seen as a stiffening of the ranks, with Campbell-Bannerman climbing down from his fence rail position. The entire Liberal Party appeared to have made a shift to the left, and "had now quite abandoned the attempt to harmonize the irreconcilables, and had thrown all [its] weight to one side."⁵⁴ The Conservatives, on the other hand, regarded the endorsement of Campbell-Bannerman's leadership as merely a temporary party truce; Asquith and Grey still held reservation about party policies. Other Conservatives said that the Liberal Party would never have peace as long as Sir William Harcourt and Lord Rosebery, both former party leaders, continued their bitter feud over foreign policy.⁵⁵

The army reorganization plan was put into effect in June, 1901. Local commanders were encouraged to take more responsibility, and the top level of command was consolidated into a War Office Board. Sir Redvers Buller was named commander of the First Army Corps, a unit which would be the first to be used in any emergency outside the British Isles. In October, Buller offered a vindication of his role in the defeat at Spion Kop, in which he intimated that there was a conspiracy among the press aimed at discrediting him. The Government wisely retired him from active duty, thus avoiding any revival of discussion of the Spion Kop tragedy or criticism of Buller's command of the First Army Corps.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., June 18, 1901, p. 7.

⁵⁵The Spectator, July 13, 1901, p. 43.

During the summer and fall of 1901 there was a continued outcry against the Government's use of concentration camps. But the more unruly supporters of the Government broke up meetings at which Miss Hobhouse, the outspoken critic of the concentration camp policy, was scheduled to speak.⁵⁶ The Government announced on July 22, that a committee of ladies was being sent to South Africa to examine the conditions of the camps. Miss Hobhouse was not included in this committee on the grounds that she was too controversial a figure to be included.

While plans were made to correct the camp conditions, an attempt was also made to place the blame for the high death rate on the Boers. Stories were circulated which alleged that the Boer women were dirty, ignorant about sanitation, and incompetent to raise their children. Actually the death rate was a result of poor planning by the British, inadequate housing, the lack of proper food for children, and insufficient fuel to insure the proper cooking of the food.⁵⁷ The heart of the problem was the inadequate method of supplying the camps. The death rate decreased by the end of 1901 because the camps were moved into areas that could be more easily reached with supply trains and medical personnel. The camps left a stigma of inhumanity against the British which would be used as propaganda by the Germans in the future.

The Government continued to demand unconditional surrender as the only acceptable terms for peace. On August 7, 1901, Kitchener issued a proclamation stating that all Boers who did not surrender before September 15, 1901, would be sentenced to perpetual banishment from South

⁵⁶The Manchester Guardian, July 1, 1901, p. 5.

⁵⁷Ibid., October 25, 1901, p. 6.

Africa after that date.⁵⁸ The Opposition branded this a policy of annihilation. Why should the Boers not continue to fight, the Liberals asked, when nothing remained for them if they surrendered? Once again there was a demand that the Government make an offer of reasonable terms which would encourage the Boers to lay down their arms, and the September deadline passed with the war no closer to a conclusion. The commando units of the Boers continued to attack isolated British units, while in Britain, Hicks-Beach declared that the taxpayers would be asked for further sacrifices in 1902.⁵⁹

As the nation moved into the third year of the war, Chamberlain resurrected the myth of the Boer conspiracy, and declared that the war "was a struggle for supremacy between two races, that it was a question whether the Union Jack or the Boer Vierkleur should wave throughout the length and breadth of South Africa."⁶⁰ To the Liberals it seemed incongruous that a group of pious farmers who had a history of moving inland away from British control should now be accused of launching an effort to bring all of South Africa into a Boer empire. In answer to this imperialistic reasoning, Lloyd George declared that the war had changed the entire course of the nation's social and political history and that "money that would have built comfortable homes for hundreds of thousands of workmen had gone to dig graves in Africa."⁶¹ Campbell-Bannerman continued his now much more direct attacks on the Government by opposing

⁵⁸Ibid., August 10, 1901, p. 7.

⁵⁹Ibid., November 5, 1901, p. 4.

⁶⁰Ibid., November 7, 1901, p. 10.

⁶¹Ibid., November 8, 1901, p. 5.

the methods of warfare and accusing the Cabinet of skulking behind the backs of the British soldier when they could not defend their own methods.⁶²

Parliament opened on January 16, 1902, with the reading of the King's Speech. Regret was again expressed that the war was not ended, and the announcement was made that more troops from the Dominions would be needed. The Opposition moved an amendment to the King's Speech stating that they were prepared to support all proper measures for the prosecution of the war but at the same time, pointing out that the "course pursued by your Majesty's Ministers...[has] not conduced to the early termination of the war."⁶³ The amendment was defeated by a majority of 210.

The 1902-03 budget was presented in April. It showed a deficit of forty-five million pounds which was to be met by several methods such as drafts on the Exchequer, an increase in the income tax, and what was the most alarming measure of all to the Opposition, a tax on the importation of grain, corn, flour, and meal. This seemed to be a direct attack on the sacred principle of free trade. Supporters of free trade viewed the corn duty as a threat to national solvency and a tampering with the system by which Britain had always paid her own way.⁶⁴ Sir William Harcourt led the attack on the corn duty. Campbell-Bannerman, reflecting his new stance, voiced the opinion that he had some doubts as to whether the Government had used past estimates very wisely. He had always given

⁶²Ibid., December 11, 1901, p. 7.

⁶³The Times (London), January 22, 1902, p. 6.

