

THE BOER WAR: CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF EMPIRE

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

They are constantly telling us that without public opinion they can do nothing; but they forget that public opinion is the product of public education, and that the first duty of a statesman is not to wait on public opinion, but to make it.¹

W.T. Stead, 1886

When I am abroad, I always make it a rule never to criticize or attack the government of my own country. I make up for lost time when I come home.²

Winston Churchill

The modern identity of the British nation and its people evolved differently than its European contemporaries. Forged in civil war and religious contention prompted by geographic isolation from the rest of Europe, this identity enabled the British people to approach themselves, their explorations, and their continental relations with a certain sense of bravado and independence. By the mid-nineteenth century, Britain's dramatically enlarged population, power, and prestige—together with its ever-growing empire and unrivaled navy—diminished the need for close allies. The grand image of the British Empire was recognized both at home and abroad.

The Boer War (1899-1902) dramatically altered both foreign and domestic impressions of Britain. Government officials believed the war would be over in mere months. As it turned out, it took the better part of three years and cost upwards of

¹ W T. Stead, "Government by Journalism," *The Contemporary Review* 49, (January 1886). From www.attackingthediabol.com, accessed 3 January 2005.

² Winston Churchill, <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/26906.html>, accessed 19 January 2005.

£300,000,000. The British suffered almost 150,000 casualties (out of approximately 400,000 soldiers) in subduing a Boer force of less than 90,000. The Boers lost 7,000 men in battle but lost more than 20,000 civilians in the concentration camps run by the British.³ As the twentieth century dawned, a new imperial policy forced the British government to come to terms with a less resolute public support for empire building as usual. British citizens became less approving of imperialism, and change was needed in the government's policies towards the empire. The last gentlemen's war of the nineteenth century, the Boer War dealt severe blows to many traditions regarding isolationism and empire building. Britain's losses during the Boer War and how they affected public opinion offer some understanding of why and how the empire began its decline.

The conflict with the Boers was avoidable, yet many politicians, businessmen, and members of the press worked to create it. Understanding the competition for public support throughout the process is valuable in ascertaining how British citizens perceived their empire. On the eve of the war, there is little doubt that much of the population within Britain lent at least some degree of patriotic support to the empire and its maintenance. Editorials, and novelists, and numerous letters to the papers of Britain contributed to create and perpetuate the grand idea of empire that lingered in the minds of British citizens.⁴ Passionate rhetoric used to persuade citizens of Britain during the Boer War was elevated to new heights in the public sphere. The expanding dialogue on empire was a boon to the men who sought to influence national policy.

³ Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York: Random House, 1979), 607-608.

⁴ A.M. Harvey, "Shall Britain Retain her Colonial Empire?," *The Times*, 7 July 1891, 11. See also the work of Arthur Conan Doyle and Rudyard Kipling for contemporary writing that encouraged support for the British Empire by creating an image of wealth, peace, and tranquility

Britain's preeminent role as a world power and the British public's reaction to this self-professed superiority must be gauged in order to better understand the changes brought about by the war. The introductory chapter will examine the state of Britain and its empire prior to the war. Chapter two will discuss the provocation of the war. In reviewing recent history of Boer and Briton, it will become clear how the public was led to the war. A history of the men who provoked this conflict and the complicit role the press played will establish the image of two battles waged simultaneously. One was fought with rifles and bayonets in South Africa, and the other was contested in the papers and pamphlets of Britain. Chapter three chronicles the autumn of 1899, when the British army found itself in desperate circumstances. Proud British sentiment and poor planning on the part of the military led to many shocking defeats and a change in public dialogue over the war. Chapter four will examine the events of 1900. The second year of the war was the only period of success that the government and pro-war activists experienced. Dramatic successes in Pretoria and Johannesburg, accompanied by government victory in the election, conveyed a sense of finality to the war. Chapter five will examine the final months of the war. Enthusiastic support for the war diminished as the nature of the war changed. Forced deportation and massive concentration camps, along with heated guerilla warfare, challenged British resolve for war and empire building. Such evolution in imperialist mentality contributed to the end of the British Empire as it existed for much of the latter nineteenth century.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

One of the problems faced when approaching a conflict fought over a century ago is that of relevance. From Arthur Conan Doyle and G.F.R Henderson in the waning

months of the war, to Thomas Pakenham's definitive work in 1979, and in specialized books of the past thirty years, the war has been thoroughly examined. However, these works do not thoroughly engage public perceptions and the role of the press, which, it will be argued, afford a deeper and more complete understanding of the nature of the British Empire. A brief discussion of what has been written will help to clear the way.

The subject of the Boer War has been covered in a wide array of books, ranging from broad histories to specific political analysis. There is no shortage of sources on both British and Boer questions. The first generation of commentary emerged during the war itself and carried through World War I. Much of it was British in authorship and typically grandiose in its story telling. One of the first histories to emerge was the seven-volume *The Times History of the War in South Africa* begun during the war and finished in 1909. One notes a distinct change in attitudes as difficulties mounted and as years following the war's conclusion allowed for reflection. Its editor, L.S. Amery, allowed for patriotic flavor, but on the whole delivered a well-developed history of the conflict. Pakenham's *The Boer War* approached the war with equal thoroughness seventy years later. His book explored actions and reactions across all political strata. Pakenham enjoyed seventy years of hindsight and the work of numerous historians. He had previously written on the Jameson Raid and was well prepared to look at the Boer War in a thorough and insightful manner. These two books, considered definitive by many, explored political and social aspects of the war while giving in-depth coverage of the battles on the field. Even handed in their approach, both authors examined the war in a straightforward manner.

Literary figures and other writers produced additional commentaries on the Boer War. Famous writers of the time, such as Arthur Conan Doyle, J.A. Hobson, Emily

Hobhouse, and Robert Baden-Powell, produced well-intended and provocative books on the Boer War. However, authors emerging out of the war usually produced one-sided studies because they were often too close to the situation to adequately assess what it really meant. Doyle's celebrated books on the war include the patriotic language he was well known for. It was such language that brought condemnation from anti-war writers during the war. Hobhouse received similar condemnation from government loyalists due to her anti-government speeches.

The study of press and public perceptions and narrow interpretations of the conflict are very much products of the post-1945 era and did not have a place in early historiography. Historiography during the past thirty years, Pakenham's book aside, has examined more specific areas of the war, the people, and the results. For example, Stephen Koss thoroughly catalogued the work of pamphleteers and anti-war committees in *The Pro-Boers: The Anatomy of an Antiwar Movement*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973). He interwove primary material consisting of speeches and literature with modern commentary on what the public battle over justification of the war meant to the war effort. It is a solid amalgamation of material, yet does not give adequate time or consideration to responses by the imperialists. In *An Imperial War and the British Working Class* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), Richard Price studied the workingmen clubs, their needs, and the effect the war had on their employment and enlistment. His book is well researched and written while providing useful information on the working class, but he neglects to show the reasons and the methods of pro-war enthusiasts and their directed mission to convert the working class to their cause. C. Tsehloane Keto is among many who have studied the war from a foreign perspective. In

his article, *The Aftermath of the Jameson Raid and American Decision Making in Foreign Affairs, 1896* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1980), Keto dissects actions on the sub-continent and how they affected foreign response. His article contributes to a fuller understanding of international response but does not deal with the domestic response. Bernard Porter's *The Lion's Share* took a much different approach to British imperialism and the Boer War. Porter argued that the latter part of the nineteenth century was in fact already a period of decline for the empire. He suggested the war with the Boers was merely a symptom of this slow demise and that to a large extent; it was the press and politicians who made the bigger issue of imperialism, rather than an enthusiastically supportive public. The "reluctant imperialism," as Porter labeled it, was given its final check in South Africa and the British public quickly reduced its support for the ugly realities of colonial management.⁵ Recently, historians have elected to dissect particular areas of the war. Paul Readman, in the *Journal of British Studies*, provided a thorough examination of the election in 1900. The "khaki election", as it came to be called, is very much central to the idea of manipulated public perceptions.⁶ His book dealt with established historiography, such as Price, and measured the true impact of the activists who vehemently fought for electoral victory.

These works reflect some acknowledgement of the roles played by public opinion and the press, but none adequately covers these topics in detail for the entire war. The aims of these writers and of the many who preceded them, have enlarged our understanding of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. In adjusting the lens of discovery, meaningful insight will be revealed regarding the relationship between opinion makers

⁵ Bernard Porter, *The Lion's Share*, 2d ed. (London: Longman, 1984), 111-18.

⁶ Paul Readman, "The Conservative Party, Patriotism, and British Politics: The Case of the General Election of 1900," *The Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 1. (January 2001).

and the public. A clearer understanding of domestic reaction to the war, both pro and con, will be ascertained after examination of the manufacture and creation of the war. In focusing on the roles press and politicians played in attempting to control public perceptions, it is clear that modern discussions of free speech and war find much of their language in the Boer War.

THE EMPIRE BEFORE THE WAR

A broad understanding of Britain and its empire before the Boer War began is helpful in providing a broader context for the war and the changes it brought about. The war brought a quick and painful realization to the British public of the consequences of imperialism and Britain's place in the world elite. The catastrophic cost in money, manpower, and prestige effected a change within Britain itself. The politicians and press of the day manipulated an evolving perception of the empire. Because of the Boer War, British sentiment shifted sharply against unchecked colonialism.

The size and nature of the British Empire was staggering at the end of the nineteenth century. At Victoria's Jubilee, Mark Twain remarked that during her reign, "Great Britain had added to her real estate an average of 165 [square] miles of territory per day . . . which is to say she has added more than the bulk of England proper per year, or an aggregate of seventy Englands in the sixty years."⁷ In 1860, the Empire encompassed almost 10,000,000 square miles, by 1909, this number increased to almost 13,000,000.⁸ To keep this immense size in perspective, it bears noting that the size of Britain itself is just 244,820 square miles.⁹ The British Empire's size was three times that

⁷ Mark Twain, *Europe and Elsewhere* (New York: Harper Bros, 1923) pp. 193-210.

⁸ Niall Ferguson, *Empire* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 240.

⁹ <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/uk.html> , accessed June 27, 2004.

of France's and ten times that of Germany's. Almost 440,000,000 people lived under British rule.

By the 1870s, Britain was active in North America, India, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. Successive governments added many new colonies, such as the Cook Islands, Fiji and the Solomons. The last thirty years of the nineteenth century brought continued growth and strengthening of geographic positions. The *St James Gazette* stated, "[The Empire held] sway over one continent, a hundred peninsulas, five hundred promontories, a thousand lakes, two thousand rivers, ten thousand islands."¹⁰ The domain thus created was a truly magnificent achievement in imperialism.

A distinctive feature of the British colonies is that Britain did not originally settle most of them. Many were taken from different European powers after wars or as a simple matter of assimilation.¹¹ There was never a distinctive plan to build and organize an empire. Its construction over the centuries was a product of happenstance rather than shrewd organizational policy. Rather than have an empire spanning the globe with Englishmen, hundreds of millions of natives were ruled politically by a minute percentage of British politicians. The danger of this situation was not lost on either the colonizers or the indigenous inhabitants. Without the firm grasp of British soldiers and continued Western education, there always remained a possibility of the empire's collapse. British domination brought education, effective politics, and an end to slavery; but many of the peoples under colonial authority continued to be at odds with the British.

¹⁰ Ferguson, 242.

¹¹South Africa, for example, was taken from the Dutch in 1806. The Dutch East India Trading Company had established the colony in 1652 as a means to reduce travel time. Britain had won French controlled areas of India as well, after the Seven Years war.

Perhaps the most valuable benefit of having an empire was the wealth created by trade. It was an empire maintained and held together by a variety of interests, domestic and foreign, all of which usually benefited or supported Britain's economic interests. This reciprocal relationship, and Britain's dependence on it, was clearly understood by every colony. Nowhere was this connection better understood than at the regular meetings of the Colonial Conference. In spring of 1887, Lord Charles Beresford, Member of Parliament, stated,

You have [Great Britain], in the first place, a vast Empire—vast in area, population, and resources—such as we may honestly say the world's history holds no counterpart. It is the first and foremost of its time. Within the compass of that great Empire you have all the products of nature which can be named. . . It is a world in itself.¹²

Beresford clearly suggested that if Britain did not have access to a commodity that the item was not important. Trade issues and how they affected the working class were often at the heart of domestic concerns. The imperialist goals of businessmen and politicians created pressure to portray the Empire as a profitable and efficient entity. This image and the gold in the Rand combined to ease the provocation of the Boer War.

The task of portraying peaceful coexistence within the empire often hinged on keeping peace between natives and colonizers. It was not just the inhabitants that created headaches for local and London administrators. In fact, it was often the natives that were the easiest to subdue. It was usually descendants of earlier colonizers that proved to be a problem. The uncomfortable relationship between Britain and its conquered colonies was manifested during the ill-fated Jameson raid in 1896, a poorly executed attempt at British

¹² Mr. Henry, "Free Trade In The Colonies," *The Times*, 23 February 1887, 7.

encroachment into neighboring colonies that brought international humiliation to the colonial leadership and its supporters within the government in Britain. The success of the Boers brought letters of congratulations from the Germans to the Transvaal president, Paul Kruger. Maintaining policies that would please European settlers, natives, and the citizens in Britain was often difficult and sometimes impossible.

Geography was not the sole creator of British might. Pioneers of the industrial revolution, the British amassed immense wealth and power. Historian John Bowle wrote the “Victorian Empire . . . was bound together by the need for British protection and the need for British capital.”¹³ The wealth produced and controlled within Britain and its colonies was astounding. Enriching the nation, the colonies played a vital role in the modern mercantile system. The amount of funds available provided for large amounts of investment and loans to colonial possessions. At the turn of the century, Britain had almost £4,000,000,000 invested overseas.¹⁴ This sum amounted close to one half of all foreign owned assets.¹⁵ Primary recipients of these monies were the Americas, India, and the Orient. Such immense sums set aside for the colonies were a signal that Britain had no intention of relinquishing its role as a world leader.

Continuing emigration throughout the Empire helped spread the culture of Victorian Britain. Grand stories of conquest and exploration encouraged many Britons to leave home. The continued deportation of undesirables also helped produce the necessary manpower that stabilized colonies abroad. There was never a shortage of people willing (or required) to move overseas. The government did all it could to encourage this

¹³ John Bowle, *The Imperial Achievement* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), 189.

¹⁴ Though the amount is in pounds Sterling, the term ‘million’ is applied using the U.S. method.

¹⁵ Ferguson, 242.

migration. When citizens could be motivated to move, it freed the government from the burden of costly services at home and furthered the imperial cause abroad.

It was, therefore, important that the public received and developed a positive image of the Empire. Government officials eagerly worked to convey the wonder and majesty of Britain and all it had to offer. Periodicals rife with political commentary and satire regularly parodied the government's attempts. *Punch* published a picture in 1845



HERE

AND

THERE;

OR, EMIGRATION A REMEDY

contrasting the lifestyles available to the common man at home with the family willing to move abroad. Pictures such as this with accompanying commentary from the press, fed the public desire for something better than the smoke stacks and smog filled cities.¹⁶ The growing empire welcomed the immigrants with open arms as farmers, soldiers, and sometime leaders.

ATTITUDES AT HOME

The image of an empire was not created in a vacuum. As Britain swelled beyond its borders, the zeal of politicians and members of the press (who endeavored to craft a romantic image in the mind of the people) matched the pace of growth. During the nineteenth century, Britain was quickly moving forward because of the industrial revolution and a rapidly expanding empire. Immigrants and soldiers to build this Empire had to come from somewhere. With the exception of large standing native armies in India, it was the local English, Welsh, and Scots who were called upon for this service. The need for a picture that both encouraged military service and stirred enthusiasm for the Empire developed. It was a constant ordeal to assure both popular support of the Empire and the means by which it was built and defended. There was no shortage of volunteers from throughout the Empire when the conflict in Africa began in 1899. As the war wore on, however, public enthusiasm waned.

It is not easy to separate the role of politicians from that of the press. During this period both groups appeared almost interchangeable as they used one another in an effort to further their causes. Most papers in Britain were squarely lined up alongside certain parties and in some cases actually owned by Members of Parliament and their associates.

¹⁶ Richard D. Altick, *Punch The Lively Youth of a British Institution* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), 211 and <http://vassun.vassar.edu/~sttaylor/FAMINE/Punch/Emigration/Emigration.html>, accessed 25 June 2004.

During the war the familiarity of politicians and the press, alongside accusations of suppression of speech, perpetuated a feeling of mistrust between the government and its anti-imperialist citizens.

One should not assume that Parliament was in complete agreement on how imperialism should be approached. In fact, changing governments dealt with the issue differently. For example, there were strong disagreements over expanding the empire, but many politicians from both major parties felt it was important to maintain what was already British. Though he originally wrote that the primary reason for colonization was for the pursuit of gold, British Prime Minister W.E. Gladstone later suggested that colonies were worth maintaining because “they are desirable both for the material and for the moral and social results which a wise system of colonization is calculated to produce.”¹⁷ The Tories also appreciated the need to keep what had been conquered. Though he attacked what he perceived to be Gladstone’s weak attempts at maintaining the Empire, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli agreed with Gladstone in principle when he stated, “No minister in this country will do his duty who neglects any opportunity of reconstructing as much as possible our Colonial Empire.”¹⁸ Both Liberal and Tory politicians understood the value of the Empire in terms of domestic and international contentment.

THE IMAGE

While Britain was by no means perfect at the end of the nineteenth century, it nonetheless had much more to offer its citizens than many of its contemporaries. In 1879,

¹⁷ Paul Knaplund, *Gladstone and Britain’s Imperial Policy* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1996) 185-227.

¹⁸ Earl of Beaconsfield, *Selected Speeches*. Ed. T. E. Kebbel, vol. II (London: Longmans, 1882), 532

America's Ambassador to England, John Welsh, described a nation that could easily have been the envy of all,

Its cities, towns and villages and hamlets present a most attractive aspect. There is an absence of all indications of dilapidation. The buildings and out-houses are well kept . . . particularly among the humbler classes. New buildings are rising in almost every suburb, many being villas for successful tradesmen and more for the industrial classes.¹⁹

Welsh was not suggesting an ideal state, but rather commenting on one specific positive aspect of Britain. There was a feeling among many Britons that these amenities and improvements in standards of living were benefits of living in the Empire.²⁰ The Boer War was precipitated on the notion that it would assure these qualities of life for all citizens of the empire, in a sense addressing the issues of national interest at home and abroad. When this connection was not recognized, it was up to politicians and newspapers to help the people understand the important link between empire and self-fulfillment.

Despite an abundance of rolling green hills, Britain's cities were often cramped, dirty, and depressing. Urban life in Britain was hardly the picture of perfection described by Welsh. Charles Dickens, in contrast, gave different images of late nineteenth century British city life in his novel *Hard Times*. His descriptions of Coketown, a town like dozens of others, were filled with monotonous and depressing imagery. Its citizens were trapped in a never-ending cycle, to be repeated "every day [which] was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next."²¹

¹⁹ Beckles Willson, *America's Ambassadors To England* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1929), 371.

²⁰ Custos, "The Queen and the Empire," *The Times*, 19 August 1896, 5.

²¹ Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*. George Ford and Sylvere Monod, Ed. (London: W.W. Norton, 1966), 17. (First edition published 1854)

Dickens' readers were not surprised by such vivid descriptions. They used his novels as a means of escape, attempting to find a life worse than theirs. Political leaders knew the hard lives lived within Britain's industrial cities but endeavored to paint a rosier picture, in order to deflect criticisms and justify the costs of imperialism.²² When the depressing realities of home could not be avoided, it was time to talk of the Empire and what it offered to the British. Dickens and many of his contemporaries used the pages of books and papers to remind the people of their condition, yet their enthusiasm for the Empire did not falter. Those who sold the British Empire as the pinnacle of achievement won the battle for support of its maintenance and continued imperialism.