⁶⁴The Manchester Guardian, April 15, 1902, p. 7.

his support to monetary requests before, but this attack on free trade caused a change of attitude. Harcourt argued that this duty was a direct tax on the food of the poor. In response, the Government countered that free trade had always been largely a myth, that both Peel and Gladstone had retained a corn duty in some form, and that it was not totally abolished until 1869.⁶⁵ Supported by such arguments as these, the duty of 3d. per hundredweight of grain was passed against heavy opposition.

As 1902 approached it was apparent that each of the combatants was seeking an opening to start negotiations for ending the conflict. In February, 1902, the Netherlands made an offer to get negotiations underway. They asked that the Boer leaders in exile in the Netherlands be allowed to return to South Africa to consult with the field commanders before traveling to Great Britain with definite proposals of peace. This offer was rejected by the British on the grounds that the war would be prolonged by three months simply because of transportation problems involved in the offer. It would also be undignified for the British Empire to allow a third party to intervene in a war with some rag-tag farmers who should have been defeated two years earlier. The rejection of this offer had the effect of eliminating President Kruger and his government in exile in the Netherlands from any role in negotiations, and shifted the real role of leadership to the Boer commando leaders in South Africa. At last, in April, 1902, the Boers in South Africa declared that it was "a suitable moment to do everything possible to put a

⁶⁵Great Britain, Parliamentary Debates, Vol. CVI (1902), pp. 181-183.

stop to the war.⁶⁶

On April 12, the Boers requested peace on the following terms: that the franchise be granted all whites; that equal rights be granted the people of the two republics to use both the Dutch and English languages; that the establishment of a customs, postal, telegraph, and railway union be permitted between the two republics and neighboring British colonies; that all forts be dismantled; that arbitration be requested in any future disputes; and that mutual amnesty be granted to prisoners. These conditions were rejected by the British on the ground that they would effectively continue the independence of the two republics. Besides, the Boer states were non-existent, since they had been formally annexed by General Roberts in 1900.⁶⁷

After this refusal, the Boer representatives (Steyn, Schalk-Burger, and Botha) asked that they be allowed to canvass the burghers in the field on the question of surrendering the independence of their country. They contacted each commando and requested that two burghers be chosen to represent the respective commando at a meeting to be held at Vereeniging on May 15, 1902. The peace camp at Vereeniging was laid out in an area two miles square, near the station on the Transvaal side of the Vaal River. Lighting, water, medical, and cooking facilities were provided for the Boer delegates by the British.⁶⁸ The purpose of the Vereeniging meeting was to allow the Boers to decide whether or not to

⁶⁶Great Britain, British and Foreign State Papers 1901-1902, Vol. XCV (1905), p. 147.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 147-148.

⁶⁸The Manchester Guardian, May 30, 1902, p. 5.

continue the war, after which they would contact the British if a favorable decision was reached. From April 19 until May 15, groups of Boers travelled from commando to commando, frequently crossing British lines to make final arrangements for the meeting.

At the meeting the delegates made the following proposals: that the republics would surrender independence in conducting foreign relations; that they would retain self-government under British supervision; and that a portion of their territory would be surrendered.⁶⁹ The burghers were hoping that this return to the Pretoria Convention of 1881 would be acceptable. These proposals, too, were rejected completely and countered by a British offer to draft a document which would be submitted to a "Yes" or "No" vote by the Boers. There were objections to this, but as both Boer and British leaders were to participate in drafting the document, there was no alternative. In drafting the document of surrender it was decided that the proclamation of perpetual banishment issued by Kitchener in September, 1901, could be dropped because all Boers would be required to swear allegiance to King Edward VII.

The joint document was presented on May 28, and the British granted the Boers seventy-two hours before asking that a reply be given. The document was signed by Milner, Kitchener, and ten Boer delegates at 10:30 P.M. on May 31, 1902. All persons under arms were to surrender and pledge their loyalty to the King. No property was to be taken, and the Boers would be allowed to keep their arms. Self-government was promised as rapidly as possible. The British Government granted a sum of three million pounds for the purpose of rebuilding farms and

⁶⁹Great Britain, British and Foreign State Papers 1901-1902, Vol. XCV (1905), p. 152.

restoration of livestock. The problem of the native population was dismissed with the statement: "The question of granting the franchise to natives will not be decided until after the introduction of self-government."⁷⁰

Boisterous celebrations broke out in London with the announcement of the surrender. It was another display of mafficking. The Liberal party praised the terms given, while the Times laconically remarked, "The Ministry...have committed not a few blunders before and after the outbreak of hostilities."⁷¹ The Government's military leaders had made blunders in tactics as seen in Black December and Spion Kop. Government nepotism had been revealed by Lloyd George. The fiscal policies had been assailed by the Liberal left. The worst error made by the Government was its refusal to admit that mistakes had been made in the case of the army medical facilities and the concentration camps. Instead of accepting blame and quietly correcting the wrongs, they had taken shelter behind the British soldier by accusing the Opposition of attacking the brave lads far from home. These were the errors.

But how effective had the Liberals been in their opposition? The Liberal party was weakened by internal strife at the beginning of the war. No really united opposition throughout the party had been achieved until the duty on corn was imposed. Any attempt to work with the outspoken Irish Nationalists would have resulted in the possibility of a revival of the Home Rule controversy. The Liberal leaders remembered Gladstone's experiences too well to allow this to happen. The Liberals'

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 161.