The two most important politicians during the late nineteenth century were William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli. Competing party leaders from the 1860-80s, they witnessed changing sentiment amongst political and common ranks towards the Empire. Disraeli, especially, recognized "large sections of the working classes were held to . . . Crown [and] Empire . . . which could be turned to party advantage."²³ If these bodies of men could be fed a constant stream of positive imagery based on domestic and foreign issues, the battle to enlist support for maintaining the Empire was already won. Such success meant a steady stream of soldiers and willing emigrants. In 1872, he asserted that the vast majority of the working classes stood firmly behind the Queen and Empire. He suggested there was general support for maintaining the Empire and that it was synonymous with England itself.²⁴ Such broad statements reveal confidence on the

²² For valuable pro-empire commentary see the many speeches of Benjamin Disraeli, especially "*Conservative and Liberal Principles*" (1872) and "*Royal Titles Bill*" (1876). His many speeches are full of rhetoric that suggests common support for the empire and queen, regardless of the varying costs of maintenance.

²³ Winston Churchill, *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*. (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1956), 431.

²⁴ Earl of Beaconsfield, pp. 523-35.

part of Disraeli and his party. Support of the people allowed the government freedom to pursue colonial issues relatively unchecked. General support for imperialism continued up through the beginning of the Boer War. Steady streams of vocal proponents were generally successful in creating a populace willing to abide the cost of its maintenance.

Disraeli was not at all deceitful when he made such sweeping claims. It was apparent throughout Britain that the Liberal party and their timid support of the Empire had grown unpopular with people in all classes. The growth and stability of the Empire assured trade and taxation which in turn secured jobs at home and continued emigration that relieved pressure in the cities.²⁵ A workingmen's conference, held in London during the winter of 1885, revealed that Disraeli's theories were justified. Members sought support for government policies that would enable easier trade and better organized emigration. The conference president, George Potter, suggested that for decades the British had been fed on an image of a great empire and that it was time for the Empire to contribute or be shed. The people did not wish to be regaled with stories and justifications of such an empire if it did them no good. The men he represented knew the benefits of the Empire but had begun to question the cost and commitment of the government in making it feasible.²⁶

Though the men and women of the working class made up a sizable portion of the British public, it is fair to assume members of other classes may not have felt the same as they did. Not all levels of society benefited from the Empire in the same way. Thus the methods needed to encourage support varied throughout the country. Most of the working

²⁵ "The General Balance Sheet of the Empire," *The Times*, 28 August 1872, 9. And "The Population," *The Times*, 14 April 1884, 9. And W.E. Gladstone, "Mr. Gladstone's Manifesto," *The Weekly Dispatch*, 20 June 1886, 2

²⁶ George Potter, "The Unity of the Empire," *The Times*, 21 January 1885, 8.

class men, many in the mines of Wales and Yorkshire, recognized very little direct benefit from the Empire on a day-to-day basis. Their lives did not revolve around the exploits of David Livingstone in Africa but rather the necessities of life; however, the idea of a vast Empire, even if it was not immediately available to them in person, was something that allowed for a sense of escapism. There was an opportunity to dream of something important of which they were a part. The government was split between those who focused on settling domestic problems and those who saw Britain's answers in imperialism. Such opposing views created a battle for the support and approval of the workingman. This man was poor, hungry, too often alone, and easily agitated because of these conditions.

THE CONVERSATION

Prior to the Boer War, those who supported imperialism regularly won the battle for public opinion. When Sir Alfred Milner, High Commissioner for South Africa, returned to England in 1898, the work he needed to do in order to shore up support for action against the Boers was minimal. He was a leader among those who supported the idea of imperial unity. Before the massive failures of the war, this notion was widely supported in political and newspapers circles. Propaganda in the shape of cartoons in *Punch* was accompanied by audacious statements of British self-promotion in the pages of nineteenth century periodicals. *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* stated boldly:

Great Britain . . . occupies a position of dignity, of grandeur, *and of* RESPONSIBILITY, unparalleled in either her own history, or that of any other nation ancient or modern. Let him who is inclined to doubt this assertion . . . glance for a moment at a map of the world, and having at length found our little island, turn to our stupendous possessions . . . [and] behold the glorious monarch of this little island, Queen Victoria.²⁷

²⁷ "Great Britain At The Commencement Of The Year 1843," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, January 1843, 1

Blackwoods was by no means alone. A symphony of internal praise for the Empire flowed for decades. Readers, who were not inclined to dig deeper and research facts for themselves, were generously fed on articles such as this. Contemporary writers in general successfully shaped public opinion in the affirmative for imperialism.

Regardless of political persuasion, there was no shortage of sources willing to tout the Empire during the late Victorian era. Public competition served all parties involved as it deflected attention from grim realities of British city life. It also provided for lively debate in periodicals that inevitably increased their circulation. Even the foreign press encouraged these feelings of national pride, albeit at times inadvertently. When attempting to criticize Britain in 1885, the *German Free Conservative Post* wrote,

For the rearrangement of the balance of power that would result from the dismemberment of the British Empire is an affair of such magnitude as to cast all other contemporary questions into the shade.”²⁸

The author’s attempt to suggest that Britain had grown past its ability to sustain itself and remain relevant revealed his respect for the empire. The mere idea that the world was dependent on Britain was expressed often enough to encourage mass support for its maintenance.

There were critics of the Empire, but they were most often drowned in a sea of support for imperialism. Thomas Hughes, a popular writer and sometime contributor to *Macmillan’s Magazine*, kept his work focused on social issues within Britain. He and John Morley, editor of *Macmillan’s Magazine* and later the *Fortnightly Review*, were staunch anti-imperialists. The *Manchester Guardian* and *Northern Echo* contributed to

²⁸ "A German View of The British Empire," *The Times*, 29 June 1885, 5.

domestic discourse and refused to follow the lead of imperialist governments. Their pages included writings and speeches that were received positively and respectfully in elite circles, yet there were too few among the working classes who publicly agreed with them during the pre-war period. These papers based their readership within the working class ranks, yet their efforts to encourage anti-war sentiment were battled fiercely by the spirit of jingoism. Initially, pro-Boer periodicals were unable to sway public opinion on a national level.

It was in the many fiery speeches at Parliament that the two competing parties continually laid before each other and the nation reasons for and against the Empire. It was there that the matter had been set before the British people for over a century. By the 1880's, most of the debates were the same. The adherents of Disraeli's philosophies led the call for imperialism, and their counterparts usually championed domestic issues. The most dramatic of these debates were between Disraeli and Gladstone. The debate continued up until and throughout the war. In an address to his own party Disraeli exclaimed,

And yet, gentlemen, it is not merely our fleets and armies, our powerful artillery, our accumulated capital, and our unlimited credit on which I so much depend, as upon that unbroken spirit of her people, which I believe was never prouder of the Imperial country to which they belong.²⁹

The speech assumed the people's support. This assumption appears justified after reflection upon the ease at which the nation was driven to war. Anti-imperialists, who wrote in the contrary, simply could not compete.

Letters sent to papers of the period indicate the imperialists were winning the battle for support. In 1881, *The Times of London* (*The Times*) published a letter that

²⁹ Earl of Beaconsfield, 235.

stated, “That the policy of the government in regard to foreign states, as well as important portions of the Empire, has weakened the power and influence abroad.”³⁰ The author blamed Gladstone and his party for weakening relations with allies and throughout the Empire. Ten years later, *The Times* printed a similar attack on the Liberals when the author wrote, “Wherever our country has an enemy, there Mr. Gladstone has a friend.”³¹ The letter strongly asserted the notion that the losses to the Boers in 1880, the crisis in Egypt, and the troubles in Newfoundland were all due to the lack of imperial care by Gladstone’s governments. There is no surprise at the ease with which the British government rallied the people and troops into a war in Africa. Anti-imperialist organs found it difficult to stem the tide of enthusiasm for a Greater Britain.

It is accepted, then, that the general mood of the British public was in favor of preserving the Empire. On the eve of the Boer War, British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain stated, “Let it be our task to keep alive the sentiment, forces, and institutions of imperial patriotism, so that in [the] future the British Empire may present an unbroken front in support of our glorious flag.”³² Politicians and writers had successfully created an image in the minds of the people. This image offered a means of escape from the realities of city life, and it was in fact a real boon to the economy in terms of trade. With so much power, wealth, and prestige relying on the continuity of the Empire, it was imperative that every colony be protected.

³⁰ E. Ashmead-Bartlett, “Mr. Gladstone’s Imperial Policy,” *The Times*, 27 August 1881, 4.

³¹ H. O. Arnold-Forster, “Mr. Gladstone and the Enemies of England,” *The Times*, 30 June 1892, 10.

³² “Great Britain’s Colonies,” *The Times*, 1 April 1897, 7.

CONCLUSION

The problem with the Boers at the end of the nineteenth century offers itself as a good case study for the role of public discourse and its manipulation. Though Africa's extreme geographic location prevented it from becoming a popular destination for emigration, the colonies in southern Africa offered important trade routes. The messy war with the Boers in 1880 had been an embarrassment for Gladstone and his government. When opportunities arose again to deal with the colonists, it was not difficult to accelerate public appetite for confrontation. Joseph Chamberlain's (an emerging leader within the Tory party) rhetoric appealed to all classes when he stated,

We may speak of our colonies as parts of ourselves. We feel, moreover, that our rule over the territories dependant upon us is justified only as it adds to the happiness of the populations they contain. We shall protect our self-governing colonies with all our strength against any foreign aggressor.³³

He made these remarks as the conflict in Africa approached, and he enjoyed broad support for this attitude. The costly war with the Boers from 1899-1902 checked the imperial bravado of the British. Chamberlain's asserted that continued British control in South Africa was justified. The British government assumed a role of protector in an effort to continue the happiness of the ruled. But this idea was checked and refuted as 80,000 Boers rose up to regain their independence.

³³ Ibid , 7

CHAPTER TWO

CREATING A WAR

The Dutch Boer, with all his roughness, is a gentleman in his manners from his head to his heels.³⁴

Anthony Trollope, 1878

I shall give everything, everything, everything for peace [but if] they touch my independence, I shall resist.³⁵

Paul Kruger, May 30, 1899

The problems in South Africa were not new to the British; the sub-continent had provided many challenges since its annexation from the Dutch in 1795. A wide and often dreary landmass, Africa was important in protecting British trade routes to India and the Orient. It was the wealth found beneath the soil of the unforgiving veld, however, that provided the riches upon which the empire was strengthened. Discoveries of gold and diamonds drew immigrants from all over the Empire, as well as from all over the globe, and increased the prestige of the British. At the same time, tensions heightened with the Dutch descendants who had already claimed these lands. Generations of Boers had given the better parts of their lives to settle and improve the South African veld. Imperial plans developed by the British government to annex the republics were met with vocal and bloody resistance on more than one occasion.

The contentious history between the British government and Dutch settlers in South Africa contributed to the ease with which the war began. The political and civil

³⁴ Anthony Trollope, *South Africa* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1878), 328.

³⁵ Pakenham, 60. Quoted from the *Cape Times*, May 1899.

actors who argued for the war found it easy to stir up anti-Boer emotion in Britain.

Understanding these factors and how they relate will contribute to a clearer picture of the conflict and its relevance within the final years of the British Empire. It will also provide a foundation upon which future chapters will explore the battle for public support throughout the Boer War.

BOER HISTORY

From 1795 to the second Boer war in 1899, immense changes occurred throughout the territory that affected the relationship between the Boers and their colonial guardians. When the British government emancipated slaves throughout the empire in 1834, many of the Boer farmers rejected that act and trekked beyond the borders of the assumed British domain. Relations between the British and the Boers remained unstructured and cautious for the next few decades. The British were keenly aware of the importance of the African ports and made every effort to protect them. Eventually in 1852 and 1854 two semi-independent states of Boers were created, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

A situation existed in which the British government tolerated the semi-independence of the Boer states based on the assumption that the land had little to offer. However, when the diamond rush to Kimberly began in 1870, businessmen and politicians alike pursued a policy of subjugation and assimilation throughout the veld in order to claim the wealth for Britain. In 1877, Britain annexed the Transvaal, which increased tensions and led to an armed revolt by the Boers. With tightened control and increased taxation on the Boers, the British faced swift reaction in the forms of both passive and armed resistance.

The Boer Republics had assumed a degree of quasi-independence since 1852, and the intrusion by the British brought a sense of betrayal that led to revolt and the first Boer War. Paul Kruger, President of the Transvaal, led a rebellion along with others who became prominent leaders twenty years later during the second Boer War. They quickly delivered striking military defeats to the British army. Such humiliating losses at the hands of back woods ruffians startled the British army and government.³⁶ Devastating losses at Majuba proved to be a rallying cry for the British troops in 1899.³⁷ Gladstone was quick to make peace, a peace many British imperialists and businessmen in Africa felt was far too favorable to the Boers. Many politicians and businessmen were concerned that money, time, and the prestige of the empire were wasted if the government felt content to “abandon South Africa to the Boers.”³⁸ Imperialists throughout the empire saw such concessions as a weakness and a slight to the accomplishments of Britain. Among the items granted to Kruger and his men were amnesty for all Boer leaders and self-government under British suzerainty. By 1884, language on the suzerainty was removed, and the Boers assumed independence (if only in their minds) once again. The peace in South Africa was restored.

Response in Britain was mixed and stirred anger among many imperialist factions while the pro-Boer papers and politicians quietly enjoyed the outcome. Anti-imperial sentiment prevented the British from fighting the war to an end and thus weakened the

³⁶ David Livingstone, *Family Letters. 1841-1856*. Ed. I. Schapera, Vol. II (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959), 94. In a letter to his parents in 1850, Livingstone wrote of the difficulties in converting certain tribes and the increased impediment the Boers had become on the process. He continued further to describe the Boers as “similar in character to those in Newgate.” The prison of Newgate, long since gone, was well known at the time for the especially low quality of prisoners held there.

³⁷ Though the battle at Majuba was brief, lasting less than a day, the extreme losses on the part of the British accompanied by the expert fighting of the Boers combined to make this battle a memorable and important point of reference for both sides. Almost one hundred British soldiers died with another two hundred wounded or missing. The Boers suffered one registered death and less than ten wounded.

³⁸ Frederic Mackarness, “The Boer Attack Upon Montsioa,” *The Times*, 9 September 1884, 6.

government during negotiations. The Transvaal and Orange Free State regained a measure of self-determination and freedom to transact business within their borders and between themselves. British submission to Kruger during negotiations was an outrage to Britons who felt the losses of Majuba and understood the implications of so easily caving into him. During armistice discussions *The Times* wrote, “we are told, the tone of the Boers, especially the younger ones, is offensive, and they look forward . . . to a united South Africa free from British authority.”³⁹ The editorial made the assertion that the defeat of a few hundred British soldiers did not weaken the Empire and that the Boers (perhaps) did not quite understand what they were up against.

The case for opposing imperialism was made in Parliament by Gladstone and the Liberal party as well as through the formation of anti-war groups. The Transvaal Independence Association (becoming the Transvaal Committee in 1899) formed in 1881 to work primarily for anti-imperialist causes. Members of this group worked to overturn Britain’s annexation of South African lands in the late 1870’s and allow the Transvaal and Orange Free State complete independence. The anti-imperialist groups aimed far too low in their efforts, however, as they sought to sway public opinion. Historian Richard Price wrote, “They believed that all that was needed to generate an effective opposition to the war was to expose its immorality.”⁴⁰ Between the wars there was effort made to deflect Britain from its imperialist path. Most of the efforts of the anti-imperialist groups were unsuccessful as the people in Britain could not be distracted from the memories of Majuba and the perceived benefits of living within the empire. The general population

³⁹ “The Armistice With the Boers Has Been Extended,” *The Times*, 16 March 1881, 9.

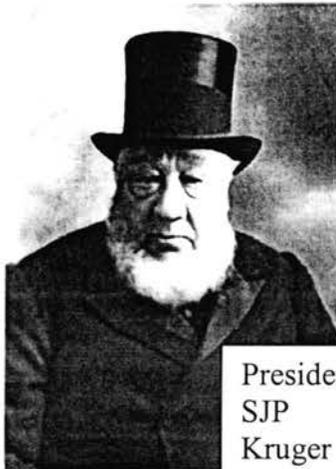
⁴⁰ Richard Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 12.

was still fascinated with military victories in Egypt and the lure of the colonies.⁴¹ Groups established to counter the patriotic zeal found few willing to hear their remarks in the 1890s.

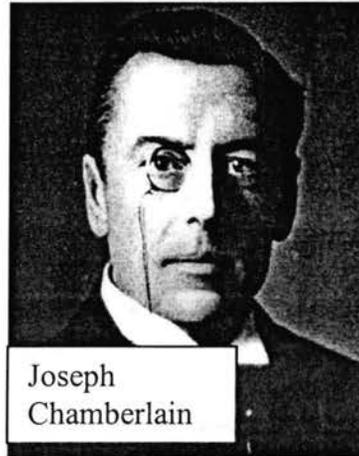
Although many British imperialists perceived the situation in the Transvaal to be simple, it was not. Assuming the presidency of the independent state just after the first war, Kruger remained in this position at the dawn of the second. He was an awkward and stubborn man. In every instance Kruger's policies were thoroughly pro-Boer, and he gave very little at the bargaining table with successive colonial leaders. His inflexible nature fueled the conflict among the Transvaal government and foreign immigrants within his gold mines and colonial leaders at the Cape. Both internal and external agitation became the norm and eventually contributed to the second war in 1899.

Kruger continuously fought with the immigrant workers who had come to the South African diamond mines in increasing numbers during the previous twenty years. Central to the conflict between him and the immigrants (Uitlanders) was the right to vote. The debate over the franchise, and to what extent it would be granted, played a major role in tensions between the Transvaal and the government in Britain. The crafting of a war to bring the franchise to the Uitlanders by such hawkish imperialists as Chamberlain (British Colonial Secretary) and Sir Alfred Milner (the British High Commissioner for South Africa) was an earnest and unrelenting task.

⁴¹ Stephen Koss, *The Anatomy of an Antiwar Movement The Pro-Boers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), xiv-xix.



President
SJP
Kruger



Joseph
Chamberlain



Sir Alfred
Milner

The Uitlanders (as the Boers called them) had steadily invaded the diamond and gold mines for the better part of forty years. By the late 1890s, they outnumbered the Boers in such a way that would likely lead to control of the government, if given the right to vote. Disenfranchised, the Uitlanders were politically powerless despite making up the bulk of the workforce and tax base. The situation was ripe for manipulation, and men such as Cecil Rhodes and Milner steadfastly worked at home and abroad to instigate unrest and agitate for reform. Rhodes was one of very few powerful British businessmen in South Africa who had amassed unimaginable fortunes through gold, diamond, and land accumulation. The British government had long turned a blind-eye to the actions of these men as they usually resulted in more power and wealth for the empire. Rhodes saw the answer to Britain's colonial woes in the crushing of the independent Boer Republics and in assuming all control of their vast resources for the crown.

THE RAID

The key to gaining public support for British interference in the Rand (and thus control of the mines) was finding a problem that would provoke emotion and concern among the British people. Many of the imperialist leaders felt the franchise for the Uitlanders was the issue they needed. The pro-Boer press and politicians in Britain were sensitive to the opportunity this provided and worked hard to portray the image of the greedy immigrant to the Transvaal. In blatantly anti-Semitic tones, the *Manchester Guardian* wrote that Johannesburg was full of Jews who controlled everything, and anything that benefited the Uitlander benefited them.⁴² Images such as these filled the pro-Boer press throughout the 1890s. Concocting such a negative image helped alleviate some of the pressure on the Boers to grant the vote to the immigrants. Milner and Rhodes took it upon themselves to counter the negative image of the Uitlanders and create conflict in South Africa that people in Britain would readily support.

Serving as Prime Minister to the Cape did not stop Cecil Rhodes from pursuing causes which best suited his private interests. He sensed the British government was in no rush to act and took it upon himself to create confrontation.⁴³ His immense holdings of gold and diamond concerns and his influence to the north in Rhodesia made him one of the most powerful men in all of Africa. Playing on the concerns of Uitlanders about the vote, he worked to provoke a clash that would draw the British army into the quarrel and effectively legitimize an assimilation of Transvaal wealth into British (Rhodes') hands. He grew concerned that the Germans, if provoked, would get involved on behalf of the Boers and was intent on assuring British control first. Rhodes and others devised a plan

⁴² "Johannesburg Today," *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1899, 7.

⁴³ Basil Williams, *Cecil Rhodes* (London: Henry Holt and Co., 1921), 242-253.

that, if successful, would increase pressure on the British army to come to the aid of revolting Uitlanders fighting for fair and equal political rights.

Organization of the Jameson Raid was no small feat, and its utter failure delivered proportionate problems for Rhodes and the British government. Secretly organized, the intent of the raid was to stir an uprising among the Uitlanders in Johannesburg and justify armed British support. Unfortunately for Rhodes and his cohorts, most of the industry leaders in the Rand were not overly concerned with the vote. As Rhodes' biographer Basil Williams suggested, "Leaders of the gold industry did not . . . care a fig for the vote."⁴⁴ They were far more concerned about protecting their profits and eliminating the high tariffs Kruger had implemented on them. Still, they were easily drawn into Rhodes' plan, as the result would be the same; British control and reduced barriers to free enterprise.

For the most part, the government in London was kept out of the loop, and the small secretive band of colonial leaders, businessmen, and press invented a scenario to achieve their goals. *The Times* participated to the extent that one of their writers, Flora Shaw, was involved in the raid's conception and was prepared to help others "know the line to take when the rising occurred."⁴⁵ Despite being the government's Colonial Minister, definitive evidence linking Chamberlain to the raid was not produced. South African historian Jean van der Poel argued that Chamberlain had foreknowledge of the raid, or at the very least gave passive approval to it. British historians R.C.K. Ensor and J.A. Hobson also debated Chamberlain's foreknowledge suggesting his involvement was

⁴⁴ Ibid., 254.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 261.

minimal at most.⁴⁶ Regardless of who did or did not know about the plan, Rhodes' close friend Dr. Leander Starr Jameson started the raid itself, and it was Rhodes and he that suffered the international humiliation for its failure. Chamberlain remained largely unscathed in the aftermath of the raid and prelude to the war in 1899.

The raid was planned and arms were smuggled in to the Uitlanders of Johannesburg (at Rhodes' expense), but its failure was almost immediate. Aware that the entire situation was highly combustible at best, Rhodes telegraphed Jameson at the last minute to cancel the raid. However, by then the communications to the Cape had been severed and on 29 December 1895, Jameson marched with over 600 men from Pitsani and crossed into the Transvaal. The Uitlanders never rose up, Jameson and his men were quickly captured and thrust into jail by a Boer commando, and Rhodes was humiliated and forced to resign. The fiasco embarrassed the British government in both London and at the Cape. The Kaiser of Germany sent a congratulatory letter to Kruger that further increased British tensions and fears of outside interference in South Africa.

Swift support for Kruger at home and abroad proved troublesome for imperialists eager to unite South Africa under the Union Jack.⁴⁷ Pro-Boers in Britain were ecstatic as their imperialist foes received a sound diplomatic defeat. Four years later when the agitators again attempted to use the franchise and plight of Uitlanders as a cause for war

⁴⁶ For further reading on the debate regarding Chamberlain's involvement see Jean van der Poel, *The Jameson Raid* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1951). Also see J.A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London: G. Richards, 1901) and R.C.K. Ensor, *England 1870-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936).

⁴⁷ For example, papers in the United States were vastly opposed to the Raid. Almost 80% of the US papers stood firmly against it while less than 40% of Americans supported the Uitlander cause. C. Tsehloane Keto, "The Aftermath of the Jameson Raid and American Decision Making in Foreign Affairs, 1896," *The American Philosophical Society* 70 (December 1980): 17-21.

the Jameson Raid was used to mock the government. The anti-war Transvaal Committee wrote that the

Appeals, in respect to the political hardships and grievances of our fellow-Englishmen . . . bear, in my opinion, a suspicious resemblance to the nauseous humbug about the peril of unprotected women and children which was used to justify the infamous and abortive Raid.⁴⁸

Later, the Independent Labour party wrote that the government was “misleading the public and rousing the passion for war.”⁴⁹ Jameson and Rhodes succeeded in temporarily rendering the British citizens within the Rand useless as a means of stirring up support for the war. For a war to be provoked, other methods and men unmarred by the events surrounding the raid were required.

The anti-war groups did not count on the efforts and intensity of purpose of one man, Sir Alfred Milner. Sent to take over as British representative in the Cape in 1897, Milner had plans from the outset to assure a war and British dominance over the South African Republics. From the beginning, he made it clear publicly that he disliked Kruger, his treatment of Uitlanders, and the policies of the Transvaal government in regards to the British. Kruger later wrote, “The appointment [of Milner] was received by the Jingoos with loud jubilation. The aim and principle of his policy are to be found in the words which he spoke to a distinguished Afrikander: ‘The power of Afrikanderon must be broken.’”⁵⁰ The short break provided to the anti-war supporters passed and a most powerful imperialist was in control of shifting public opinion and the British government towards war. Though he was afraid to admit participation with the raid in 1895, by 1898

⁴⁸ Koss, 8. From The Transvaal Committee “Report of a Public Meeting in London,” 10 July 1899.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 15. From a resolution adopted by the party in Blackburn on 9 September 1899.

⁵⁰ Paul Kruger, *The Memoirs of Paul Kruger*, Vol. II (New York: Kennikat Press, 1970), 290.

Chamberlain shifted his position. He was then willing to work with Milner (if only passively) and others towards war.

CREATING A NEED FOR WAR

From the beginning Milner set about shaping opinion at the Cape and in Britain. Changing public perceptions of the Boers and of the Uitlanders, and creating justifications for war played a central role in all his actions. Milner knew that without mass support for war by the British public he would never realize his dream of a united South Africa. Recognizing the trouble Britain faced in South Africa, Milner knew conflict was coming and that only two things could resolve it: reform of the Transvaal or war. He frankly assumed war was more probable.⁵¹ His distrust of Kruger fed this theory, and he took it upon himself to paint a picture of the Rand that would provoke a conflict that would be overwhelmingly supported in Britain.

Milner visited London in December of 1898 to shore up support for his plan and begin the process of soliciting mass support for conflict with the Boers. He was not at all fond of the “mistakes” made by preceding governments in regard to the Boer problem.⁵² He felt that both Liberal and Conservative governments had been too forgiving of (and patient with) the Boers. Milner was for imperial unity and intended to use this trip to obtain written and unwritten support from Chamberlain and others within the government for British action against Kruger in South Africa. Kruger’s police handed Milner unexpected help while he was away. They arrested and shot a British citizen, Tom Edgar, which immediately brought protests from Uitlander and imperialist groups in South Africa and Britain. The South African League, an Uitlander political group, quickly

⁵¹ Pakenham, 17.

⁵² Ibid, 12-15.

seized on the opportunity and issued a plea for help from Britain and detailed the abuses they were forced to live under. The *New York Times* wrote,

Things have been going from bad to worse in the Transvaal for some time, and sooner or later such an incident as this will bring about a crisis, out of which the Transvaal may not emerge at all.⁵³

Milner finished meetings in London and returned to the Cape with the understanding that the task of provoking conflict was under his control. The British Cabinet passively responded as he acted, and he quickly went to work turning domestic issues of the Rand into an international problem.⁵⁴

The spring of 1899 saw an increase in maneuvering for public support of action against the Boers. While Kruger hurriedly built up his military arsenal in anticipation of conflict, Milner built an arsenal of mass support in Britain when he encouraged a petition that was sent to Queen Victoria containing almost 22,000 signatures. The Uitlander petition addressed their grievances and begged for British intervention. In May, he further increased pressure on Chamberlain with his famous Helot's Dispatch. Milner listed reasons for intervention on the part of Britain and alleged numerous Britons were actually treated as slaves with little or no rights within the Transvaal. He concluded by suggesting

It is idle to talk of peace and unity. . . The case for intervention is overwhelming. . . The spectacle of thousands of British subjects kept permanently in the position of helots, constantly chafing under grievances and calling vainly on Her Majesty's Government for redress could only lead to British prestige being grievously undermined.⁵⁵

⁵³ "News and Views in England: More Trouble With the Boers," *New York Times*, 25 December 1898, 17.

⁵⁴ Despite the debate on Chamberlain's direct involvement in the Jameson Raid, there is ample evidence to suggest that he knew what Milner planned and gave tacit approval to his activities on the sub-continent. For further reading see Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War*.

⁵⁵ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War A Two-Years Record, 1899-1901* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1902), Chapter 3.

His work was further aided by reports in the *New York Times* (among others) that Kruger was “densely ignorant, suspicious and obstinate.”⁵⁶ The common theme of negative characterizations of the Boers and their leadership in the papers allowed Milner to further provoke Kruger knowing full well his actions would hardly be questioned.

British press and politicians were willing and able to lend support to the cause of demonizing the Boers. At home, Majuba was not forgotten and imperialist leaders were anxious to expand control. The pages of magazines, papers, and pamphlets were filled with images and texts aimed at destroying the credibility of the Boers. No expense was spared in defining Kruger as an ignorant oaf.

The end of the nineteenth century was a time of unmatched literacy in Britain. The masses that could be reached and influenced were never greater. Though *The Times* and most other papers in Britain were pro-war and anti-Boer (many of which were controlled by associates of Rhodes and Milner), there were a few papers such as the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Northern Echo*, which staunchly remained pro-Boer. The pages of both sides were used to fuel the debate prior to October 1899 when the war began.

The frenzied pitch at which support for the war was rallied escalated events in Britain and Africa to the point of no return. Speeches in Parliament found government Ministers calling the anti-war Liberals traitors for any statements they made against impending action in South Africa. There were veiled threats of violence aimed at politicians, which accompanied the fervent effort to silence all pro-Boer rhetoric.⁵⁷ War became inevitable, and what mattered for Britain was quickly importing troops to the

⁵⁶ Henry Norman, “London Topics of the Week: A Crisis in the Transvaal Expected,” *New York Times*, 21 May 1899, 19.

⁵⁷ Koss, 33-34. Speech in House of Commons by Michael Davitt, 17 October 1899.

veld. Milner ignored opportunities for peace at the Bloemfontein Conference in May 1899 when Kruger offered relaxed rules for the franchise. Kruger and his associates felt that the time had passed for reconciliation, and it was clear to them that Milner had no desire to resolve the issue peacefully.⁵⁸

The Boers were under increased pressure to act before they were acted upon. By August, Chamberlain was solidly on board Milner's plan to go to war and regularly attacked Kruger in the British press and in Parliament. On 26 August he gave a speech in which he accused Kruger of responding slowly to British offers of peace, and accused the Boers of treating the Uitlanders as an "inferior race."⁵⁹ Parliament was recalled to London, and the reserves were called up in an effort to mobilize an army for South Africa. In mid-October, feeling boxed in and concerned about troop build-up on their borders, Kruger sent an ultimatum demanding their removal. It went unanswered and by default the war began, initiated by the Boers. As Kruger later wrote: "In spite of all concessions, all the patience and indulgence of the Republic, the war broke out."⁶⁰ This was as Milner had planned, and he had acquired increased ability to justify the war and encourage enlistment for the fight. Britain had been attacked, and the empire must be defended.

THE WAR BEGINS AT HOME

Though European support for Britain was low, especially in the conflict with the Boers, it was not difficult to gather support from throughout the empire. Efforts in Britain and its colonies were increased to champion the cause. This reaction does not suggest that imperialist interests were the sole voice, but rather, they were able to drown out

⁵⁸ Kruger, 308.

⁵⁹ Pakenham, 90-91.

⁶⁰ Kruger, 346-47.

competition with their volume and alleged patriotism. The battle to provoke the war was fought through pamphlets and the press and was continued there when it was time to enlist volunteers. Edward Carpenter, a well-known socialist, argued that conscription would inevitably be the result of this war. He warned his readership against jingoism and the patriotic fervor that might drive the nation into a costly war.⁶¹ The *Manchester Guardian* refused to support the government and fought the war from start to finish. Weeks before the ultimatum it wrote: “We should be careful not to underestimate the wrongs of the Outlanders [Uitlanders] or to relax efforts for their redress, [however] I believe that such a war would be both crime and a blunder.”⁶² Letters to the editor in September echoed this sentiment,

I feel very strongly that our Government has no right whatever to interfere in the internal affairs of the Transvaal, and that all questions of the franchise, of taxation, and of education are essentially internal, and are, I believe, always held to be out of the sphere of diplomatic action between independent nations. I hold, further, that in the relations of England to the Transvaal we have been *almost* always in the wrong. . . I hold that Chamberlain's aggressive tone and conduct is the cause of all the present trouble.⁶³

Having escaped repercussions from Jameson’s Raid, Chamberlain was now forced to endure numerous attacks on his character and motives. Ten days after the war began, Henry Labouchere attacked him in Parliament, “It is an entire error to suppose that the Transvaal Republic is responsible for the war. I say that we are responsible for it, and that it is the absolute act of the Colonial Secretary himself.”⁶⁴

Initial support for the war was high, or at the very least mass indifference suggested support for imperialism. Although there were many Liberal politicians

⁶¹ Koss, 54-57. From a pamphlet issued 1 January 1900.

⁶² *Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1899.

⁶³ Alfred Wallace, “Untitled,” *Manchester Guardian*, 2 September 1899, 7.

⁶⁴ Koss, 35-38. From Henry Labouchere Speech in House of Commons, 17 October 1899.

prepared to lead a national campaign against the war, there was a lack of local drive to agitate against it. Price noted that while there were two hundred resolutions sent by trade councils and churches in opposition to the war, most were from recognized nonconformist groups. Very few emerged from mainstream sources of any notable reputation that would demand attention from the government. Even popular church leaders were conflicted over the war. W.T. Stead found it frustrating that noted Methodist preacher Hugh Price Hughes “lavished praise on imperialism.”⁶⁵ The lack of organized mass opposition suggested general support from the working-class. However, it was clear from the outset that a heavy battle would be waged on two continents. Two wars, one literal and one verbal, were fought for the soul of the empire.

Within a few short months, editorial pages in Britain castigated those who held pro-Boer sentiments. The Scarborough paper supported the suppression of an anti-war hearing and suggested “[That] they really cannot expect the average man in the street to give a patient hearing to such rubbish as this.”⁶⁶ *The Daily News* carried similar stories of abuse directed towards pro-Boer Britons.⁶⁷ *The Times*, as always, appeared as a mouthpiece for the government and so continued a long tradition of supporting Chamberlain and Milner’s methods in its editorial pages. It is important to again note that increased literacy in Britain made the importance of editorial positions all the stronger. There was no passive resistance on the part of the pro-Boer or a silent majority slipping off to fight a war. The papers, pamphlets, and pulpits became important tools for directing public moods. Hughes continued to encourage Methodists to support the war by

⁶⁵ Price, 12-15.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁶⁷ “The South African Question,” *Daily News*, 5 May 1900, 2.

suggesting Britain could not “leave Africa, with honour, to the Dutch.”⁶⁸ The Quakers, too, published articles and pamphlets that supported the cause for war. While Milner did his work quietly in Africa, cohorts and opponents in Britain quickly worked to establish support for action.

Though the pro-war groups obviously had a great advantage in the area of daily and weekly papers, the opposition cleverly wielded the use of pamphlets to inform and incite the populace. No stranger to pamphlets, the Europeans used them for centuries. They were small, cheaply produced, and easily distributed among city dwellers. Influential groups such as the Transvaal Committee and the South African Committee published them regularly throughout the war but especially in the beginning in an attempt to stave it off. They had a stiff uphill battle as Majuba remained a rallying cry and many Britons still smarted from the sting of Jameson’s failed raid. Beatrice Webb, a prominent anti-war activist wrote, “Imperialism in the air—all classes are drunk with sight-seeing and hysterical loyalty.”⁶⁹ It was clear to her and others of her ilk that only mass distribution of their ideas, accompanied with attacks on the government, could effectively sway the public. When Webb made her comments in 1897 that might have seemed possible, but by the summer of 1899 the work took on a sense of urgency, and in some cases activists turned from stopping the war and hoped to just make it a quick one. Massive distribution of pamphlets throughout Britain heated up in earnest.

The sources for, and ideas contained within, anti-war pamphlets were varied yet were singularly focused on one main purpose: A common drive to prevent the war in spring and fall of 1899. Quite similar to modern wars, the writings contained accusations

⁶⁸ Price, 14.

⁶⁹ Koss, XIX

that the war was a way to stir up the vote and support for the government. Many agreed with the chairman of the Transvaal Committee when he wrote that the information needed to honestly define life for Uitlanders was not available in Britain, and citizens should not rely on papers controlled by men “under the influence of South African gold.”⁷⁰ The pamphlets were usually based on rousing speeches such as ones given by George Russell, John Morley, and William Stead. All were powerful writers and publishers, and before the war began many were willing to at least hear what they had to say. In September, Morley wrote that regardless of any perceived successes in a war, no glory would be won.⁷¹ Later that month his associate William Stead issued one of the more famous pamphlets of the war, *Shall I Slay My Brother Boer?*, which was an attack on the policies of the government in preparations for the war in Africa.

Stead claimed the article was an “appeal to the conscience of Britain.” He chronicled the history of travesties committed on weak nations and individuals and then likened the venomous attacks by Chamberlain on Kruger to the infamous Dreyfus affair in France (that his readers would surely have been familiar with). Stead forewarned of a disaster similar to Majuba and of the sullied reputation Britain would receive in the world. He further reminded the reader that “the judgments of foreigners often anticipates the judgments of posterity.”⁷² He concluded that the reputation and abilities of Britain were limited by the rigorous and hate-filled desire to avenge Majuba. With the war quickly approaching, men such as Stead and Morley worked feverishly to stave it off if at all possible. By the end of October, with the war in progress, Stead had already unleashed

⁷⁰ Ibid., 6. A transcript of a meeting held by the Transvaal Committee 10 July 1899.

⁷¹ John Morley, *Recollections*, vol. II (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 87.

⁷² William Stead, *Shall I Slay my Brother Boer? An Appeal to the Conscience of Britain* (London, privately printed, 1899), Chapter 2.

many more pamphlets, which ranged from accusing Chamberlain of orchestrating the Jameson Raid to demanding the British ask themselves if the war was right. He lectured his readership that patriotism is not enough, but that one must truly understand why England was now at war. Referring to Kruger's ultimatum he wrote "that no state in the world would consider itself bound to wait until its neighbour brought up overpowering forces with the avowed object of coercion."⁷³ It was clear to the government and pro-war activists that the competition for the mind of the people was going to be fierce.

The pamphlets and the public lectures were effective but to what extent? By far the majority of Britons appeared to support the war or at most seemed uninterested in either side. As was discussed above, there appeared to be no meaningful opposition at the national level. What of the successes of these anti-war methods and the vehement responses in the days leading up to Kruger's ultimatum? Letters to the editor provide useful information on members of higher classes. While literacy was up, it is not likely that the common workingman had time or inclination at the turn of the century to read *The Times* or the *Manchester Guardian*. His medium would have been local papers or the pamphlets so craftily used by pro-Boers. Still, letters to any paper are valuable in gauging general feelings of the pre-war period. A brief discussion of newspapers, working classes, and their opinions will follow.