⁷¹The Times (London), June 2, 1902, p. 11.

most effective opposition was their humanitarian action against the concentration camps and inadequate medical facilities. After the party meeting of July, 1901, the Liberals presented a more solid front and were no longer afraid of fomenting party schisms by questioning Government policy. This solidifying of the Liberal ranks plus a general reaction by the public against the prolonged war forced the Government to be lenient in the peace negotiations. By the end of the war the man in the street realized that the British red on the map of Empire was symbolic of the blood of British soldiers spilled to defend it.

CHAPTER III

SOCIALIST OPPOSITION

The emergence of popular socialist movements in Britain after 1880 was largely the result of a growing disillusionment with the old Liberal solutions to national problems. Both at home and abroad new developments had posed questions which the classical liberal philosophy seemed unable to answer. A serious economic depression with its attendant unemployment undermined prosperity. The coercive efforts against the Irish, the Egyptian war, and troubles in India and Afghanistan caused dissatisfaction among the more radical Liberal leaders. The most serious symptom of this malaise in liberal thought was the beginning of attacks on free trade.¹ Part of the reaction to these Liberal failings in the post-1880 period was the formation of a number of socialist groups that favored either social reform or social revolution by force. By the time of the Boer War, four groups, ranging from evolutionary socialists to hard core doctrinaires of Marxist leanings, had grown up and were expressing opinions on the war.

The most articulate of these factions was the Fabian Society, formed in 1884. In contrast to the other three socialist groups, the Independent Labor Party, the Social Democratic Federation, and the

¹Max Beer, A History of British Socialism, Vol. II (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1953), pp. 226-227.

Trades Union Congress, the Fabians were not a political party but an association of men and women who were concerned with spreading practical views and solutions to immediate and pressing social problems through existing political institutions. Socialism, they taught, was not a new form of society to be accomplished by class struggle but a natural result of the social and economic changes that had come about in the preceding one hundred years.² It was by using pamphlets, lectures, and petitions that the Fabians drew attention to the nation's problems and offered their solutions. For the first fifteen years of its existence, the Fabian Society had consistently avoided taking a position on those emotion-packed issues such as Home Rule, church ritual, or foreign affairs, feeling that such matters fell outside the realm of social improvement. However, the Boer War was debated throughout the country with such vigor and intense emotion that the Society was forced by its membership to make a statement on imperial policy.

In December, 1899, a meeting of the Society's membership was held in hopes that a definite statement could be formulated. At this meeting a motion was put forward which would have placed the Society on record as condemning the war as being incompatible with "that higher social organization" which the Society sought to promote.³ An amendment by George Bernard Shaw was much more temperate in tone and described the empire as a product of "lofty and public-spirited Imperialism."⁴ Neither the motion nor the amendment passed, but the debate on the

²Ibid., pp. 274-277.

³A. M. McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics 1884-1918 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 121.

⁴Ibid., p. 122.

question revealed that there was a serious division of opinion within the Society on the question of the war.

The Executive Committee canvassed the Society's members by postal referendum in February, 1900, with the question, "Are you in favour of an official pronouncement being made now by the Fabian Society on Imperialism in relation to the war?"⁵ By a vote of 259 to 217 the membership elected not to issue any official statement on imperialism. This gave rise to the erroneous assumption that the Fabians were in favor of the war. In reality, they had merely declined to make any statement whatsoever concerning the war for fear a schism in the Society would develop. Dissatisfaction with the results of the poll prompted approximately fifteen members to resign from the Society because of their strong anti-imperialist feelings. These included several important figures: J. Ramsey MacDonald and J. F. Green of the Executive Committee; Mrs. J. Ramsey MacDonald; Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst, the leading advocate of women's suffrage; and G. N. Barnes and Pete Curran, future M.P.s for the Labor Party.⁶ After this anti-imperialist element had resigned, the Society issued a tract entitled Fabianism and the Empire to clarify its position.

This tract, written by G. B. Shaw and published in October, 1900, appeared to reinforce the popular notion that the Fabians were favorable to the idea of maintaining an empire. The tract had been submitted to all the Society's members prior to its publication for revision and

⁵Edward R. Pease, The History of the Fabian Society (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1963), p. 130.

⁶Ibid., p. 133.

therefore represented "the general view of the Society as a whole," though it was not binding on any individual member.⁷ The preface also pointed out that within the Society some members "considered it [the war] a political crime and others a justifiable stroke of Imperial Statesmanship."⁸ Shaw devoted most of this 101-page book to social conditions at home, but also criticized both political parties, the press, and the War Office for their shortcomings in dealing with the war.

In Shaw's opinion, the press was responsible for the war, not because of direct control by "financial trading rings" but because of its "ignorance and pugnacity."⁹ Influenced by these newspapers, the government's ministers had sent out armed expeditions ostensibly to defend flag and empire when in reality the politicians were being used by the financiers "as a ferret is used by a poacher."¹⁰ Shaw took both political parties to task for leading the country into war: the Conservatives hypocritically profess to be defending democracy, he charged, while the Liberals give the appearance of opposing democracy by supporting the Boers. To Shaw, these arguments based on an appeal to principles were immaterial. South Africa, he argued, had "unexpectedly turned out to be a gold-reef," and Britain was simply engaged in taking this wealth back from the farmers after having relinquished it to them in 1881.¹¹ In Shaw's opinion, the war had produced no effective opposition. The

⁷The Manchester Guardian, January 30, 1902, p. 9.