Before the war began the editorials of many papers fought back at the unpatriotic message of Stead and his fellow pro-Boers. It was not popular for Liberal members of Parliament to take that position and so many contributed discreetly to the anti-war effort during the latter half of 1899. When Liberal MPs did appear at rallies and their speeches

⁷³ Wilham Stead, *Joseph Chamberlain. Conspirator or Statesman?* (London: privately printed, 1899), preface. And William Stead, *Are We Right? An Appeal to the Honest Man* (London: privately printed, 1900), Chapter 1.

in print, there were usually calls for their heads. On 5 October 1899, a letter to *The Times* asked, "Is treason to be preached?"⁷⁴ The writer described a meeting held in Dublin in which three Liberal MPs were in attendance. The theme of the conference, according to the writer, was that there was hope that the Boers would speedily be victorious and that the Irish regiments would defect. This letter reveals the emotional nature of Britons towards war on the eve of conflict. Some men outwardly rooted for the enemy while others charged treason and advocated violence against those opposed to the war. On 19 September, the editorial page of *The Times* called Boers "obstinate" and blamed them for the tenuous situation in South Africa.⁷⁵ Eight weeks after the war began the *Weekly Dispatch* wrote, "There is not one historian of the Transvaal, from Fitzpatrick to Stead . . . who is not compelled to confess that the Boer government is a very sink of corruption."⁷⁶ With the exception of the papers in Ireland, the vast majority in Britain (along with their readers) appeared to be on the side of Chamberlain. Just as *The Times* had been a willing accomplice in the agitation during the Jameson raid, four years later the paper seemed equally willing to encourage further conflict.

Though involved more in day-to-day concerns the working class still had just as much interest in the war as did regular readers of *The Times* and *Guardian*. Their interests in the war were as diverse as other classes. Their papers were filled with discussion for and against the war. *The Morning Leader*, *Northern Echo*, and *Reynolds News* hotly debated the war but were usually on the side of the Boers. Just as modern papers geared towards the worker, these papers leaned left and focused on deaths and other negative attributes of the war. Just as modern day unions do not control the thought

⁷⁴ J.C. Dicker, "Untitled letter to the editor," *The Times*, 2 October 1899, 8.

⁷⁵ "The Text of the Boer Reply to the Last British," *The Times*, 19 September 1899, 7.

⁷⁶ "The Dead Lion," *Weekly Dispatch*, 4 January 1900, 10.

of their members, these nineteenth century papers merely influenced, while their editorial boards hoped for effective change. The more effective way to influence the workingmen was through the various clubs and unions they participated in.

Membership in trade unions and workingmen's clubs in Britain was, as it is now, an important part of life. These groups brought social unity, camaraderie, and a sense of belonging. They focused on the needs of the workers, usually within geographic units. While they primarily focused on relaxation, many of the clubs and unions met regularly to socialize and to address issues facing their area of the empire. They were popular targets of politicians such as Gladstone in efforts to shore up political support for new policies. Members of such clubs generally supported politicians who focused on domestic issues that benefited them. The working-class men often made their concerns known (with their vote) that government policy had shifted too far and too long abroad. While the intent of these clubs was for recreation rather than political activism, hard times provided for different methods. Incursions of socialism within their ranks and the idea of domestic resources being spent for the protection of Rand gold caused a stir within the working class. On the eve of the war the London Trades Council stated,

We further call the earnest attention of the working classes to the fact that we have always during this parliament a Foreign question thrust forward with the earnest intention of diverting the attention of the country from home affairs.⁷⁷

This echoed the feelings of most other trade councils. They were not so much concerned for the Uitlanders as they wanted protection of their jobs and improvements to their way of life.

⁷⁷ Price, 74. Minutes from London Trade council meeting 10 August 1899.

The state of Britain in the autumn of 1899 was precarious at best. While the empire was vast and largely unchecked throughout the world, they had crafted a problem for themselves in one small corner of it. History with the Boers, compounded with stubborn if not belligerent leadership under Kruger, became a thorn begging to be removed. The added efforts of Milner, Rhodes, and Chamberlain paved the way for a conflict no one really needed or wanted except for a few elite businessmen. The propensity for writers, papers, and leaders across all social strata to vigorously become involved only added to the ordeal. The Boer War emerged from a series of manipulations on the part of imperialist businessmen and politicians. Their work was not alone as the press (on both sides) played an integral role in shaping opinion prior to the war. The war was not fought like others the British had hitherto faced and quickly became a drain on both military morale and public will. The next chapter will address the beginning of the war by studying aspects of the war both in the field and in Britain. The first few months of the war provided shocking lessons to the British and deserves to be discussed. Reactions to them in the press and in Parliament in Britain equally add to the study of the conflict. In addressing conflicts on and off the battlefield during the autumn of 1899, the role of public opinion in the war and the earnestness in which people sought to control it will emerge.

CHAPTER THREE

A RUDE AWAKENING

It is thoroughly understood that if the Boer begins operations British interests will suffer until sufficient reinforcements arrive to swamp the enemy.⁷⁸

New York Times, 1 October 1899

The war at Transvaal rests invisible to them (other nations) and nothing is known to them of it but what the English, and the English only, want to tell the rest of the world.⁷⁹

Le Petit Journal, November 1899

Heightened emotions and rabid attacks in the pro-Boer press did not prevent the war in Africa. In fact both may have inadvertently hidden serious inadequacies within the British army. A sizeable portion of the British populace, the army, and the government expected a short and decisive win in the Transvaal. W.T. Stead wrote that the creation of the war by the government was “disreputable, contemptible, and discreditable.”⁸⁰ He further suggested that the government’s desire to protect its position in Africa from a few Dutch settlers was laughable at best. However, other than pro-Boers like Morley and Stead, most people believed that a small state in Africa stood no chance against British might. There was no immediate call for volunteers or enlistment of new troops, because many felt there were plenty available for the task. The press in London portrayed the British citizens as generally supportive of the notion of going to war. *The Daily Mail*

⁷⁸ “Great Britain Cannot Recede,” *New York Times*, 1 October 1899, 10.

⁷⁹ *Le Petit Journal*, 5 November 1899.

⁸⁰ W.T. Stead, “How the British Government Caused the War,” *Review of Reviews*, London edition, October 1899, 333.

blamed the conflict on Kruger's defiance; the *Standard* assured its readers that the government had done its best to avoid war, and the *Daily Chronicle* suggested that Kruger was "shifty and impracticable."⁸¹ A war against the Boers was justified in the minds of most imperialists and many of Britain's proud citizens.

Mindsets like these proved disastrous on and off the battlefields of Africa. Shocking defeats in quick succession tested the mettle of soldiers and citizens alike. The first three months of the war awoke Britain from its complacent slumber and increased tensions between supporters and opponents of the war. From the first shots fired at Kimberley to the vicious competition for public support after Black Week, the final quarter of 1899 proved difficult for Britain. Because the War Office had assured the public of a quick victory, the initial preparations for the war were woefully inadequate. The famed sieges, especially the siege of Mafeking, taxed men on both sides. The events of Black Week brought disastrous effects on and off of the battlefield and forced Britain to come to terms with the new face of war at the dawn of the twentieth century. Continuous reference to the press, writers, and general public discourse demonstrates the evolution of discourse in response to action in South Africa during the autumn of 1899.

INITIAL TROOP STRENGTH

In early August 1899, Chamberlain requested 10,000 troops be sent as a show of force to Kruger. By amassing so many troops at the Cape, the British were breaking the 1884 Convention signed by Kruger and Gladstone. Chamberlain did not seem concerned, because both he and Milner were confident that the war would begin soon, and they were just preparing Britain's position. During the next two months, the British military presence grew to almost 28,000. Despite the ease with which the British soldiers grouped

⁸¹ "Hostilities are Imminent," *New York Times*, 18 September 1899, 1.

themselves in South Africa, they faced two problems: They were unaccustomed to a war of this type, and the military was woefully ill prepared.

Based on a study ordered by the government in the 1880s, the British Secretary of War (Edward Stanhope) suggested Britain was not prepared for the troop movements required. Allowing for the troops required in India, Britain, and various stations across the globe, there were very few corps free to reposition in the veld. Military leaders hoped that Britain could send forth two fully equipped army corps, and this would send the necessary message. The lack of preparation was no secret and filled newspaper columns at home and abroad. Although Chamberlain encouraged Milner's actions for months, no serious effort was made on the part of Cabinet officials to assure adequate arrangements for the impending conflict. The War Office was attacked for its perceived lethargy by the foreign press and anti-war citizens in Britain.⁸² Whether it was a case of overconfidence or bungled leadership, the British troops were the ones left to face the consequences of the debacle.

Assuming the lack of well-prepared troops was due to overconfidence rather than poor planning, it is important to note the size and ability of the army fielded by Britain. In comparing this number to what the Boers could field, further credit was granted to the Boers because of their amazing success against their British foe. By the end of September, more than 25,000 British soldiers were in Africa or on their way. The army consisted of twenty-five battalions and almost one hundred and thirty big guns.⁸³ The reputation of British regulars was enough for many in the government to assume this number would be sufficient to suppress a Boer uprising. Plans quickly changed, however,

⁸² "British Troops' Personnel," *New York Times*, 1 October 1899, 10.

⁸³ Lord Michael Carver, *The Boer War* (London: Pan Books, 2000), 12-14. Statistics also taken from "Great Britain Cannot Recede," *New York Times*, 1 October 1899, 10.

after the war began. By the end of October, Britain was scrambling for more help from throughout the Empire.

The initial field strength of the Boer commandos was far greater than that of the British but was not perceived by the War Office as much of a threat. It was assumed about 50,000 men could be mustered in the many Boer commandos. This number took into account all men from sixteen to sixty, but many could not leave the farms for extended periods. The British felt comfortable sending a comparatively smaller force, with the assumption that their trained men would more than compensate for the nearly one to three ratio they faced against the Boers.⁸⁴ They had not taken into account Kruger's stockpiling of weapons, a measure he had actively pursued for years. Within a month of the war's commencement, the Boers were still purchasing weapons from abroad. A bank transfer of £400,000 (within London banks no less) weeks before the war procured rifles for all Boer volunteers from the Cape.⁸⁵ The volunteers' duty was to protect the homeland from the colonizing British, and there was little initial trouble finding men willing to carry weapons purchased with Rand gold.

Rabid anti-British sentiment throughout the world also fueled a migration of sorts to South Africa. Foreign nationals who had any type of disagreement with the British flocked to South Africa to fight. As the war began, France's *Le Petit Journal* exclaimed,

Defending the train of fugitives [Englishmen leaving the Transvaal] would be useless to those who know the nobility of heart, the generosity, and humanity of the Boers. They never make war with women or children, but with those who . . . wish to make their wives widows and their children orphans.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ On day one of the war, the Boers fielded 35,000 men, which was more than twice the available British contingent. They also benefited from superior artillery procured from the Germans.

⁸⁵ "The Situation in Capetown," *New York Times*, 15 August 1899, 7.

⁸⁶ "Untitled Editorial," *Le Petit Journal*, 19 November 1899.

Such praise for the Boers stoked resentment of Britain at home and abroad. And it was exactly this type of language that provoked scores of men to join up in the fight against the Empire. The Boers began the war with a sizeable foreign contingent of well over 3,000—which included men from Ireland, Holland, Germany, Italy, America, Russia, and many other nations.⁸⁷ Though a victory of sorts was won in steering the British to war, Chamberlain faced an enormous obstacle in maintaining mass British support and deterring additional foreign help for the enemy.

Lack of preparation on the part of the British and overzealous Boer Commandos created a powder keg that exploded at the beginning of October 1899. The frantic pace with which the Boers swarmed the veld, attacking and retreating, confused the ill-prepared British army and produced shocking defeats. Kruger and his generals knew more British troops were on their way. Initial Boer strategy was to defeat and demoralize the ones already on the continent and set up suitable positions from which they could defend the veld from British advancement. As British reinforcements sailed from Southampton with General Redvers Buller on 14 October, thousands of British civilians flocked to Natal and the Cape in an attempt to avoid the coming bloodshed. Alone again in their own country, the Boer commandos moved rapidly to wreak havoc and discourage British regulars.

In his efforts to sell Chamberlain (and, in effect the British public) on the war, Milner neglected to mention his fears concerning Boer fighting capacity. He had hidden his fears in order to usher in public support for a quick and reasonably easy war. The idea that sixty thousand farmers could topple the well-prepared British troops did not sell papers at home. By 14 October, Ladysmith and Mafeking were under siege while Milner

⁸⁷ Carver, 14.

worked feverishly to assure that colonial and regular troops were adequately distributed while he awaited Buller. At the same time, Chamberlain fought to maintain a sense of urgency with the task in the eyes of the public. Within a month he was speaking to large crowds in Leicester about the importance of maintaining rights and privileges for British citizens in South Africa.⁸⁸

SIEGES AND SHAME

Often catching the British off guard, Boer commandos roamed the veld looking for easy prey. It was classic partisan warfare; the friendliness of the locals to their brother Boers enabled ease of movement and collection of provisions. Moreover, it was this seemingly disorganized approach to battle that allowed such great success at the start and helped maintain it for three years as the major cities fell and Kruger fled the country. The pride of the British Empire and its military was largely based on tradition. Traditional modes of fighting did not apply in the Boer war, and this proved to be a decisive factor. Count Sternberg of Germany, an observer of the war, wrote that the “Boer is a man of ambushes, of the trickeries of war,” and that on every occasion a “wily snare was prepared to catch the English.”⁸⁹ These methods, or possible lack thereof, allowed Boers to prey on the fears of jittery British soldiers who looked anxiously to the hills for signs of help throughout October and November. The British regulars were not an army in “a position to crush them [the Boers] at short notice.”⁹⁰

The best way to instill fear in already concerned enemies is to give them the sense that they are surrounded, that no relief is in sight, and that the war is already lost.

⁸⁸ “Mr. Chamberlain’s Visit to Leicester,” *The Times*, 20 November 1899, 17.

⁸⁹ Count A.V. Von Graves Sternberg, *My Experiences of the Boer War*, with forward by G.F.R. Henderson (London: Longmans, Green and CO., 1901), 203.

⁹⁰ “Great Britain Cannot Recede,” *New York Times*, 1 October 1899, 10.

Kruger's generals set about doing this before the ultimatum even expired. In cutting off Kimberly, Ladysmith, and Mafeking, the Boers had a brief chance to defeat the contingent of local British troops and the British will to pursue this conflict. In taking these towns, the Boers sent a clear message around the world – an important message in the battle for public support. Thousands of well-trained British soldiers were trapped by armed farmers and were rendered impotent by the Boers, unable to do much more than maintain their positions. Britain's European counterparts found comfort in mighty Britain's powerlessness. The Boers were heartened at their success and emboldened to continue the fight. Buller's initial plans were thwarted as troops were redirected to break the sieges until more men could arrive in the spring of 1900. Putting Britain on the defensive was a smart move, although it arose from desperation, and it allowed the pendulum of success to swing towards the Transvaal, if only briefly. The Boers had already won the initial psychological victories.

The race to affect morale in Britain with the news of the sieges was fast. *The Times* quickly noted that there was a lack of adequate information on military exercises.⁹¹ The editorial board suggested that the clear losses were by no means final and that the public should withhold judgment until the complete story was understood. But when *The Times* printed that article, Sir George White, commander at Ladysmith, had lost over forty officers and almost 1,500 enlisted men in defense of the town. The British troops were powerless in their endeavor and maintained small hope that they would soon be relieved. On what was referred to as Mournful Monday, 30 October 1899, White's men suffered over 1,500 casualties. *The Times* attempted to bolster domestic support by suggesting that "reverses" in warfare often happen, but that the entire nation remained

⁹¹ "The Reverse at Ladysmith," *The Times*, 1 November 1899, 7.

resolute behind the troops.⁹² Language such as this was parroted across the pro-war papers in order to continue the enlistment drive and prevent disenchantment. The most glaring problem, however, was the instinctive response to defend the war at any cost. The argument for sustaining the conflict was made without regard to facts and with the suggestion that available facts be ignored while the government made efforts to offset the losses.

The besieged towns of Ladysmith, Kimberly, and Mafeking were isolated from the outside world. The telegraph lines were cut, and only African runners and pigeons were able to cross the Boer lines. Isolation distorted the information revealed to the press and added weight to the cynical comments of *Le Petit Journal*. While there truly was trouble mounting for the British, it was important that citizens back home did not realize it. White had 12,000 men in Ladysmith, Robert Baden-Powell had only 600 at Mafeking, and Rhodes was cut off from the world at Kimberly with just 3,050 men under the leadership of Colonel R. G. Kekewich.⁹³ These numbers were insufficient compared to those in the many Boer commando units of over 3,000 men each, which roamed the hills cutting off all supplies and shelling the towns intermittently. These dire situations were not public knowledge at home but soon became so as November gave way to December and grim results increased.

MIXED SIGNALS

Although the British soldiers felt trapped within the besieged towns, they found some release in journals and in letters sent home. These formats were not subject to censorship but also were not widely publicized. A brief inspection of their concerns

⁹² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹³ Carver, 23-25.

throughout the war will help clarify the difference between the war on the ground and the one portrayed by *The Times* and its allies. Captain Christopher Balfour wrote to his mother from Ladysmith on 30 October, suggesting things were disastrous. His battalion had lost men and supplies, and many mules (invaluable in this war) had been killed. He wrote that “there are thousands of Boers . . . who have every modern weapon.” Earlier he displayed fear and desperation when he complained that the Army Corps had not yet arrived, and a “wicked waste of life had consequently ensued.”⁹⁴ The siege at Ladysmith lasted for over two hundred days, and it weakened the spirit of many. On his way to relieve Kimberly, Lieutenant Harry Price wrote, “I’m afraid we have another big fight in front of us, we are all pretty sick of it.”⁹⁵ He further suggested that his ability to write the letter home was an example of luck, his group having already lost dozens of men, hundreds of horses, and many officers. The war was barely a month old and soldiers were already feeling the strain.

It was not just the soldiers but also the British civilians who felt the initial pinch of siege and deprivation. Linden Bradfield Webster, a young child during the siege of Mafeking, reminisced: “We were about 2,000 strong (including us boys) and at one stage we had 12,000 Boers around us. What would we have achieved by going out to fight them?”⁹⁶ He also spoke of the hardships and lack of food faced by soldier, civilian, and native alike.

Horse meat, of course, was a regular part of our diet. So was mule and donkey meat. In fact, we had to eat the hide as well. We received meat twice a week.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 21. From the diary of Christopher Balfour of the 60th Rifles.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 28-29. From the diary of Harry Pryce-Jones of the 1st Coldstream.

⁹⁶ Linden Bradfield Webster, *Reminiscences of the Siege of Mafeking* (Johannesburg: The South African Military History Society, unpublished), <http://rapidtp.com/milhist/vol017lb.html>, accessed 3 November 2004.

Towards the end of the siege, we also received a ration of 'Sowen . . . a sloppy porridge made from horse oats.'⁹⁷

The nurses at Ladysmith suffered similarly, "Our rations were daily: 5 oz cornmeal, ½ lb bread or two biscuits, 1/3 of an oz. of tea, 1/5 of an oz. of sugar, ½ lb. of meat . . . in times of reserves, our rations were cut down to a quarter of this amount."⁹⁸



(A wagon hauls horses to Ladysmith for soup, April 1900)

These situations were not unique, and those who had supported Chamberlain in going to war became very uneasy about what their boys were enduring in Africa. It did not take long for opponents of the war to double their efforts to steer the public away from supporting the conflict. In late October, a correspondent for the *Manchester*

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Katherine Louisa Nealon, *Memoirs of Katherine Louisa (Oswell) Nealon* (Johannesburg: The South African Military History Society, unpublished), <http://rapidtp.co.za/milhist/dianurse.html>, accessed 1 November 2004.

Guardian issued one of the first responses to these early setbacks and deprivations.

Waxing poetic he exclaimed,

War wears a double face. One face is a mask which has been thrust upon it, and this face is all laughter; the other is the natural face of war, and it is all tears. The two are not seen as alternatives, but always side by side.⁹⁹

In attempting to inform the public that the war would not be simple, the paper hoped the government could be stopped from pursuing it further.

MAFEKING: A CASE STUDY

The story of Mafeking under Baden-Powell is an especially good example of creative storytelling on the part of the press. Though the siege lasted much longer than the four months this chapter addresses, it is relevant to the notion that opinions were manipulated throughout the war. The siege of Mafeking provides for a long-term study of the effort made by pro-war elements to create a positive image. Carefully orchestrated press releases, official reporting, and limited access for non-combatants allowed Baden-Powell to become one of the war's greatest heroes.

A small and hitherto unimportant town near the Transvaal border, Mafeking became integral to the war in Britain and Africa. Baden-Powell's prodding of the Boers made him and his men a target. Once committed to cutting Mafeking off, valuable Boer commandos were tied up in the siege. Just as Britain was forced to reorganize troops in order to

⁹⁹ "Bound For the Seat of War," *Manchester Guardian*, 31 October–20 November 1899, 1.



Robert Baden-Powell

free Ladysmith and Kimberly, so too was Kruger obliged to strengthen troop numbers around the area of Mafeking. Baden-Powell was given most of the credit for retarding the Boer plans during late 1899 and early 1900. Perhaps much of his enduring fame can be attributed to writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle who wrote,

Under ordinary circumstances any force shut up there was doomed to capture. But what may have seemed short-sighted policy became the highest wisdom, owing to the extraordinary tenacity and resource of Baden-Powell, the officer in command.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, his reputation was maintained throughout the war. It was the crafting and maintaining of this reputation by government officials and the pro-war press that gives clearer understanding to the dual nature of the war.

Boer leader Piet Cronje, with almost 8,000 men, quickly surrounded Mafeking and trapped its occupants in October 1899. Women and children who wished to leave were already gone and the British soldiers had dug dozens of trenches by the time the Boers arrived. British numbers did not exceed 2,000 and there were questions about their

¹⁰⁰ Doyle, Chapter 24.

abilities.¹⁰¹ Day after day Baden-Powell sent small detachments to prod the Boers and keep them off balance in order to prevent all out assaults. From the beginning, there were obvious discrepancies in reporting. There was combat on 14 October, resulting in losses on both sides. The British immediately reported that they had killed over fifty Boers while injuring an equal number, but an English doctor with the Boers reported that only two had been killed. A correspondent for a local paper reported sixty Boer casualties. Reports varied and were highly questionable. As the *New York Times* reported, the war “was a matter of conjecture.”¹⁰² A clear image of what Baden-Powell was doing was impossible to obtain.

It was not just what the papers printed but also what they omitted. The British were in Africa to maintain control and protect the natives (long since freed by the crown yet abused by the Boers). Circumspection was required, and it would not have made good print to disclose that Baden-Powell was starving the natives out of Mafeking. Sol T. Plaatje was a young native man who lived through the siege with his family. His diary offers a wealth of information on the hardships faced. By no means pro- or anti-British, his words give a relatively unbiased and straightforward account of the actions of both sides. Though an important part of the town and its operations, Plaatje wrote that natives who once served in dangerous positions as scouts found themselves on lists that strictly controlled their movements. By the middle of February 1900, Baden-Powell had rationed food disproportionately against the natives and on 10 February Plaatje wrote,

He [Baden-Powell] is going to give them ten days grace after which he is going to close all stores, and also shut the door against their employment at the defense works. . . These people include Bangwaketse, Bakwena, Zulus, Zambesians, Shangaan, and others too numerous to mention.

¹⁰¹ “The War’s Probable Course,” *New York Times*, 15 October 1899, 2.

¹⁰² “The News Condensed,” *New York Times*, 17 October 1899, 1

And eleven days later he continued,

I returned to town again at 4:00, and found Weil's crowded with Fingoes and Zambesians, with no consciousness of the fact that the town store had closed its doors last night, and that they could get no more food. They were worrying me, and waiting for me to give them passes, when one of them fell in the courtyard of starvation - poor fellow was taken to the hospital, where he died afterwards.¹⁰³

A careful study of *The Times* during the spring of 1900 makes no mention of this situation. Yet the *Daily News* praised blacks that "were so loyal to the last to the nation which had protected them against the Boers."¹⁰⁴ This grand image no doubt sparked increased support from citizens convinced that Britain was on a humanitarian mission. Fewer than two paragraphs later the writer referenced the porridge the men were forced to eat suggesting there was plenty to last the "citizens" until May 1900. Baden-Powell's reputation continued to grow as his questionable decisions were overlooked and under-reported.

The siege of Mafeking perpetuated the general perception of the noble soldier fighting in Africa. *The Weekly Dispatch* wrote, "That his [Baden-Powell] fine spirits and thoughtful humanity are as inexhaustible as his courage and resourcefulness," and that he "was human character at its best – at once both noble and gentle."¹⁰⁵ His reputation kept the people excited for further news of his successes against the Boers. When relief finally came to Baden-Powell's men, the day became a national holiday in Britain with town councils glorifying his name above all others. *The Daily News* cited the Birmingham city

¹⁰³ Sol T. Plaatje, *The Boer War Diary of Sol T. Plaatje* (Kimberly South Africa: McGregor Museum, unpublished), <http://www.museumsnco.za/mcgregor/departments/history/blacksinwar/mafsiege/mafeking.htm>, accessed 1 November 2004.

¹⁰⁴ "The Siege of Mafeking," *The Daily News*, 26 April 1900, 5.

¹⁰⁵ "The Deeds of Our Army in South Africa," *The Weekly Dispatch*, 13 May 1900, 4.

council (Chamberlain's hometown) as it praised Baden-Powell and his comrades for upholding the proud traditions of the British Empire. The middle class men, whose clubs often spoke out against the war, were used by politicians and press to arouse public support. Local political leaders, with support from the national government, encouraged public (and often violent) celebrations. The image of Baden-Powell and his soldiers was trumped up to assure support for the war against the Boers.¹⁰⁶ It was this support that kept the fire of war burning through the autumn of 1899 and into the early spring of 1900.

DARKEST DAYS OF DECEMBER

Cut off from the world, stories of the soldiers had begun to trickle out, and the losses and hardships were far greater than expected. Characteristically, *The Times* led the pro-war press in praise for the army. Despite reports of greater than expected casualties and the shattered plans of Buller, the editors saw fit to proclaim "all is well" and that Mafeking and Kimberly could easily hold out for months.¹⁰⁷ Apparently unaware of the plight of men trapped within these towns, a desire to protect Chamberlain and his government appeared to take center stage. Anti-war writers, ignoring the plight of the soldiers for the benefit of their cause, quickly mounted campaigns to point out British failures and the lessons learned. Beatrice Webb wrote, "we have proved so incapable . . . in generalship [it] is humiliating. I sometimes wonder whether we could take a beating and be the better for it?"¹⁰⁸ If a mixed message had been sent to the men in the field and the citizens at home, feelings in Britain quickly changed with the events of December 1899.

¹⁰⁶ For further reading on the violence incited on Mafeking Night, see Price, Chapters 2-4.

¹⁰⁷ "Ladysmith Can Hold Out For Months," *The Times*, 20 November 1899, 11.

¹⁰⁸ Koss, 58. From Beatrice Webb's Personal Diary, 31 January 1900.

The fighting was hard-hitting work for the British soldiers in late autumn of 1899. In what became known as Black Week, the British suffered three devastating defeats that sent both the troops and the public reeling. The face of the war changed and conceptions the British public held went under forced reconsideration. From 10 to 17 December, the British lost over 3,000 men and an entire battery of field guns. At the time, this loss of guns was perhaps one of the biggest signs of failure; to leave one's guns on the field for the enemy. This disappointment was not lost on the troops or the citizens at home. Buller signaled to White that he should surrender his men at Ladysmith on 17 December and with that, the strain became too great on the British. Lord Roberts assumed Buller's job as Commander-in-Chief two days later.

The first battle of Black Week was at Magersfontein on 10 December. Poor planning and incorrect assumptions about the enemy's position forced a night march of the Highlanders under the leadership of Major-General Andrew Wauchope. Three battalions, including the Black Watch, Argylls, and Seaforths, marched in formation holding knotted rope across the veld towards the assumed Boer position. The strong and numerous trenches prepared by the Boers were unknown to the Scottish soldiers and their general. Igniting the night with gunfire, the Boers opened the battle and quickly pinned down the confused and battered Highlanders. The next nine hours brought an odd mixture of terror and boredom for both sides as British soldiers were forced to lay motionless for fear of being killed. Their nerve weakened and some of Wauchope's men were ordered to retreat backwards for regrouping, but the withdrawal quickly became a bizarre scene of wind-blown kilts as hundreds fled the field. One officer exclaimed, "I saw a sight I hope I may never see again: men of the Highland Brigade running for all they were worth . . .

cowering under bushes . . . lying under blankets, officers . . . threatening to shoot them.”¹⁰⁹ The battle was over, the Boers lost 236 men and the Highlanders over 900, including their general, a great majority died with their backs to the Boers.¹¹⁰

Despite the distance and difficulty in relaying news, word of the disaster reached Britain quickly. The first real blow to the British was delivered in expected patriotic tones. *The Times* gave an honest, if not muted, rendition of the battle but rounded out their initial report with traditional praise of the Empire and all who dwelled therein. The writer spoke of widespread patriotism and reminded the government of its duty to encourage this zeal further.¹¹¹ The *Weekly Dispatch* was less positive and recommended reprimands for the generals involved.¹¹² The writer questioned the wisdom of fighting the Boer at a site chosen by the Boer. Letters to *The Times* echoed the sentiment in hoping generals would learn from such big mistakes.¹¹³ The generals did eventually learn, but it was too late for the next two battles of Black Week.

The second great defeat for Britain in December 1899 was at Stormberg. The British lost almost 700 men to another group of well-provisioned and disguised Boers. General Gatacre led a group of soldiers (numbering less than 3,000) who were camped thirty miles south of the Boer position at Stormberg. He lacked provisions, and Buller had pilfered his troops. Unwittingly following the example of mistakes made at Magersfontein, Gatacre decided to advance without adequate support or reconnaissance. The men marched across the veld straight into an attack by well-hidden marksmen in the

¹⁰⁹ Pakenham, 213-214.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 214. Boer sources widely reported British losses of over 2000, *The Times*, 8 January 1900, 3.

¹¹¹ “The Repulse At Magersfontein,” *The Times*, 14 December 1899, 6.

¹¹² “Untitled Report,” *Weekly Dispatch*, 1 December 1899, 4.

¹¹³ “Magersfontein,” *The Times*, 11 January 1900, 2

hills of Stormberg. Ill prepared and surprised, Gatacre ordered his men to charge the hills rather than retreat. Those who survived were required to find shelter among rocks at the foot of the hills. Retreat was impossible because the British soldiers had marched themselves to sleep. Both British officers and Boers awakened sleeping soldiers on the roadside; often the men did not care which because escape from the battlefield was a relief regardless.¹¹⁴

The complete disaster was described much differently in the pages of *The Times*. Its correspondent, traveling with Gatacre, suggested the plan was clear and well organized from the start. He did not highlight the inferior intelligence, but focused on familiar themes of British ability and military tradition. He wrote that success would have prevented criticism of Gatacre, but a series of accidents had halted success.¹¹⁵ The men had marched through the night, many dropping from heatstroke during the day, only to be ordered up against a fortified hill. It was not realistic to expect victory.¹¹⁶ Gatacre's plan was ill conceived (if such a plan existed at all). The *New York Times* cited *The Times'* piece but continued further by revealing Gatacre's mistakes as bold print sub-headings, rather than small appendices to the story (if present at all) like in the London newspaper.¹¹⁷ These omissions in the British press suggest further the deliberate manner in which the press kept the British from an awareness of the real problems in Africa. The battle at Colenso was just days away, and confusion and frustration on the battlefield were about to spill over into the public discourse.

¹¹⁴ "Boers Wearing British Uniforms," *Weekly Dispatch*, 14 January 1900, 5.

¹¹⁵ "Gatacre's Repulse at Stormberg," *The Times*, 18 January 1900, 10

¹¹⁶ Carver, 40. From the diary of Colonel R.E. Allen of the East Yorkshire Regiment.

¹¹⁷ "British Meet Severe Reverse," *New York Times*, 11 December 1899, 1.

The loss at Colenso was the climax of the string of failures dealt the British army in December 1899. Tactical and numerical losses were great but paled in the reaction to the shockwave that reached the shores of Britain. The Crimea was the last time Britain had been defeated so badly and so strongly, and neither the troops nor the citizens were prepared for the setbacks in South Africa. With almost 21,000 troops, Buller attempted to take Colenso and its rail line. The town was key to relief at Ladysmith where White and his men were trapped. As with the previous battles, Colenso was fought on Boer terms in their venue. The land was open, and all attacks had to be carried out without cover. It was a disaster from the beginning. Despite the river to be crossed, thousands of well-hidden Boer marksmen, and questionable information, Buller ordered the assault on 15 December.

Poor directions and ineffective guides ensured the assault began awkwardly and ended in disaster. Communication was poor and many British soldiers were quickly cut down or forced to retreat due to hostile and friendly fire. By 8 am, Buller realized continued action was unwise and ordered a retreat. The hurried change in strategy only added to the confusion. Captain Henry Warre wrote to his father: "I feel almost too depressed to give you an account of our doings."¹¹⁸ His sentiments echoed across the battle groups as the well placed Boers shocked 21,000 British soldiers. Warre told his father that if anything, the enterprise should be considered a "severe check," and he was sure the people at home would agree. What made matters worse was that Buller suggested White surrender Ladysmith. Assuming White could not hold out and knowing another assault on Colenso was useless in the foreseeable future, he sent word to White that he should give in with his army of 12,000. This was an action equal in gravity to the

¹¹⁸ Carver, 45 From private letters of Henry Warre of the 3rd 60th Rifles.

losses at Colenso. White refused and held Ladysmith, “The loss of 12,000 men here would be a heavy blow to England. We must not yet think of it.”¹¹⁹ This courageous decision saved the troops and citizens from further heartbreak. The shocking defeat chronicled by Arthur Conan Doyle bluntly showed

A British General, at the head of 25,000 men, recommending another General, at the head of 12,000 men only twelve miles off, to lay down his arms to an army which was certainly very inferior in numbers to the total British force; and this because he had once been defeated, although he knew that there was still time for the whole resources of the Empire to be poured into Natal in order to prevent so shocking a disaster.¹²⁰

With over 1,000 men killed, wounded and missing, this completed a week of disaster for the British army and sent the supportive public at home reeling.

A NATION REACTS

By the end of December, the British public eagerly awaited explanations for Colenso and perhaps a change of fortune for the troops. Buller suggested that his men had not learned the value of scouting, and that by walking into Boer territory unprepared they were punished accordingly.¹²¹ But what of the British army and its famed reputation? Three defeats in one week (due in part to poor reconnaissance), at a high cost, threatened to crush the national will of Britain and the morale of its soldiers. The pro-war press tried to be forgiving, but it was no longer quite so easy. The *Weekly Dispatch* exclaimed that the Empire had sent out an “insignificant force,” and that the army was “built on a system of the most expensive and doddering imbecility.”¹²² There were cries of insubordination and cowardice across the nation. Such an explosion of defeats against a laughable foe

¹¹⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War* (Hindhead: Undershaw, 1902), Chapter 11. From Dispatch sent by Sir G. White to Sir R. Buller, 16 December 1899.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ “Our Generals’ Excuses,” *Weekly Dispatch*, 28 January 1900, 11.

¹²² “A Disgraceful Story,” *Weekly Dispatch*, 28 January 1900, 10.

brought outrage. *The Times* began to give credit to Boer positions and skill rather than continue traditional methods of downplaying their abilities.¹²³ Kruger's commandos were finally revealed to the reading public as capable and expert opponents. The *New York Times* and many other international papers reported it as a rout.¹²⁴ The insular period of the war had ended, and a better plan to win the wars in Africa and Britain was needed.

The news that White and his men had enough provisions to last out a siege brought some relief to the British. They had been humiliated on the battlefield and in the world arena of public opinion. The Boers stood strong, and their spirits remained high.¹²⁵ Chamberlain and the government worked quickly to overcome the news and assure the defeats would not be repeated. The *New York Times* quoted the *Daily Mail's* assertion that patriotism still abounded, and this patriotism would silence European critics, but the *Westminster Gazette* feared what Germany and France might do if many more volunteers were required in Africa. The *Daily Telegraph* suggested adversity is what Britain needed to test its abilities, and the *Standard* quoted Lord Roberts' (Buller's replacement) comments that support from past and present British colonies was enough to silence continental critics of British actions and defeats.¹²⁶ Roberts was dispatched to South Africa, along with Major-General Lord Kitchener, on 23 December 1899. He cabled ahead for all advances to be stopped while troops were amassed in the Cape Colony. The elderly Roberts had long been petitioning Lord Lansdowne for the leadership role. He

¹²³ "The Battle of Colenso," *The Times*, 17 January 1900, 4.

¹²⁴ "Buller Routed," *New York Times*, 16 December 1899, 1.

¹²⁵ There were reports that the Boers lobbed plum puddings and seasons greetings, stuffed into plugged artillery shells, into the British camps at Colenso. "White May Try a Sortie," *New York Times*, 1 January 1900, 3.

¹²⁶ "No Fear for General White," *New York Times*, 22 December 1899, 3.

knew Buller was in over his head and feared the disasters would spread the insurrections to neighboring colonies.

Immediate concerns for the safety of the troops were accompanied by talk of conscription. Roberts made it clear that many more troops were needed to offset the advantages the Boers enjoyed. Their expert marksmanship, knowledge of the terrain, and sizeable support network across South Africa were well known to him. Facts such as these had been largely hidden from the public as Chamberlain urged the war onwards, but now a truer picture of the conflict had emerged. The papers of Britain assailed the government with questions and accusations. The *Daily Chronicle* attacked the government policy of “indiscreet patriotism,” and questioned the motivations behind choosing not to use American wagons. *The Times* accused the War office of managing the war for their benefit rather than for that of the nation.¹²⁷

A turning point had unmistakably been reached when *The Times* felt comfortable attacking the government. Edward Carpenter’s attack on the government and its jingoism proved accurate. He said the wave of enthusiastic imperialism would soon subside, and an “odd looking mud-bank [be left] behind – and on it the word Conscription.”¹²⁸ Writer Silas K. Hocking wrote to the general press that “no one can any longer doubt the courage or the skill of either of the combatants, but why prolong the strife?”¹²⁹ Genuine fears of a bloody and protracted war finally began to emerge within the masses of Britain. Stead, Morley, and others finally found receptive audiences. The Stop the War Committee met not long after Colenso and issued a public request for the war to end. They concluded with the assertion that if Britain finishes the war it will mean,

¹²⁷ “War Office is Assailed,” *New York Times*, 27 December 1899, 2.