⁸George Bernard Shaw, Fabianism and the Empire: A Manifesto by the Fabian Society (London: Grant Richards, 1900), preface.

⁹Ibid., pp. 9-10.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 10.

¹¹Ibid., p. 22.

British people had witnessed defeat after defeat with such dumb passivity that The Times had been moved to express admiration for the "fortitude and self-control with which the English nation bore humiliation and disaster without guillotining the Cabinet in the manner of mere foreigners."¹²

After flailing both parties for the lack of adequate programs for resolving the war, Shaw noted the distressing paralysis of internal reform. The status of the franchise, he pointed out, was such that all adult women and one-third of the adult males fell outside the legal qualification. Shaw saw rampant nepotism throughout the Government, from the military to the entire diplomatic corps, and denounced the House of Commons for promoting "private commercial interests as much as any Chamber of Commerce."¹³

After offering these acerbic views on the situation at home, Shaw tackled the problem of the Empire more temperately by arguing that a "Great Power" had the duty to govern in the interests of all civilization.¹⁴ To be sure, there were elements in the world such as gold fields and armaments that needed to be internationalized. But the day of the world federation did not appear to be at hand. The only realistic substitute for this international sovereign body was acceptance and support of "the most responsible Imperial federation available," i.e., the British Empire.¹⁵ Of course, any peace settlement would have to

¹²Ibid., pp. 26-27.

¹³Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 24.

reflect this trust of civilized society in the British as the protectors of common interests. Freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and freedom of political combination must be guaranteed, and a Representative Imperial Council should replace "irresponsible High Commissioners" as a source of appeal on grievances.¹⁶

By means of this tract, the Fabians offered an ambivalent answer to the question of support or non-support for the war. Shaw portrayed the Government as being used to protect the interests of the financial speculators who controlled the industries of South Africa. Simultaneously, however, he gave the impression that the empire could be of some benefit in working for the common good of civilization. But, he argued, it would not achieve any great success until a socialist program is in control of the government.

Like the Fabians, the trade unions of Britain were divided in their attitude toward the war and reflected an ambiguity of opinion in their public pronouncements. Labor policy was formulated in the annual Trades Union Congress (T.U.C.), in which delegates representing more than a million working men met to consider questions at issue. The Trades Union Congress of 1900 passed a resolution condemning the war on the grounds that it was a "cruel and unnecessary" war and called for negotiations to end the conflict.¹⁷ In 1901, however, a motion merely to open the discussions on the war was defeated by a vote representing 724,000 constituents to 330,000.¹⁸ The reason advanced for this refusal

¹⁶Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁷Tingfu F. Tsiang, Labor and Empire (New York: University of Columbia Press, 1923), p. 81.

¹⁸The Manchester Guardian, September 7, 1901, p. 5.

to act on the war was that such action was outside the purview of the Congress. Taking a stand on foreign policy, it was feared, would turn the Congress into a "stalking-horse for persons interested in political questions."¹⁹

Unlike the Fabians and the T.U.C., the socialist groups to their left allowed no ambiguities to intrude into their statements of complete opposition to the war and the Government's imperial policy. Their views were an amplification of one side of Shaw's work, i.e., that the Government was being manipulated behind the scenes by capitalists and financiers who were protecting their investments.

The only workingman's organization that consistently opposed the war was the Independent Labor Party (hereafter referred to as the I.L.P.) under the leadership of James Keir Hardie. Hardie was first elected to Parliament in 1892 and promptly scandalized that august assemblage by wearing a cloth cap and tweed suit to symbolize his representation of the working man. He presented a distinct contrast to Joseph Chamberlain, who always wore an orchid in the lapel of his formal morning coat while in Parliament. By 1897 Hardie's party was strong enough to capture 38% of the total votes cast in municipal elections where I.L.P. candidates were standing.²⁰ The I.L.P. continually opposed the war on the grounds that "it allowed a handful of millionaires to get richer at the expense of the workingman"²¹ while Great Britain was being

¹⁹Ibid., September 11, 1899, p. 4.

²⁰Max Beer, A History of British Socialism, p. 306.

²¹The Manchester Guardian, November 13, 1901, p. 7.

made into a "commercial annex of the United States."²²

These socialist groups to the left of the Fabians made no effort to form any coalition with the Liberal party because it was "rotten from within"; the only way to achieve their goals, they believed, was to "destroy the existing Liberal party."²³ Even within the socialist movement itself there were factions which refused to cooperate with Hardie and other labor leaders. The Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.), formed in 1885 under the leadership of Henry Mayers Hyndman, was a dogmatic Marxist party which emphasized theory before organization. It was totally unsuccessful in all its attempts to achieve representation in Parliament. The S.D.F. refused to cooperate on a permanent basis with other socialist groups largely because Hyndman believed that they were not sufficiently committed to a thoroughgoing socialist program directed against the "Imperial Vampirism" which was sucking South Africa dry.²⁴ Hyndman, like Hardie, considered the war a plot to increase the capitalists' gains at the expense of working men's lives.

In February, 1900, these four major factions of British socialism,

²²Ibid., April 1, 1902, p. 8.

²³The Blackburn Labour Journal, August, 1900. This was a particularly vitriolic socialist monthly newspaper. During the war its opposition to government policy was even expressed in some very acerbic verse:

To Carlyle's Fools

"There are thirty millions of Englishmen - mostly fools." Carlyle

Good-morrow, Bulldog Mafficker, seen the
Budget, eh?
And you haven't caught De Wet, fah-del-rah-del
rey!
How you stoned and scoffed us with your "Pay,
Pay, Pay!"
Now we grin derisively, Every Dog His Day!