¹²⁸ Koss, 54. From Edward Carpenter’s pamphlet, “*Boer and Britain*.” 1 January 1900.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 67. From Silas K. Hocking’s open letter to the press, 24 December 1899

The sacrifice of the lives of 20,000 of our brave men.
 The slaughter of at least as many brave Boers.
 Hard times for the poor at home.
 Dislocation of Trade.
 Increase of Taxation.
 The waste of £100,000,000 of our hard earned money.
 And in the end,
CONSCRIPTION.¹³⁰

CONCLUSION

Both the government and the Queen attempted to assuage the British public. Victoria stated, "Please understand, that there is none depressed in *this* house. We are not interested in the possibilities of defeat. They do not exist."¹³¹ Damage control on the part of government was underway as were attacks from the left. The Stop the War Committee charged "55,000 children are driven every day hungry and underfed into the public schools of Britain due to the expense of the war"¹³² A common understanding emerged on both sides that the war must be finished, but how and at what cost? The complacency of Britain began to erode as further troops arrived in South Africa. Thus, this chapter comes full circle with regard to the comments made by *Le Petit Journal*. The press and government worked hard to prevent any negative aspects of the war from emerging. The obvious lack of troops and the disasters of Black Week broke the silence. The government was forced into an arena of public discourse to justify the war and encourage new troop enlistment. Obtaining further support and needed troops from throughout the empire proved vital to maintenance and completion of the war. The war, based in Britain and fought almost entirely via dialogue, greatly affected the British people and their general support for the government. Major events such as the taking of Pretoria and the

¹³⁰ Ibid., 70. From Stop The War Committee Pamphlet, "*Stop the War! An Appeal To The People.*"

¹³¹ Churchill, 461.

¹³² Koss, 75. From Stop the War Committee Pamphlet 13, "*The War Blight on Social Reforms.*"

Jingo Election had a positive effect on the government's desire to continue the war. There was a constant battle for new troops, one that was fought heavily at the local level, a place where national leaders did not always fare so well. Chapter 4 will chronicle the major problems and events of 1900, assessing the mood of the public, and to what extent they supported the war (and how) based on the continuous competition for their support by the press and Tory government.

CHAPTER FOUR

A PATRIOTIC YEAR

When pro-Boers . . . insult the living and the dead by extolling the nation's enemies, they do what is not only foolish but wicked, and openly invite the ill-usage they afterwards receive.¹³³

Yorkshire Post, March 1900.

Far more important to the people of England . . . is the question whether our forces are equivalent to the defense of our Empire. It is said that the strength and numbers of these peoples were underestimated. By Whom? Surely if that were true, some person in authority would have told us by this where to lay the charge.¹³⁴

Northern Echo, January 1900.

After the setbacks of December 1899, the British War office faced increased scrutiny over its administration of the Boer War. Not only did it face international humiliation, but also the British public showed an increased concern for the loss of life and the possibility of conscription. Questionable actions by the British soldiers, such as the establishment of concentration camps and forced deportation of Boers, intensified scrutiny of the conflict and ballooned the British presence to well over 400,000 men in South Africa. The Boer commandos, forced out of the cities, increased their guerilla warfare while their families were rounded up and their farms were burned. During 1900 and 1901, the war brought irreparable damage to the international reputation of Britain and forced its citizens to reevaluate their support of imperialism. Yet the government

¹³³ Koss, 105.

¹³⁴ *Northern Echo*, 3 January 1900, 3.

remained resolute in its task to both finish the war and maintain positive support for it within Britain. Both Roberts' success at Pretoria and the impending election in the autumn of 1900 helped the government maintain the status quo.

The new methods of warfare successfully employed by the British military during the second year of the war, and the accompanying support and criticism emanating from the press greatly affected the war discourse. Changes of leadership on the battlefield increased the ferocity of the conflict, because both Roberts and Kitchener appreciated the need to destroy the Boer spirit in order to achieve total victory. The continued presence of Tory leadership after the election assured that the war would be fought to an end. The British and foreign press enjoyed a season of plenty as editors, writers, and the reading public contributed to the growing dialogue on the war and the means used to control the South African republics. The pace at which enlistment grew throughout the Empire showed a public generally supportive of its soldiers. Energetic propaganda during the election campaign in the autumn of 1900 revealed a nation caught up in a competitive dialogue. The emergence of concentration camps in South Africa during 1901 revealed a new face of the war to the world that brought condemnation. Constantly fighting to keep the public's support for the war while simultaneously fighting Boer commandos across the veld, the government tried to free itself from what was beginning to look like an overseas quagmire.

The events during 1900, following the disasters of Black Week, show the race to control perceptions of the war and the empire was intensified by the government and members of the British press. In assessing the public discourse at the dawn of the new century, monitoring public reaction after the fall of Pretoria, and understanding the

conscientious effort to manipulate the electorate during the election of 1900, one can see the urgency of the battle for control in Britain. The Tory electoral victory in late 1900 suggests a measure of success in persuading the voting public of the worthiness of the war. Dissecting the public dialogue sets the stage for a clearer understanding of the public outcry as the concentration camps in South Africa filled with women and children, and the guerilla war waged on far longer than anyone expected. The feeling of concern and disenchantment with empire building felt at the end of 1899 returned in 1901 despite Unionist efforts to the contrary. The highpoint for the Unionist government was 1900, when it had many successes in obtaining public support despite fervent and talented opposition in Parliament and in the press.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

At the beginning of 1900, civilians and soldiers alike were still reeling from the setbacks of December 1899. Letters home from the field were dutifully printed in local and national papers.¹³⁵ Some papers decried the conditions the soldiers fought in, while others continued to perpetuate the myth of the cowardly Boer. Editors at the *Northern Echo*, including Morley and Stead, railed against the war,

In the war there has been a singular forgetfulness of principles. They [the Boers] were . . . made known in the whole world by our newspapers as a race both ignorant and cowardly, [yet] today we are cheered by the news of even an isolated success, forgetting that we are only fighting—according to the vulgar and ignorant—a lot of cowards.¹³⁶

If the Boer soldiers were as backwards as the British government led the people to believe where, the editors asked, was the glory in this war? Pro-Boer writers felt empowered by the recent defeats of Buller and printed numerous articles and letters

¹³⁵ *Northern Echo*, 2 January 1900, 2. See also 12 and 13 January 1900.

¹³⁶ "Editorial," *Northern Echo*, 3 January 1900, 3.

contradicting Unionist portrayals of the Boer fighter.¹³⁷ Immediate change was necessary in order to stave off a collapse of public support. However, Pretoria fell later in 1900, the anti-war actors continued their venomous appeals to end the conflict immediately.

The *Northern Echo* was not alone in its springtime attack on the government. The *Manchester Guardian*, by far the more important anti-war paper, stepped up its attacks on anyone or anything associated with the war. In February, it again alerted its readers to the lack of true information escaping South Africa. Writers often went out of their way to point out that many Americans were against the war and the selective way in which information was disseminated.¹³⁸ International discomfort with the conflict increased pressure on the British government. French, German, and Russian papers assailed the government daily with accusations of inhumanity and suppression of speech. The *Guardian* gleefully reported any attacks by the foreign press on the war. In March, President David Jordan of Stanford University said, "The present inhabitants of Great Britain are a mere shadow of their forefathers in brains and health."¹³⁹ He suggested that the twentieth century would see the downfall of the empire. The panel Jordan addressed expressed hope that thousands more British soldiers would be forced to join the fight at great cost to Britain.

The papers and pamphlets in Britain were filled with complaints about the lack of free speech throughout the spring of 1900. Many rallies against the war were broken up violently by hooligans and other government supporters who were riled up by the Tory's patriotic discourse. The police did very little to stop such violent outbursts. Though general support was behind the government, issues regarding the war and free speech

¹³⁷ "Battle of Spion Kop," *Northern Echo*, 29 January 1900, 3.

¹³⁸ "The Censoring of Telegrams to Pretoria," *Manchester Guardian*, 24 February 1900, 11.

¹³⁹ "Opinion from Abroad," *Manchester Guardian*, 5 March 1900, 4-5.

deeply divided the nation. There was a feeling among many anti-war supporters that their personal freedoms were being suppressed in order to maintain the war fever so successfully stirred up in pro-government circles. Defending attacks on Stop-the-War activists the *Scarborough Post* stated “they really cannot expect the average man in the street to give a patient hearing to such rubbish as this.”¹⁴⁰ It was difficult for anti-war demonstrators to maintain any type of public presence for long.

Robert Buchanan described the empire as a hooligan. A rabid anti-war activist, Buchanan despised Rudyard Kipling’s patriotic descriptions of the empire. During Black Week he wrote,

There is an universal scramble for plunder, for excitement, for amusement, for speculation, and above it all the flag of a Hooligan Imperialism is raised . . . Let me at least hope . . . that Englishmen, after their present wild orgy of militant savagery, may become clothed and in their right minds.¹⁴¹

W.T. Stead was among many who drew the ire of the government by actively corresponding with the enemy during the war. After the debacle of December 1899, he wrote Boer General de Wet’s wife,

The only element of comfort we have is that apparently Chamberlain has taken alarm, and is pretending at least to adapt a more conciliatory [illegible]. Judging from a letter which I have received from a British officer at the front Kitchener has determined to devastate the country, and shoot all the prisoners. At present it would seem that there is much more prospect of Cape Town being captured, than there is of Kitchener having many prisoners to shoot.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Price, 141. From the *Scarborough Post*, 12 March 1900.

¹⁴¹ “The Voice of the Hooligan,” *The Review of Reviews* 20, December 1899, 581.

¹⁴² “W T. Stead to Madame Koopmans de Wet,” 12 January 1900. www.attackingthediabol.com, accessed 5 January 2005

Stead suggested hope was near because the Liberals controlled the *Daily News*. Much to his chagrin the paper took quite some time in shifting from pro-government organ to agitator, and with a war of this nature the more press on one's side the better.

Another well-known anti-war activist was J. A. Hobson. Some of his immediate histories following the war give the clearest and most truthful accounts of battlefield action. An historian and avid anti-imperialist, Hobson spent the bulk of the war in South Africa. In late spring 1900, he returned to Britain to embark on a series of speaking engagements against the aggressive policy of the government. His common theme encouraged Liberal members of Parliament to take a stand against the "inevitable" spread of imperialism.¹⁴³ He attacked the false image of empire and pushed Britons to defend their country's reputation. Accusing the government of actually reducing freedom throughout the world, Hobson's rhetoric was sharp and often directly aimed at Chamberlain.

Some papers, however, continued to maintain the pro-war stance even after their writers witnessed honor in the actions of the enemy. When Boer General Joubert died in South Africa the *Weekly Dispatch* praised his ability and nobility often comparing him to a Briton. The editors turned his obituary into a pro-war rant by praising his nobility and suggesting that men like him would obviously appreciate the "personal and religious liberty enjoyed under the British flag."¹⁴⁴ There was very little, other than the events of Black Week, that deterred Unionist papers from towing the line. Angry readers of *The Times* reacted to negative comments made by French diplomats by suggesting France

¹⁴³ "The South African Question," *Daily News*, 18 May 1900, 2.

¹⁴⁴ "The Dead Lion," *Weekly Dispatch*, 4 January 1900, 10.

would be the most helpful if it minded its own business.¹⁴⁵ The editors defended their criticisms of the Boers when attacked for it in a letter just as the *Manchester Guardian* had defended Kruger when he sent an inflammatory letter to the British press.¹⁴⁶ Both sides continued to set forth and attack agendas while the soldiers slogged it out in the heat of South Africa.

The feverish competition to control the public mind had an effect. Although the pro-Boers were able to win over some to their cause, it was generally the status quo that was perpetuated. The image of empire was ingrained and powerful. The same men who reacted violently after Mafeking was freed worked constantly to control the dialogue on the local and national level. The District Council of Chatteris censured its pro-Boer clerk, who in turn refused to enter the censure into the minutes of the council meeting.¹⁴⁷ Local conflicts such as that were repeated across the nation. It was such divisive attitudes that prompted the formation of the League of Liberals Against Aggression and Militarism. These men sought to stop the dissent at home and the war abroad. The League recognized the problems with free speech and the violence that had been seen in many parts of Britain. Central to their goals was to stop the spread of government propaganda and the “growth of a spirit of Aggression and Militarism.”¹⁴⁸ They worked in Parliament and in local councils to calm the passionate rhetoric.

On the national level, Liberal Members of Parliament attempted to shame people and papers into joining the Boer cause. John Burns, a labor agitator, railed against *The*

¹⁴⁵ “Lord Salisbury’s Reply To The Boer Presidents,” *The Times*, 15 March 1900, 10.

¹⁴⁶ “Great Britain And Boer Republics,” *The Times*, 20 March 1900, 12. See also “Right of Free Speech,” *Manchester Guardian*, 16 March 1900, 3.

¹⁴⁷ *Weekly Dispatch*, 11 March 1900, 12.

¹⁴⁸ Koss, 102. From Platform of League of Liberals Against Aggression and Militarism, 17 February 1900.

Times' record of reporting on human rights.¹⁴⁹ He associated the paper with Rhodes, who he in turn linked to the shady side of the empire and ill-gotten money. Burns, and others like him, hoped to force the working class to join the anti-war effort in a class conflict. Immediate success in South Africa was needed by the government in order to silence the critics, while opponents of the war yearned for further humiliation in order to put an end to the conflict.

It was important that the new military leadership on the veld in South Africa deliver quickly on its promises to defeat the Boers. Chamberlain and the rest of the government were beginning to feel the heat, and they could no longer rely on *The Times* and other papers to defend their actions *carte blanche*. In early January 1900, Field Marshal Lord Roberts arrived in South Africa to assume overall command of the war. He brought Lord Kitchener as his Chief of Staff. The men had distinctive leadership styles and sound reputations that demanded respect from the troops and assured the Boers that Britain intended to win. Kitchener had most recently conquered the Sudan with British and Egyptian armies. His reputation was large and current. He wrote, "People here do not seem to look upon the war sufficiently seriously. They consider it too much like a game of polo with intervals for afternoon tea."¹⁵⁰

There was no mistaking the message intended for the Boers which was sent by Kitchener's assignment to the region. *The Times* wrote, "We all hope and believe that the entrance of these distinguished soldiers upon their commands will mark a new departure in the conduct of war."¹⁵¹ The article waxed poetic about their military achievements and declared both Roberts and Kitchener saviors of the conflict and of the empire. A few

¹⁴⁹ Koss, 95 John Burns, Speech in the House of Commons, 6 February 1900.

¹⁵⁰ W. Barring Pemberton. *Battles of the Boer War* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1964), 17.

¹⁵¹ "Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener," *The Times*, 12 January 1900, 9

short months later, Kruger wrote that the war under Roberts' direction held some of the darkest days he had experienced.¹⁵² He did not trust Roberts and Kitchener and repeatedly instructed his generals to ignore British offers of peace and amnesty. The expertise of these two military veterans, accompanied by the pressure to deliver the final blow, provided for change in the military and political landscape in South Africa. The battle turned from a gentlemanly war to a vicious battle of attrition. Kitchener's methods eventually evolved into an attempt to exterminate any identity that bound the Boer Republics together against the British.

Roberts intended to avoid Buller's failed assaults. His plan called for the freeing of Kimberly, the shoring up of rail lines to the east, and encircling the Boers in order to force their surrender. To achieve such goals it was obvious that more troops were needed. Roberts needed in excess of 50,000 men for his plans, aside from those already commanded by Buller. The limitation of quick troop call up from Britain has already been discussed above; however, the fact remains that Roberts was able to fill the veld with almost 400,000 men during the next year and a half.¹⁵³ It was agreed (within the government) from the beginning that the war would be fought between whites. The British government had no desire to import Indian troops in any significant number. What little international support Britain had stemmed from the fact that the Boer War was a gentlemanly conflict between white Christians. If the British had imported non-whites from Egypt and India the war's popularity would have sunk even deeper.

Much to the dismay of anti-war activists in Britain, enlistment within England and Scotland was impressive. Furthermore, the empire flocked to support the mother country

¹⁵² Kruger 353.

¹⁵³ For thorough discussion of Lord Roberts' assessment of battlefield failures and his plans to remedy the deplorable military situation in South Africa, see Carver, Chapters 4-6.

in a time of need. Canada, Australia, and New Zealand contributed so many troops that some had to be turned away because regiments were filled to capacity.¹⁵⁴ In February, the Canadian Parliament issued a statement assuring its support for Britain and the empire.¹⁵⁵ Even pro-Boer organs like the *Northern Echo* were forced to admit that a fresh wave of patriotism was sweeping the empire. While the shocking defeats of December 1899 allowed for more public debate, the plain truth remained that people generally supported the empire and the action in South Africa. Roberts' plan to cut off the Boers and quickly annex the two states grew more popular day by day.

PRETORIA AND RENEWAL

With dialogue spiraling out of control in Britain, major success on the battlefield was needed to ease the tension. Soldiers and civilians alike responded enthusiastically as summer brought the capture of Pretoria and an end to some of the sieges. As the sieges of Mafeking, Kimberley, and Ladysmith ended and Roberts' army marched slowly towards the Transvaal capital, the reading public eagerly awaited every update. Remarking on the successful end of the sieges the *Daily News* suggested that the true nature of the war was finally revealed.¹⁵⁶ The government and many within the empire saw the fall of the capital as an end to the war. The success of Roberts could not have come at a better time, for initial reports had emerged in May of British soldiers burning Boer farms and deporting thousands to St. Helena in the South Atlantic and to other islands in the Caribbean.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, the relief of Mafeking and Baden-Powell was a godsend to the government, and pro-Boer papers were compelled to celebrate along with the rest of

¹⁵⁴ "The War Spirit," *Northern Echo*, 10 March 1900, 2.

¹⁵⁵ "The Canadian Parliament," *The Limerick Echo*, 6 February 1900, 2.

¹⁵⁶ "Notes on the War," *Daily News*, 28 May 1900, 7.

¹⁵⁷ "War Notes," *Northern Echo*, 2 May 1900, 2.

the empire.¹⁵⁸ The distractions of Mafeking Night eased the pressure on Chamberlain and the War Office.

Roberts felt that by crushing the main commando force and capturing Pretoria the Boer resolve would collapse.¹⁵⁹ The length of the war shocked and tired the British soldiers who were unaccustomed to such hit-and-run style tactics. The British regulars as well had grown weary with the slow bloodletting by the Boers. With over 100,000 troops Roberts marched from Bloemfontein in early May, and, strung across the veld, his men moved up both sides of the main rail lines. Surprised and unfamiliar with Roberts' tactic of encirclement, Botha's commando, down to 8,000 men, was forced to withdraw. As the British army purposefully marched northward, government officials from the Transvaal and Orange Free State scattered across the veld. Some fled the country while others, even in old age, joined commandos on horseback in defense of the Republics. By the beginning of June, Johannesburg had fallen and Pretoria awaited capture, its defenders long since absent. Unlike other towns, Johannesburg's resources were left intact by fleeing Boers whom *The Times* dutifully labeled "parasites."¹⁶⁰ British papers, enthusiastic with praise for the success, now boldly questioned the resolve of the Boers. Again, the government's reputation was bolstered by reports from the victorious Roberts who reported little praise for the enemy or their fighting ability. Lord Salisbury spoke of the general feeling of national duty in South Africa, which echoed louder as Election Day neared and guerilla warfare tested British mettle.

¹⁵⁸ *Northern Echo*, 19 May 1900, 2-6 See also Price, chapter IV.

¹⁵⁹ "The Dispatches from Lord Roberts," *The Times*, 7 May 1900, 11. In a response to reports of successful troop movements towards Pretoria, Lord Salisbury toasted the actions as a step towards victory. In a rare occasion of truthful reporting, the writer called Salisbury's comments optimistic, and pointed out confidence among Boer leaders was not yet gone.

¹⁶⁰ "Lord Roberts Has Once More Surprised," *The Times*, 30 May 1900, 11

On 5 June 1900, Roberts marched into Pretoria unopposed and hoisted the British flag at the capital of the Transvaal. Mrs. Kruger became a prisoner of war in her own home as the burgher guards were replaced with British soldiers. To most British it appeared that the war was over. Roberts' strategy had been successful in almost every instance since his arrival on the continent five months earlier. *The Times* immediately called the action "momentous" and "masterful" and suggested the whole world would "understand this sign of our definitive success."¹⁶¹ Those who did not consider this war to be their own were left to hide in shadows, quietly hoping the war truly was closer to resolution. Anti-war critics at home could do little but recognize the masterful plan. Many burghers laid down their weapons peacefully and swore oaths to the British. Kruger, who had already fled, attempted to rally his troops to fight on rather than surrender.¹⁶² When it became clear that the victorious Roberts was deporting combatants, including all males aged twelve and older, fear began to grip the hearts of battle-weary rebels.