²⁴Ibid., June, 1901.

the Fabians, the Trades Union Congress, the Independent Labor Party, and the Social Democratic Federation, nevertheless combined temporarily to form the Labor Representation Committee, which had evolved by 1906 into the British Labour Party. Their combination, however, was the product of their desire to win seats in parliament for representatives committed to social reforms at home; the war, or foreign policy in general, made little or no contribution to this electoral coalition.²⁵ For the Committee was torn by internal differences over domestic issues, and it was even more impossible to reach any agreement on the questions of imperialism and the war.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the most original contributions to socialist thought occasioned by the war came not from the socialists, but from a man with no formal connections with the movement. His name was John Atkinson Hobson. When he began his studies on the Empire in 1899, the word "imperialism" had a favorable connotation to most Britons of the time. Largely as a result of his work, the concept of imperialism acquired the sinister overtones of exploitation, oppression, and abuse that have clung to the word to the present day. Hobson was an economist, but he recognized the role that ethics and politics played in the shaping of economic decisions. He was one of several engaged in the "search after a social ethics" which should harmonize the two fields of economics and politics.²⁶ In Hobson's search for

²⁵Elie Halevy, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. V: Imperialism and the Rise of Labour (New York: Peter Smith, 1951), pp. 263-64.

²⁶John Atkinson Hobson, Confessions of an Economic Heretic (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1938), p. 55.

confirmation of his ideas, the Boer War "was both a turning-point...and an illumination" to his understanding of the relationship between economics and politics.²⁷ Though no definite position can be assigned to him within the ranks of any organized political group, Hobson's writings reflect the socialist conviction that the war was designed to produce gains for the capitalists at the cost of the lives of the working population,

Hobson's writings follow an evolutionary process traceable in a number of articles and three books published during the period 1899-1902. His article on imperialism which appeared in the March, 1899, issue of Contemporary Review brought an offer from the editor of The Manchester Guardian for Hobson to travel to South Africa as a correspondent for the newspaper.²⁸ During his stay, Hobson was able to interview leaders of both sides before the hostilities erupted in October, 1899. He returned to England shortly after the outbreak of hostilities and began his writings. The South African experience, wrote Hobson, "had two effects upon my life. It gave realistic support to economic opinions derived in main from theoretical interpretations of history, and it plunged me...into the heated atmosphere of political controversy."²⁹

A preview of Hobson's conclusions appeared in Contemporary Review during January, 1900. Gold and diamonds were the causes of the South African war, he argued, while the grievances of the Uitlanders were

²⁷Ibid., p. 59.

²⁸Ibid., p. 60. Hobson mentions this article in his autobiography but no such article can be found in any of the 1899 issues of Contemporary Review.

²⁹Ibid., p. 62.

imaginary and were drummed up only to reflect the economic interests of the capitalists. Then Hobson falls into an anti-Semitic trap by labeling the capitalists as not merely "financiers" but always as "Jewish financiers." It is this group of international Jewish financiers of Continental origins, he explained, who came to South Africa to sink "their economic fangs [into] the carcass of their prey."³⁰ This financial conspiracy had achieved economic control, and it was "the growing need of these economic rulers to become political rulers" that had caused the war.³¹

Hobson argued that there were two policies which could be followed when citizens made economic investments outside the political limits of their country. On the one hand, investments might be made at the investor's own risk with no promise of the state intervening to protect the investment. On the other hand, harmony between the political and economic interests might be maintained by a continual expansion of the territory controlled by the state. This latter policy would lead inevitably to conflict and war with other states which were following the same principle. Hobson believed that, in the words of Sir Thomas More, "a certain conspiracy of rich men [are] seeking their private advantage under the name and pretext of the Commonweal."³²

In his book, The War in South Africa, Hobson examined the charge that a cause of the war was the threat of a Boer conspiracy to control all of South Africa. Hobson could find no organized desire to expel the

³⁰J. A. Hobson, "Capitalism and Imperialism in South Africa," Contemporary Review, LXXVII (January, 1900), pp. 4-5.

³¹Ibid., p. 5.

³²Ibid., p. 17.

British from control in the Cape Colony or the Transvaal. Perhaps it was true that the Boers were seeking a loosening of control, he admitted, but it was being done by educational and peaceful representation to England. There was no justification, Hobson felt, for the actions of the British government in the months prior to October, 1899. The ultimatum issued by the Boers just prior to hostilities was prompted not by any conspiracy on their part but by the increasing threat of British arms on her borders after the failure of the Bloemfontein Conference.

Hobson's outlook for the future of South Africa was a gloomy one. He predicted that guerrilla warfare would prolong the conflict, and the ultimate outcome he saw as either "an oligarchy of financial Jews" or "a restoration of Boer domination."³³ Whatever the outcome, Hobson noted that both the British and the Boers had sidestepped the issue of the native population which would be a factor in any settlement obtained. This book, The War in South Africa, was followed by two other volumes during the war, The Psychology of Jingoism in 1901, and Imperialism in 1902. In all of his publications during these three years, Hobson hammered at the same points: the war was a result of an inequality in the distribution of wealth which left the wealthiest members of society with no place to invest their excess capital except overseas. When these investments were threatened, the financiers manipulated the organs of the press to bring pressure on the government to save these overseas financial empires at the cost of the lives of the working population. Hobson's writings represent a synthesis of all those arguments against the

³³J. A. Hobson, The War in South Africa (London: J. Nisbit and Company, 1900), p. 310.

war which were advanced by the spokesmen of the socialist movement from George Bernard Shaw to Hyndman and provided the theoretical and factual foundation for Lenin's subsequent identification of imperialism with the final stage of capitalism.³⁴

The socialist groups offered no effective opposition to government imperial policy between 1899-1902 because there was a lack of unanimity within the socialist ranks and because socialists were unwilling to work within the existing power structure of the Liberal Party. The notion that imperial policy fell outside the workingman's limits of concern, and the ingrained respect and "tug of the forelock" attitude towards the aristocracy prevented any group of socialists from bringing pressure to bear on the Government. The most significant event for the socialist movement during this period was the publication of J. A. Hobson's theories which synthesized socialist thought on imperialism for future students and proponents of socialism.

³⁴Bertram D. Wolfe, Marxism: One Hundred Years in the Life of a Doctrine (New York: Dial Press, 1965), p. xix.

CHAPTER IV

BRITISH SOCIAL CONSCIENCE IN OPPOSITION

British imperialism, whatever its motives, had usually been justified by an appeal to its moral or ethical value. Kipling's poem, "White Man's Burden," is the classic example of this. Even at the height of the Boer War the Archbishop of Canterbury declared that it was imperative that Britain evangelize the world; Parliament must give protection to those who went out into foreign lands to spread the gospel.¹ This Christian imperialism had always been expressly aimed at the heathen areas of the world which had as yet been untouched by the teachings of Christ and the edifying moral fiber of the British people. The Boer War thus presented a prickly situation for the conscience of the nation. For the foe in South Africa was not a half-naked, black savage who howled obeisance to false gods but a white Christian with a Protestant Dutch heritage, a heritage with which the British had close ties since the seventeenth century. How could the conscientious Englishman find any moral justification for a war against a people such as this?

The proponents of the war were hard pressed to offer a rationalization. They argued that even if the Boers were not heathen, they were at least guilty of an equally grave sin: that of engaging in the persecution of innocent British miners who were seeking to better their

¹The Manchester Guardian, October 25, 1901, p. 7.

economic status in the Transvaal gold fields. There was something of an aura of sanctity in the possession of British citizenship that was worthy of defending no matter where the offended citizen was residing. In this case, of course, the charges of persecution were of dubious validity, since equal voting rights for the British Uitlanders was the central theme of the negotiations just prior to the outbreak of hostilities. As is the case of most foreign policy decisions, deciding where morality and national interests parted company was the problem. The Conservatives might clearly see where national interests needed defending, but they would always serve up a goodly portion of moral defense for their actions to soothe the troubled conscience of the British electorate.

Those who opposed British imperial policy argued that nations, like individuals, are equal and capable of behaving morally and rationally. Natural harmony should exist between nations; peace should be achieved by federation, arbitration, and international law. A line of tradition can be traced from Charles Fox's opposition to the French wars through John Bright's stand against the Crimean War to the dissenting factions of the Boer War.² British dissenters were convinced that foreign affairs was a field which abounded in "wicked and persuasive sirens" to lead them astray, even though they fervently held to moral ethics in their policies.³

This outcry of the British social conscience in relation to the

²David A. Martin, Pacifism: An Historical and Sociological Study (New York: Schocken Books, 1966), p. 74.

³Ibid., p. 78.

Boer War can be divided into three periods: a pre-war demand for settling the dispute by peaceful means; a period of comparative inactivity between October, 1899, and January, 1900, in the expectation that it would be a short war; and the period from the beginning of 1900 to the end of the war, during which the dissenters formed into groups specifically aimed at halting the war.

There were groups that debated the morality or immorality of the war. Those arguing against the war included the "Stop-the-War" Committee, the Transvaal Committee, the National Reform Union, and the South African Conciliation Committee. Both social reformers and labor leaders worked in these organizations. The Government, on the other hand, was supported by groups like the National Union, the Imperial South Africa Association, the South African Vigilance Committee, and the Central Conservative Office. All these published pamphlets and conducted meetings throughout the war to present their views to the public.⁴

Among the most prominent of the opposition organizations was the Transvaal Committee. It was formed in Manchester on September 6, 1899, to "watch the present crisis" and "resist any attempt to drag this country into war upon the issue at present before it."⁵ The committee dissociated itself from any political party and affirmed that "the principles of righteousness and morality" would be its source of guidance in the crisis then before the nation.⁶

The best known member of this humanitarian opposition was the

⁴John S. Galbraith, "The Pamphlet Campaign on the Boer War," The Journal of Modern History Vol. XXIV, June 1952, p. 112.

⁵The Manchester Guardian, September 6, 1899, p. 5.