The sweeping success of late spring 1900 was not lost on the war's supporters and detractors. The nation was tired of battle in Africa and at home. Though usually on opposite sides, most in the press took advantage of these events to speak of a possible end to the war. The grateful country exploded in a victory celebration on Pretoria Night. Unfortunately, as with Mafeking Night, violence broke out against those who had opposed the war.¹⁶³ Despite successes on the battlefield that the entire nation could celebrate together, wartime tension in Britain prevented peaceful resolution. Attacks by the foreign press on Roberts and his methods further decreased the possibility that Britain

¹⁶¹ "Lord Roberts Has Crowned His Splendid Achievement," *The Times*, 6 June 1900, 7.

¹⁶² Kruger, 353.

¹⁶³ Price, 139.

would unite in purpose off the battlefield.¹⁶⁴ The public competition of opinions became so distracting that when telegrams between Botha and Kruger (which discussed surrender) were intercepted, they went largely unnoticed.¹⁶⁵ The time spent on self-congratulatory activities prevented immediate completion of the war and allowed leaders of the Orange Free State valuable time to convince their compatriots in the Transvaal of the worthiness of their cause.

The immediate response to the news unleashed unabashed praise for Roberts. The Lord Mayor of London telegraphed, "The whole nation will never forget what you . . . have accomplished."¹⁶⁶ The government gratefully stepped out of the crossfire as citizens celebrated. The *Daily News* quickly reported a telegram that declared the entire empire was behind the war.¹⁶⁷ In an attempt to show international support for the effort, the paper also reported that the Sultan of Turkey had telegraphed congratulations to Queen Victoria.¹⁶⁸ Canada, along with other British colonies, communicated its collective approval.¹⁶⁹ Hailing the "brilliant success," the *News of the World* once again questioned the courage of the Boers.¹⁷⁰ The early setbacks of the spring of 1900 somewhat muted praise of the war, but the mounting successes of Roberts encouraged imperialist papers to step up their patriotic spin.

¹⁶⁴ "Treatment of the Burghers," *New York Times*, 2 June 1900, 3. The paper, and other international organs, continued to question Roberts' methods of detaining Boer youths and his threats to try Kruger once captured.

¹⁶⁵ Fransjohan Pretorius, *The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Cape Town: Struik Publishers Ltd, 1998), 26.

¹⁶⁶ "London Goes Mad Again," *New York Times*, 6 June 1900, 3.

¹⁶⁷ "Pretoria," *Daily News*, 5 June 1900, 7.

¹⁶⁸ *Daily News*, 9 June 1900, 5.

¹⁶⁹ "Canadians and the War," *Manchester Guardian*, 8 June 1900, 6. Despite the constant barrage of criticism against the British, many in the international community were forced to concede the victory and encourage a quick settlement.

¹⁷⁰ "Details of the Fighting," *News of the World*, 10 June 1900, 7

February and March of 1900 provided ample opportunity for the anti-war writers to distribute their message to a public eager for honest reporting. They finally had an audience who were not completely hypnotized by the rhetoric of empire. However, Pretoria's capture in June allowed jingoism to rear its head once more as cries of "remember Majuba!" returned to the papers of Britain.¹⁷¹ The success of June was a staggering blow to those who opposed the war, but Liberals quickly found new ground to fight on with rumors of an impending election. Conventional wisdom suggested the government would quickly call for an election to take advantage of the rejuvenated support of the war and its successes. Just prior to the fall of Pretoria, the *Northern Echo* cynically attacked the government,

The Tory wirepullers and Mr. Chamberlain, who it is said on good authority [*sic*] are pressing strongly for an early dissolution and taking advantage of the Khaki fever. The opposition are often taunted with lack of loyalty and patriotism.¹⁷²

With the summer barely begun and Roberts only just settling in at Pretoria, the talk of election reinvigorated the war discourse that blanketed the nation. Members of the press and the politicians alike continued their efforts to convince the British public of the righteousness of their causes. With victories fresh in their minds and volunteers still pouring in from throughout the empire, the pro-Boer factions faced an uphill battle in the fall of 1900.

A PATRIOTIC ELECTION

Studied for over one hundred years, the British election of 1900 has produced various interpretations by historians. Richard Price in his study of the war and the

¹⁷¹ "What of the War?," *The Weekly Dispatch*, 17 June 1900, 4.

¹⁷² "Election," *Northern Echo*, 28 May 1900, 2

working class suggested that voter apathy re-elected the sitting government.¹⁷³ A British labor historian, Price was concerned that generalized assumptions were being made about the Victorian worker. He used tables to suggest that voter turnout was actually low, and that it was not truly a frenzied Khaki election. Price's efforts to dispel the myth of a malleable working class electorate opened the door for a discussion of the turnout on election day. While turnout was lower than expected (though higher than the election of 1895 in many locales), it seems as though the election was much more than a blasé endorsement of imperialist ideals. The actual turnout could be considered high, especially when many in Britain felt the defeat of the government's jingo machine was not really possible.¹⁷⁴

The British voters in the election of 1900 did not merely re-elect the British government to finish what it had started. The voter response was not quite so cynical. There is some degree of scholarship that suggests the jingoism was highly effective. Paul Readman disagreed with Price when he suggested, "The language of patriotism employed by Unionist candidates would appear to have had an important effect on their performance in the polls."¹⁷⁵ Readman asserted that turnout was respectable in a wartime election and attributed much of this success to the actions of government campaigning. His research has centered on cultural and patriotic aspects of Edwardian Britain and has linked the rural desire to maintain ties with the past to the patriotic fervor that re-elected the Tory government in 1900. Porter agreed to some extent by suggesting that the boundaries of general support for imperialism were reached and checked in the election. He argued that the patriotic language subdued much of the opposition, although it proved

¹⁷³ Price, 105.

¹⁷⁴ Readman, 128-30.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 109

to be the final event of mass approval for such imperialism.¹⁷⁶ Thomas Pakenham suggested the election was perhaps due to a divided opposition.¹⁷⁷ The people recognized the lack of clear direction under the Liberals and chose to remain with what they knew. It is a fact that the papers and politicians worked themselves into a frenzy to win the election, regardless of the degree to which patriotic pressure was applied. The election returned the government with a 134-seat majority over all combined rivals. Yet the pro-Boer contingent of the Liberal party remained with over fifty seats. Although the Liberals faced a sizeable disadvantage, their continued presence in respectable numbers continued to distract the government from its agenda. A brief examination of the election shows a continued theme of manipulation of public perceptions during wartime.

Barely a month after Pretoria fell, the *Northern Echo* began the election campaign by attacking Roberts' vaunted successes. Quoting military men, it suggested the drawn-out process had weakened the British position and that suggestions that the war was nearly over were bold exaggerations.¹⁷⁸ By the end of July, there were almost 250,000 troops representing the empire in South Africa. There was no initiative to begin sending them home as Roberts' victories might suggest. Britain had not planned for the sweeping guerilla warfare it faced after the annexation of the rebel states. Tightly organized Boer commandos prolonged the war at a time when most in London hoped for a quick resolution. Government leaders found themselves in a position wherein they had to calculate the most agreeable time to dissolve Parliament and hold elections. By 9 September, papers were reporting on the tenuous relationship between the election and

¹⁷⁶ Porter, 178.

¹⁷⁷ Pakenham, 489-505.

¹⁷⁸ "Official Information," *Northern Echo*, 16 July 1900, 3.

the war in South Africa.¹⁷⁹ Unionist leaders built their entire platform on the war and assured their followers that patriotism would be successful.

From the beginning, every effort was made to subdue domestic issues and wave the flag of patriotism. *The Times* reported that the war was the “main issue,” and that all other matters “sank into insignificance.”¹⁸⁰ Unionist leaders used speeches and papers to remind the voters of Majuba, the shocks of Black Week, and the victories of Johannesburg and Pretoria. Chamberlain cast aside domestic concerns he championed and suggested that only one matter truly affected Britain at the present.¹⁸¹ As with any election, the race was on to find a weakness in the armor of the opponent. The overzealous nature of the British election of 1900 and the way in which it was fought out in the pages of the press sets it apart from most elections prior to and of its time.

The pro-war press’ use of Baden-Powell (as an image of the noble British soldier) during his siege was again implemented during the build up to the general election. Successful generals were used to attach victory to the message of Tory party members. Grand drawings of Kitchener, Roberts, White, and Baden-Powell were placed on placards and posters throughout Britain. These signs encouraged British voters to associate the generals with the Tory government. Selected campaign posters portrayed Liberal candidates as direct financial contributors to Kruger and his cause.¹⁸² Election speeches suggested the voters had nothing else to ponder but the “extraordinary success of our troops under Lord Roberts in Africa.”¹⁸³ The British papers continued their successful efforts to wax patriotic despite claims from America that the British public was past

¹⁷⁹ “The General Election,” *News of the World*, 9 September 1900, 1.

¹⁸⁰ *The Times*, 29 September 1900, 11.

¹⁸¹ *The Times*, 3 October 1900, 10.

¹⁸² Price, 106.

¹⁸³ Readman, 116-117.

manipulation.¹⁸⁴ It was very difficult for the pro-Boer candidates to vigorously defend their positions without appearing unpatriotic to a public that generally supported the soldiers. *The Times*, although supportive of the government, printed letters of caution from members of Parliament who urged the nation not to base an election on the notion of “for the soldier [rather than] against the soldier.”¹⁸⁵ Highly reminiscent of modern elections, the election of 1900, along with a vigorous press and increasing readership, provided an especially potent example of the battle to control public opinion.

It is easier, and much more predictable, to understand the ideals promulgated by those who supported imperialism. It was much more convenient for the government to get its opinions into the public domain, whether in print or speech. At a time of violent celebrations, due to ended sieges and the annexation of the two South African Republics, it was surely the safer route to be on the side of the government. By August, *The Times* was full of letters that justified the government’s actions of tying the war to the election. Most wrote very bluntly of their gratitude that there was little chance the pro-Boer contingent in Parliament would become any larger.¹⁸⁶ Most of the editorials and letters centered on the empire and how to best sustain it. A most poignant letter from a volunteer in New Zealand summed up the general thrust of pro-war propaganda emerging in *The Times*,

I have nothing to apologize for in the part we have taken in the war; it was our privilege; but, having sent all the men you would let us send in defense of the old flag, we naturally want to see that its upkeep is left in the hands of the Government who will maintain it with honour.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ “London Topics of the Week,” *New York Times*, 19 August 1900, 6. It is interesting that on the eve of the election, foreign observers put no faith in the propaganda machine of the government. Not only did they question pro-war papers, but they also insisted the people of Britain were also fed up with the lies.

¹⁸⁵ Henry H. Howorth, “The General Election,” *The Times*, 13 July 1900, 8.

¹⁸⁶ Henry Miller, “The General Election,” *The Times*, 8 July 1900, 5.

¹⁸⁷ “The General Election—A Colonist’s Views,” *The Times*, 29 September 1900, 14.

The author defended Chamberlain as one of the best colonial secretaries he could recall and suggested anti-war ministers could possibly face tarring and feathering if they found themselves in the colonies away from the comfort of England. After the votes were counted, *The Times* declared anti-imperialism to be as dead as “Gladstone’s schemes for Irish Home Rule.”¹⁸⁸ Gloating in such anti-Liberal tones was par for the course. This non-stop coordination between *The Times* and conservative MPs was to be expected, but what of the other national papers?

While many other national papers lacked the readership *The Times* enjoyed, their knack for presenting the war and the election in the best light possible was identical. The *News of the World* reminded its readers that it was the Boers who started the war and that the citizens of Britain must remember the conflict was to restore voting privileges in a corrupt society.¹⁸⁹ The paper further reported that an election was required in order to show the world that there was one united Britain.¹⁹⁰ Combating anti-war writers, these papers lifted the conversation above important domestic issues to promote their brand of patriotism. Though often unimpressed with the actions of Britain during the war the *New York Times* suggested the outcome of the election was a personal victory for Chamberlain and his methods.¹⁹¹ Chamberlain regularly defended his war and assured voters that the Queen and their entire empire supported the soldiers and the causes for the war in South Africa.

¹⁸⁸ “The Additional Election Results,” *The Times*, 8 October 1900, 9.

¹⁸⁹ “Attitude of Parties,” *News of the World*, 23 September 1900, 2.

¹⁹⁰ “Dissolution Looming,” *News of the World*, 16 September 1900, 6.

¹⁹¹ “Detailed Election Returns,” *New York Times*, 5 October 1900, 1.

It was important that the people be fed daily on imperialist rhetoric. As quickly as Britain had been worked up to celebrate Mafeking or Pretoria, they were depressed at the word of protracted guerilla fighting. Price argued that it was only in contested locations that such patriotic language was used, but it appears as though patriotic fervor was encouraged by the national Tory leadership throughout Britain in the days preceding the election.¹⁹² Liberals were accosted as “Little Englanders” for their support of Kruger and the notion that their actions would shrink the empire.¹⁹³ Previous chapters identified this image and from whence it came, and it was difficult for anti-war actors to fairly battle with such dramatic concepts. In many cases, vocal anti-war radicals were replaced with Liberal candidates who stood a better chance of defeating the government at the polls. The intense heat displayed in the press, together with rousing political speeches, forced the opposition to rethink strategies in order to maintain credibility.

There was some ammunition to fight this domestic battle, but it usually came from the obvious quarters. The *Northern Echo* and *Manchester Guardian*, alongside numerous pamphlets decrying the war, worked tirelessly in their attempt to disprove government assertions. They did what they could to influence public will in favor of Liberal leadership. A month before the election, editors at the *Northern Echo* wrote,

Those who have ventured in the past to oppose the war have been branded as un-English cowards, and by men not themselves conspicuous for courage. Those who have ventured to criticize the government in its conduct of the war have either had to suffer similar accusations or to bear clumsy attempts at ridicule.¹⁹⁴

Conscientiously fighting a war of words to defend their position, anti-war writers struggled to influence voters blinded by adoration of Lord Roberts and his cohorts. In

¹⁹² Price, 128-31.

¹⁹³ Readman, 117.

¹⁹⁴ “Plain Words for Plain People,” *Northern Echo*, 5 September 1900, 2.

attempting to contrast the difference between the sitting government and the valorous soldiers in South Africa, the same paper wrote,

While paying homage to our brave soldiers we should not permit mere politicians, even though they be of cabinet rank, to attribute themselves the credit which belongs to other men . . . the politicians are wrong and the soldiers have been right.¹⁹⁵

Though this sentiment is worthwhile and true, the reading public simply could not or would not separate the two groups of men. The image of empire, sold to the British by Milner, Rhodes, and Chamberlain, was seared into the minds of many men, women, and children. Regardless of the heated public debate, the result of the election appeared obvious months before the election took place.

There were other papers and pamphleteers who joined the cause against colonial policy. Prior to the election, the *Manchester Guardian* reported that the *Cape Times* was confident that the Boers did not have the stomach for prolonged war.¹⁹⁶ *Guardian* editors were unsure of these assertions and warned its readership against the validity of information emanating from South Africa. It was a constant battle of truth versus perception. Try as they might, most of what the pro-Boer factions did was fruitless. As Stephen Koss wrote, “By late summer, partisan invective had drowned out responsible debate.”¹⁹⁷ The accusations of treason returned, and many politicians and writers found themselves accused of supporting the Boers. Author Jerome Jerome attacked the government’s use of the Union Jack as “their Commercial asset,” while other men invoked religion and sought some type of middle ground with Britons not yet convinced

¹⁹⁵ “Wit and Wisdom,” *Northern Echo*, 26 September 1900, 3.

¹⁹⁶ “The Annexation of the Free State,” *Manchester Guardian*, 15 May 1900, 8.

¹⁹⁷ Koss, 148.

of the righteousness of the war.¹⁹⁸ The *Wall Street Journal* congratulated Chamberlain on his victory but reserved praise, suggesting that the khaki election was less than fair.¹⁹⁹ Six months later these editorialists and many others found their most useful weapon as the war dragged on and horrors of concentration camps became apparent.

Hobson also joined the assault on the conservative press. His speeches and writings made him unpopular in Unionist circles, but the pro-Boer contingent encouraged him to publish his attacks often. He condemned the press, most notably *The Times*, as obedient servants to the government. He lambasted the practice of taking their daily news feed from papers owned by Rhodes and others associated with the government. Calling the British press neither reliable nor independent, Hobson suggested that they carried no weight. He claimed that the government had won, because it had been able to monopolize “the mind of the British public.”²⁰⁰ Scathing attacks like these, though in large part true, did little to adjust the minds of the working class who had been so dutifully indoctrinated. His rhetoric amounted to little more than sour grapes to a public enthralled by the success of Lord Roberts.

The frantic pace of electioneering was often focused on the working class. These people were a large segment of the voting pool and the most impressionable. An unforeseen effect of the war was the increased need for workers. The volunteers fighting in South Africa, and the hurried nature in which the war was being supported, created a need for more men. When working class men labor without fear of job loss it is often their tendency to support the government, or at the very least, the status quo. While many of the workingmen’s clubs were apolitical (as was discussed in a previous chapter),

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹⁹⁹ “The British Elections,” *Wall Street Journal*, 8 October 1900, 4.

²⁰⁰ J. A. Hobson, *The Psychology of Jingoism* (London: G. Richards, 1901), 138.

history saw them lean towards the Liberals. During this election, however, many not only voted for the Tories but also actively campaigned for them. This proactive approach towards the election illustrates the effect the pro-war barrage had on the voters. While turnout was not as high as expected, it was still over 70 percent. Such a number is astounding if one considers the election outcome was presumed months in advance. The Liberals left dozens of Unionist constituencies uncontested. This action contributed to a building idea that the battle for the public will was won by the government. Just days before the election, Chamberlain said that “every seat gained at this crisis by the Unionist party is a blow struck at enemies at home and abroad.”²⁰¹ Readman agreed with an earlier discussion on the empire’s therapeutic effect on the British mentality.²⁰² It was noteworthy that the swell of patriotic fever allowed the people across Britain to ignore their own mundane lives and look to something grander.²⁰³ The Liberals were pushing for domestic reform, a much-needed thing, but the glory of the troops on the field meant something more to the citizens. And when they faced a press willing and able to convey this message, day after day, they were quite willing to jump on the bandwagon, regardless of the cost.

CONCLUSION

Looking back at a year that dealt them several blows, the anti-war groups had every reason to feel deflated after the election of 1900. The horrors of Black Week enabled them to come out swinging in the domestic fight for public opinion. Spring was a boon to anti-war activists as the public became receptive to their opinions. However, the success of Roberts in South Africa quickly elevated patriotic rhetoric above the Liberal

²⁰¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 2 October 1900, 3.

²⁰² See Chapter 1

²⁰³ Readman, 136.

stance. The war was then over a year old, and 300,000 soldiers of the empire remained in South Africa. The election suggested the government had broad support, but support for what? Although both republics were annexed, the commandos still fought a guerilla war that regularly tested the patience and ability of the British troops. Many in the international community quietly supported the rebel Boer effort and employed no pressure to force them to surrender. As the government whipped up the voters on the basis of Pretoria and Baden-Powell, it quietly allowed Roberts and Kitchener to develop a plan for crushing the Boer spirit which included forced deportation, concentration camps, and hundreds of small forts up and down the veld. What had begun as a simple war of subduing a rebellious colony had turned into a fight for the reputation of the British Empire. At the end of 1900, most regular Britons did not realize that fact. By the early part of 1901, however, it became clear that the re-elected government was using its political capital poorly by running an unpopular war against a resolute people. Late summer reports showed the British troops were burning Boer farms, a terribly un-British thing to do to fellow white Christians. And on the eve of the election, reports emerged that showed the true nature of the suffering of British troops on the sub-continent.²⁰⁴ While many of these revelations came too late to unseat the government, they did provide a window into the following months and the about-turn the public performed as the war waged on.