⁶Ibid.

journalist and editor, William Thomas Stead. Stead had for many years been a close friend of Cecil Rhodes, the British mining magnate in South Africa, but the developing events of the 1890's caused Stead to sever the friendship. An enthusiastic supporter of the Hague Conference of 1898, Stead pledged the rest of his life to keeping the peace through the principle of arbitration. He was subjected to considerable abuse by the press but doggedly put forth his opinions in his popular Review of Reviews. His pamphlet, Shall I Slay My Brother Boer?, issued in September, 1899, is the best known of the plethora of pamphlets put forth by both sides before and during the war. In this pamphlet, Stead denied that he was a "peace at any price" partisan or a "eulogist for the Boers."⁷ Chamberlain and Rhodes had his support at the time of the supposed insurrection in Johannesburg in 1895. But by 1899 Stead felt that the Briton had become as "insufferable as the Boer" in his attempt to "massacre them [the Boers] into modesty."⁸ Stead pledged his utmost to arouse public expression to prevent a war which was "impolite, [sic!] unnecessary, and unjust."⁹

Any discussion of virtue or morality in connection with the war would naturally evoke responses from the religious element of the society. The Church of England was less willing to take a stand opposing the war than the non-conformist churches. Only a month before the war began the Archbishop of Canterbury declared that he had not studied the controversy enough to permit him to make a statement on the justice and

⁷Ibid., September 23, 1899, p. 7.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

the consequences of a war with the Transvaal.¹⁰ However, other members of the Anglican clergy were not so hesitant in calling down the wrath of God on the heads of the Boers in the name of Great Britain. Reverend Arthur Bovins, the rector of the Holy Trinity at Windsor, denounced the "crotchety conscience" of the Little Englanders who would "dwarf our dominions everywhere." Merely because Paul Kruger, President of the Transvaal, "is on his knees, [he] is not therefore always at his prayers," he pointed out.¹¹ Reverend Robins called for Britain to "strike for life and honor such a blow as shall make all Boerdom reel."¹² Another Anglican clergyman, a critic of the war, was disgusted by his fellow ministers' lack of opposition. They were, he said, like "dumb dogs that couldn't bark" while standing "in the drawing rooms of the great, hand in glove with the men who were clamoring for war."¹³ The non-conforming churches were more united in their opposition and called for patience, asking Salisbury and Chamberlain to use their influence to bring a peaceful conclusion to the crisis. They also laid the blame for the crisis on the press, which, in the eyes of non-conformist opposition, "appeared bent on hounding the nation" into war.¹⁴ It appears that a clear division on the crisis can be seen between the Anglican Church and the non-conforming churches, but a fear of congregational splits persuaded the pulpit to speak for peace for the most part

¹⁰Ibid., September 8, 1899, p. 5.

¹¹Ibid., September 7, 1899, p. 5.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., October 5, 1899, p. 8.

¹⁴Ibid., September 12, 1899, p. 5.

"in muffled tones."¹⁵

Public meetings and resolutions by peace groups were the principal means of expression for the British social conscience prior to the war. The resolutions presented to the leaders were politely pigeonholed, but the public meetings were subjected to much more vigorous types of remonstrations. The largest demonstration opposing the resort to war was held on Sunday, September 24, 1899, in Trafalgar Square. Speaker platforms were set up on three sides of the monument. All speakers were subjected to a torrent of verbal abuse from the crowd in the form of booing, the singing of "Rule Britannia," and the spirited rendition of various music hall favorites. The demonstration was considered a success by W. T. Stead, even though "the Devil had been allowed...to come out, head, horns, tail and all," and the meeting proved "there had never yet been a good cause advocated without its being possible for its opponents to obtain a London mob to break up the meeting."¹⁶

While organizations individually passed resolutions asking for a peaceful solution to the crisis, a National Memorial against the War was composed to give an opportunity for a nation-wide statement to be voiced. It was hoped that this collective effort would have a greater effect on the nation's leaders than the smaller groups. The National Memorial was published on September 29, 1899, protesting the charges that the opposition was hindering the Government's efforts in reaching a peaceful settlement and calling for arbitration as affirmed by the Hague

¹⁵Ibid., October 3, 1899, p. 9.

¹⁶Ibid., September 26, 1899, p. 7.

Conference.¹⁷ After the war had begun the Memorial was presented to Lord Salisbury with 53,833 signatures and the hope that the war would be brought to a speedy conclusion.¹⁸

During the period of opposition quietude between October, 1899, and January, 1900, the British humanitarians appeared in some strange guises. The homeless and jobless Zulus in the war zone were the objects for donations sought by the Aborigines' Protection Society.¹⁹ A letter to the editor of the Guardian announced the founding of a Peace Army trained in the use of ambulances, fire brigades, and life-saving duties, which would urge arbitration and oppose conscription.²⁰

After the beginning of the new year, the humanitarians formed organizations which were directly aimed at bringing a conclusion to the war. The "Stop-the-War" Committee, formed in January, 1900, drew up a new memorial calling for a truce and adherence to the Hague Convention.²¹ The Committee claimed that a number of Anglican clergy had signed the memorial, but what astonished the organizers was the number of non-conformist church members and leaders who had signed.²² Emily Hobhouse worked with this group to organize the women in protest against the war.²³ The South African Conciliation Committee pledged itself to

¹⁷Ibid., September 30, 1899, p. 8.

¹⁸Ibid., October 17, 1899, p. 8.

¹⁹Ibid., February 2, 1900, p. 4.

²⁰Ibid., October 14, 1899, p. 10.

²¹Ibid., January 15, 1900, p. 9.

²²Ibid., January 22, 1900, p. 9.

²³Ibid., May 4, 1900, p. 10.

keep the public informed of the political situation in the colonies and to advocate policies which would establish good will between Britain and South Africa.²⁴

The war was still condemned as a "disgrace to humanity, civilization, and a scandal against Christendom."²⁵ Replying to the cry of patriots for a closing of the ranks in the time of peril, the Guardian noted that it was easy to be patriotic "when the war is...six thousand miles away, involving not a shadow of a shade of risk to our own island or any of us at home."²⁶ The peace groups called for a truce in the middle of March, 1900, because all British territory had been recaptured, and any further action would be an invasion of Boer territory.²⁷

These organizations did enjoy some local successes as evidenced by the experiences of Joseph Chamberlain with the Methodists. He had been invited to speak to a Methodist meeting in Manchester on March 2, 1900. From February 19 through February 22, fifty-five letters appeared in the columns of the Guardian protesting Chamberlain's invitation on the grounds that he was responsible for the war. Chamberlain cancelled his appearance of February 28 because, as he put it, "a small section of extreme politicians...have succeeded in raising a political agitation within the Wesleyan Methodist Church, which threatens to disturb its internal peace."²⁸

²⁴Ibid., January 17, 1900, p. 3.

²⁵Ibid., January 13, 1900, p. 9.

²⁶Ibid., November 13, 1899, p. 7.

²⁷Ibid., March 13, 1900, p. 4.

²⁸Ibid., February 28, 1900, p. 5.

The summer of 1900 was a period of optimism due to the successes of the British troops. The Transvaal Committee expressed hope that the war was drawing to a close and stated that a peace settlement should be based on the independence of the two republics. The Canadian Union Act of 1840 and the United States reconstruction policy towards the post-Civil War South were cited as examples of how the peace settlement should be achieved.²⁹

The increase in guerrilla warfare after the "khaki election" of October, 1900, gave the organizations more solid grounds to oppose the war. Strong protests against the concentration camps, the farm burnings, and the inadequacies of the medical facilities were initiated by these groups. For the remainder of the war these organizations sought to promote a settlement which would return the country to the "high moral lines which alone can secure permanence and prosperity," and demanded that the two republics be allowed to keep their independence.³⁰ But the Government had refused to entertain this solution from the beginning of the war.

The efforts of the peace groups and humanitarian societies were a success because they did bring to the public's attention errors in the conduct of the war. Suffering caused by poor conditions in the concentration camps, the loss of property by burning, and inadequate medical treatment for the British soldiers were alleviated due to the efforts of these organizations. By the end of the war their campaign had contributed to a shift of public opinion that was moving more and more away

²⁹Ibid., June 21, 1900, p. 6.

³⁰Ibid., May 22, 1901, p. 7.

from support of the war. This eroding away of popular support brought about a peace settlement that was lenient and acceptable to parties on both sides of the war issue. This humanitarian spirit found kindred minds in the growing socialist and labor groups that were growing more powerful politically by the end of the war. The Boer War marked no significant change in British pacifism but was simply another milestone in a tradition of dissent that can be traced back to the Revolutionary War.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Great Britain has a tradition of solidarity in the face of its enemies during periods of national crisis. However, there is also a tradition of dissent and opposition in which the British take equal pride. This stream of opposition can be traced from the American Revolution to the Boer War. This study has been concerned with the opposition during the latter.

The Boer War occurred when Great Britain was at its peak as an imperial power. The possession of citizenship in such a majestic dominion was the source of greatest pride. But opposition existed at this time in Great Britain that permeated the entire strata of society and argued against the forceful expansion of this empire. Opposition ranged over a wide spectrum of arguments from political to humanitarian in nature. Opposition had its basis in the failure to use the principle of arbitration as established by the 1898 Hague Convention; in the inadequate training and equipment for the troops; in the lack of fiscal responsibility by the government; in the supposed economic exploitation of the war by the financiers; in the unfair advantages granted to the favorites of government officials; in the use of concentration camps to hold Boer dependents; and in the demands for an unconditional surrender as the only terms of settlements. The list of reasons for opposition is long, but the test of any opposition is its effectiveness in producing change.

The pre-war opposition was totally ineffective in preventing the outbreak of hostilities. The Boers' attack on Natal which began the war and the hopes for a quick victory caused the opposition to be subdued during the first three months of the fighting. But after 1900, as the war appeared to be concluded during the "khaki election" and then slowly turned into a guerrilla conflict, the opposition made more telling points as the government made mistakes in the conduct of the war. The government reaction to all opposition was to wrap itself in the flag and to declare that any attacks on it were attacks on the brave boys fighting in South Africa. The opposition produced some concrete results in getting conditions improved in the concentration camps and better medical facilities for the British troops. The wanton destruction of Boer property was also brought under control after the facts were publicized by the opposition. The Spion Kop dispatches ultimately resulted in the removal of officers from command and finally in Sir Redvers Buller's forced retirement.

In regard to the peace settlement, the opposition's role is more difficult to discern. It is impossible to point to a specific section of the peace treaty and say that this was a direct result of the "Stop-the-War" Committee or the pamphlets of W. T. Stead. But within a year after the 1900 election, it was fairly obvious that the public mood had changed and that the electorate was drifting away from support of the war. Targets of anti-war agitation in the months after January, 1902, included the attacks on the free trade tradition, the rising economic and trade might of the United States, and, naturally, the lengthening casualty lists. The efforts of the opposition did contribute to a general decline in support for the war. As a result, the government

softened its stand on unconditional surrender and ended the threat of banishment as a term of the settlement.

There is one failure on the part of the opposition in relation to the settlement that would mar the relations between Britain and South Africa from this time forward. Neither the government nor the opposition made any effort to give the native population of the region any rights or role in the government of the area. It is this ignoring of the racial situation that would rise to the surface time and time again and permanently poison the relations between the South Africans and Great Britain.

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