The events of 1900 are useful and necessary in understanding the changes that occurred in British support of the empire. The *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph* wrote, "1900 will not rank among the happy years of our history . . . we have passed from joy to

²⁰⁴ *Northern Echo*, 4 October 1900, 3

failure.”²⁰⁵ The writer urged the readers to turn inward, and think of the men and the women of the local mines and shops who had lost so much. The surprising events of 1899 assured that 1900 began with the nation in painful shock, searching for its strength to carry on. But Britons found renewal in military success under the leadership of Roberts and Kitchener on the battlefield of South Africa. Capturing Pretoria and freeing the besieged towns raised an empire’s hopes to a feverish degree and saw rhetoric once more powerfully dictate the national will. The election was a culmination of years of hard work. In controlling the public’s perceptions of empire and the war government leaders along with its cohorts in the press cleared the way for finishing the war on imperialist terms. The prolonged guerilla war and the concentration camps remained. The brief window of opportunity afforded anti-war actors in the spring of 1900 returned in early 1901, and when it returned it stayed. Milner’s war to defend the empire was based on the image of a carefully created enemy. The last months of the war presented the public with a very different image of Boer and Briton. Public support for the war became muted, and the government scrambled to find a way to finish the conflict quickly. The season in the sun for those who stood firmly against the war came quickly and clearly as the stories of mistreatment and suffering finally emerged from the veld.

²⁰⁵ Koss, 179 “Story of the Year,” *Blackburn Weekly Telegraph*, 29 December 1900.

CHAPTER FIVE

UNPLEASANT TRUTHS REVEALED

If we are to build up anything in South Africa, we must disregard and absolutely disregard the screamers.²⁰⁶

Alfred Milner, 1901

The . . . people had seen England through a veil of idealism which had small relation to reality. The Tory Government's war policy had torn asunder this veil with disastrous results. The effects were deep. Something lifelong had snapped within them – their bearings were lost.²⁰⁷

Emily Hobhouse, 1901

The British election in late 1900 allowed the sitting government much needed breathing space as it attempted to set forth a plan to win the war. By the end of the year, imperialists believed they had won the war of words and completion of the war, on their terms, was assured. Empire builders, such as Rhodes and Milner, took great satisfaction in their successful efforts to craft public perceptions. Despite setbacks presented by the failed Jameson Raid and the horrors of Black Week, both of which heaped military and diplomatic embarrassment upon Britain, a majority of the British voted in wartime to re-elect the government. The election and the mid-1900 annexation of both South African republics gave pro-war actors hope, and many pro-Boer citizens cause for concern. The Boer War should have been a simple colonial action but became a harsh lesson for the

²⁰⁶ Pakenham, 511.

²⁰⁷ Emily Hobhouse, *Boer War Letters*. Rykie Van Reenen, ed. (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1984), 41

British. The final events of the war worked in favor of anti-war Britons to reduce general public support of the empire, or at the very least lessen the support given the government to maintain it.

The spring of 1901 allowed the dust of elections and annexations to settle and the realities of the war to become clear. As 1900 ended, the media muscle flexed to assure Unionist victory was relaxed and people were allowed to focus on other aspects of national concern. The British public had spent months under a barrage of editorials, speeches, and books, which provided little time to see what was really happening in South Africa. As the war stood, Kitchener's poor treatment of Boer civilians only strengthened the resolve of Boer commandos. The last year of the war provided more positive ammunition for the anti-war contingent as reports increased about concentration camps, forced deportations, and resolute Boers. Emily Hobhouse, an influential human rights activist, informed the Britons at home of the inhumanity employed to maintain their empire. The international press dutifully supplied scores of reports on the success of rogue commandos who continued the offensive long after the republics fell.

There was an uncomfortable resolution to the Boer War, as the long hot months in the African veld took a toll on both military morale and civilian spirit. With the end of the war came an end to the government's assumption that the public would support empire building at any cost. Such a change is understandable because of the press' growing power, which led to altered perceptions of the empire by the British public. The war's protracted nature and the infamous concentration camps altered the traditional image of British imperialism and sent epiphanies racing across Britain. No longer were Britons keen to watch colonies conquered and subjected in such a fashion. The people so easily

led into war by Chamberlain and Milner were no longer so easily molded by the time the British troops began their long journeys home. Britons had tired of both the domestic squabbles and the war in South Africa. Enthusiastic support of empire building was no longer automatic. Availability of the opinion throughout the press and the increased literacy of Britons combined to rob government ministers of a traditionally malleable electorate.

ELECTION FALLOUT

Initially disheartened by the election results, the anti-war Britons were not deterred. Their cause had been buoyed a year earlier by Buller's defeats. The arguments and actions of the imperialists were weakened by the negative reports of British actions in South Africa. Rather than accept defeat, Liberals ratcheted up their rhetoric in the fading months of 1900. A week after the election the *Northern Echo* castigated the nation, "The country has given the Unionists a blank cheque without knowing by whom, or when, or for what it would hereafter be presented."²⁰⁸ But this war of words was not to be won by shaming the populace; it was rather to be won by informing them. With the help of J.A. Hobson, Emily Hobhouse, and W.T. Stead, pro-Boer activists began a final assault on the war – and this brought lasting change to the minds of the British. Hobson wrote, "Most provincial papers take not only their news but their 'views,' with abject servility, from the London journal which they most admire."²⁰⁹ Though his assertion was largely correct, he and other pro-Boers soon saw a change of attitude transform the nation as they became largely anti-war, or at the very least, war-weary. Such a change signaled that the truth was being reported and (more importantly) read and understood.

²⁰⁸ "Effect of the Campaign on the Liberal Party," *Northern Echo*, 13 October 1900, 3.

²⁰⁹ Hobson, 138.

Success at the polls emboldened the Liberals to remain on the attack. Anti-war voices continued to speak out in condemnation of the government and the conflict in South Africa. Even *The Times* carried letters of Liberal party faithful, who were proud of the seats they maintained despite the jingoism the government employed to unseat them.²¹⁰ It quickly became apparent that the breathing room Tories counted on was not going to materialize. Leading the opposition in Parliament, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman suggested that the war in Africa was most remarkable as the “British public know so little about it.” He continued his attack on Chamberlain by asserting that “never has a war, great or small, been conducted with so little communication of authentic information.”²¹¹ In charging the sitting government with lack of respect for its citizens, Campbell-Bannerman’s resolve was doubtless aided by his majority increase in the recent election.

The latter half of 1900 provided imperialists with a “false dawn” in their quest for finality.²¹² By all accounts most of the successes on and off the battlefield, from April through the election, were credited to pro-war policies and men. However, the Liberals were not so easily browbeaten by military triumphs and convenient reporting of news from South Africa. Violence upon pro-Boers, both in public and private, did not hinder Liberal efforts to affect change. What should have been a final stamp of approval on the policies of the government, proved to be one last hurrah for imperialist policies at the dawn of a new century. Though the imperialist government found itself returned to power, the next election in 1905 saw Tories swept from power dramatically, where they remained in the cold well into World War I. An election response in their favor proved to

²¹⁰ Allan Bright, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Times*, 16 October 1900, 4.

²¹¹ Koss, 175-76

²¹² Carver, 159.

be a short-term approval of their actions, rather than a signal of long-term support of imperialist policies.²¹³ The true winner of the Jingo Election was the Liberal party, for it was spared any connection to the administration of the war. The Tory victory kept imperialists in the public eye where they were slowly and viciously attacked for a few more short years.

A HARSH NEW WAR

Stead once wrote sarcastically of the Dutch plan to take over South Africa and ruin the British Empire.²¹⁴ Though his words did not prove prophetic, Kitchener's work on the veld assisted in diminishing Britain's international and domestic prestige. In November 1900, Kitchener assumed overall command from Lord Roberts and began his effort to exterminate the will of the Boers. He was of the same ilk as Rhodes and other imperialists who saw little of value in the inhabitants of the South African republics. In a letter to the children of Lord Desborough, he wrote, "The Boers are not like the Sudanese, who stood up for a fair fight. They are always running away on their little ponies."²¹⁵ He told the boys that foreign fighters were much easier to shoot, as they did not "slink about" like the Boers. Kitchener continued to demean the character of the men who had valiantly kept the British army at bay for fifteen months. There was little choice; for he knew the war was costing Britain upwards of £3,000,000 per month and the

²¹³ Price, 233-39. Price argued that the working class was never whipped into the frenzy either side would have liked. The efforts of anti-war actors, most especially, fell on deaf ears as their movement lacked a central leader with the charisma needed to unite people against government policies. Price suggests domestic policies were the main concern of these groups, and the speeches of leftwing Liberals did little to change their standard of living. Despite Liberal attacks on imperialist governments, the working class did benefit from the empire, though the war did make them weary of its cost, and how it affected their livelihood.

²¹⁴ W.T. Stead, "How the British Government Caused the War," *Review of Reviews*, October 1899, 333.

²¹⁵ James Barbary, *The Boer War* (New York: Van Rees Press, 1969), 160.

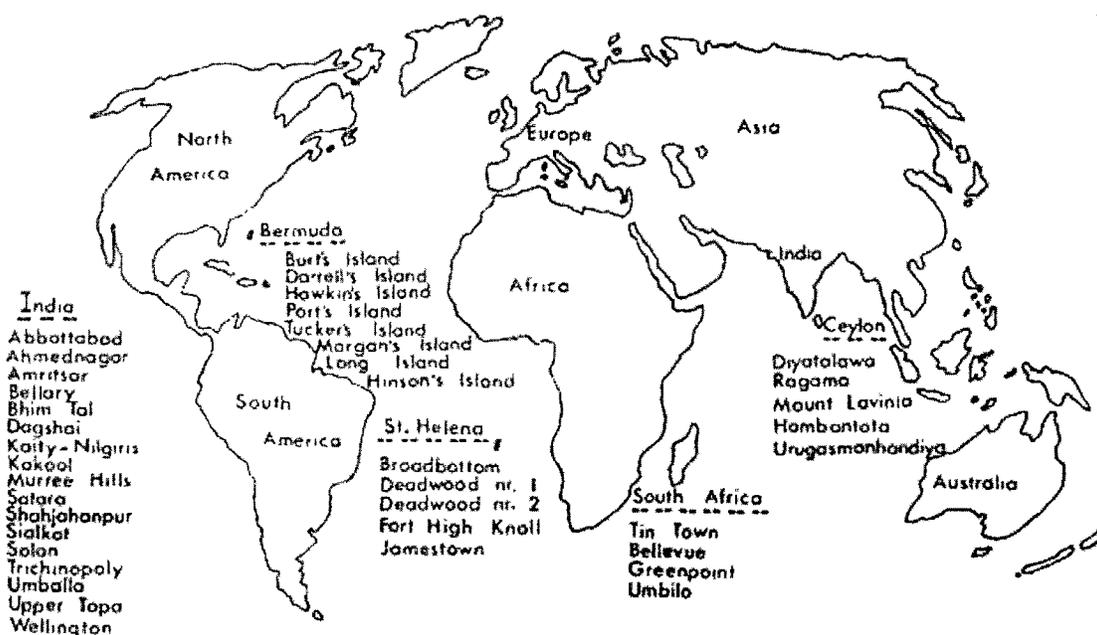
pressure was on to finish it. If the British army could not force the Boers to fight a traditional war, Kitchener had to endeavor to change the nature of conflict himself.

In the spring of 1901, Kitchener intensified his efforts that were already devastating the veld. Since the middle of 1900, his soldiers were under orders to eradicate farms and round up any suspicious people they came across. Kitchener intended to break the will of the people and starve the commandos into submission. Working in tandem with the previously established policy of deportation, he aimed to reduce the number of active Boer combatants through shrinking their supply of soldiers and food. It was very difficult for his men to adequately guard against attack when surrounded by enemies at all sides. As Boers were captured, they were forced to sign neutrality oaths; but the British soldiers quickly grew accustomed to the limits of that neutrality. The war was against farmers and their families; it was these simple groups who sought out and attacked British soldiers under the guise of neutrality long after they had submitted themselves as non-combatants.

Vicious attacks by both men and women prompted Kitchener to do two things. First, he stepped up the forced deportations, and second he forced rogue combatants to reveal themselves through burning their farms and incarcerating their families.²¹⁶ The War Department, on Milner's recommendation, decided that the only acceptable end to the war was unconditional surrender. Though the British had annexed the republics they had little control. The changing tactics of the war greatly contributed to evolving perceptions of the empire in Britain. Improved methods of communication assured that

²¹⁶ Barbary, 162. When rumors circled, which suggested that British soldiers were sacking towns and burning farms, Presidents Kruger and Steyn begged Roberts to fight the war upon traditional principles. Roberts responded that he would look into the matter and hoped there would be as little injury as possible to those considered innocent. Whether aware of Kitchener's actions or not, Roberts did little to address the situation prior to his retirement.

truthful reporting of such methods was reaching British shores. When addressing Parliament, opposition leader Campbell-Bannerman insisted that as the people slowly received and understood the facts of the war, they would “demand” immediate adoption of a peaceful conclusion to the conflict.²¹⁷ British readers, who had been apt to ignore warnings of pro-Boers in 1899 and 1900, found themselves quickly catching up on news from the war as Kitchener’s methods gave them pause for thought.



Map detailing the many deportation camps opened by the British during the Boer War²¹⁸

One of Kitchener’s first responses to the actions of civilian Boers was a series of notices sent out in both English and Dutch. These notices warned that the British would begin burning houses and confiscating animals if the combatants who had signed neutrality oaths did not immediately stop aiding the Boer commandos. The threats were

²¹⁷ “Methods of Barbarism,” *The Times*, 15 June 1901, 5.

²¹⁸ Map and location of deportation camps during Boer War. Anglo-Boer War Museum, <http://www.anglo-boer.co.za/boerpow.htm>, accessed 23 December 2004.

not aimed simply at the fighting men, but also at the women and underage children. The British army offered passes to widows so that they might safely relocate to what the press boldly called concentration camps.²¹⁹ And later, as the warning went unheeded, Kitchener threatened permanent expulsion of rebel leaders from South Africa. To add insult to injury, the expulsion would be at the expense of each offending Boer's family.²²⁰ Almost 30,000 Boers were deported to camps throughout the empire by the time the war ended. Constantly attempting to demoralize the Boer troops, Kitchener regularly informed them through letters and pamphlets that there was no hope that a foreign power would intervene. The Boers had often hoped that the Germans or even the Americans might help. At this point in the war, however, foreign governments appeared quite content to watch Britain implode from afar.

As previously discussed, the word of forced deportations and the cruelties of war had reached Britain by late 1900. The anti-war press was quick to respond, and in the new year government organs were forced to realize the shocking turn of events. It has been argued that the concentration camps cleared the way for more men to join the Boer commandos.²²¹ The fact that their families were being cared for allowed many to feel free to take up arms. But regardless of intent or result, Britons at home were focused only on the brutality of the situation. Just a month after the election, the Humanitarian League passed a resolution that condemned the British actions of burning farms and turning women from their homes. The committee declared the events in South Africa "so

²¹⁹ Government Notice 115, 20 September 1900. National Army Museum, London. File 6807-4444.

²²⁰ Proclamation by Lord Kitchener, 7 August 1901. National Army Museum, London. File 6708-4444.

²²¹ Wallace Mills, "Interpretations of the South African War 1899-1902," http://husky1.stmarys.ca/~wmills/course322/12Boer_war.html, accessed 2 January 2005.

inhuman in themselves as to be inexcusable under any circumstances whatsoever.”²²²

Emily Hobhouse had been in the country over a year, and with her political connections was able to visit many of the concentration camps. Her popularity soared in Britain as Kitchener and Milner sought for ways of preventing her accounts from leaving South Africa.

The daughter of Lord Hobhouse, a prominent Liberal politician, Emily Hobhouse was a thorn in the side of government officials trying to avoid any dialogue about the camps in South Africa. Milner gave her permission to visit the camps on the grounds that she refrained from activism and solely performed humanitarian work. Neither Hobhouse nor Milner had any real idea of what she was to find when she left the comforts of Cape Town. There were dozens of camps, which were under-staffed and under-supplied. It is not likely that the British purposefully established the camps this way, but because of sheer numbers, the living conditions became unbearable. Cramped quarters and constant outbreaks of yellow fever and malaria caused the suffering and death of thousands. While fewer than 8,000 Boer fighters perished during the war, over 20,000 Boer women and children died from malnutrition and neglect in the camps. As this information began to reach the shores of Britain, the public was shocked. These facts provided fodder for the anti-war dialogue, and the government became less comfortable in its position

The government was hostile to any initial attempts to reveal the true horrors of the camps in South Africa. In early 1901, the Stop The War Committee revealed an intercepted telegram suggesting Roberts and Kitchener had ordered exterminating the Boers through starvation. British officials vehemently denied the accusations.²²³ In fact

²²² “The Conduct of War,” *Northern Echo*, 14 November 1900, 3.

²²³ “Secret British Orders,” *New York Times*, 18 January 1901, 1.

most London dailies did not report the revelation despite wide coverage in the *Manchester Guardian* and by some foreign papers. It was a troubling time for both Milner and Chamberlain. They were recognized in most circles as the faces behind the war, a war which had brought little glory and great humiliation to Britain. The problem with having such a wide audience initially convinced of the righteousness of the cause was the anti-war activists had access to an equally impressive audience. And by this point in the war so much of what the Liberals were saying rang true with the citizens.

British officials found it imperative that humanitarian workers be carefully watched while working in South Africa. Any new revelations about the conditions of the prisoners or methods for winning the war could (and did) bring dramatic accusations against the government. Upon obtaining permission to visit the camps, Hobhouse realized Milner had attached spies to her traveling party.²²⁴ Kitchener, too, made sure her whereabouts were well documented. She was aware of their actions but was still able to reveal the shocking nature of the conflict to the citizens at home. Hobhouse successfully provided aid in many camps (through generous fundraising efforts in Britain) and reported on their conditions until the government had her deported back to Britain in late 1901. She wrote of her sense of betrayal by Milner, who had first struck her as Liberal in his thinking. Accusing both him and Kitchener of brutality and betraying the British, she felt “ashamed to own [them] as fellow countrymen.”²²⁵ Her exploits encouraged support from pro-Boers seeking further ammunition against the government and derision from the parties supportive of military action in South Africa.

²²⁴ Hobhouse, 116.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

Initial coverage of the new face of the war fell neatly into traditional patterns. A study of *The Times* from September 1900 through early 1902 suggests little positive coverage of Hobhouse's work. Rather than receive praise for the humanitarian efforts she was making, Hobhouse was castigated by pro-government papers. If one studies the letters and articles printed in its pages, *The Times* appears to do very little in the way of drawing positive attention to her deeds. She was constantly defending herself from attacks on her motivations.²²⁶ When Hobhouse returned to Britain and spoke at fundraisers, she was accosted as pro-Boer. In July 1901, *The Times* again attacked her when it suggested her motivations for helping the Boers were less than honest. In late summer, letters attacked Hobhouse and her work for the affect it was having on international relations. One writer felt her actions in South Africa were encouraging the French to slander the empire and warned that many nations were watching Britain.²²⁷ There is little doubt that the work of Hobhouse and other humanitarians exposed a side of war that was previously unseen by the world. And the writer was correct in his assertions that the foreign press was encouraged in its assault on the British reputation by the actions of well-known anti-war activists. The panic in his letter, and in those of many others, suggests a realization that many imperialists felt uncomfortable with their positions and feared outside commentary.

From the very beginning of 1901, the euphoria caused by the election gave way to frustration as the international press joined with domestic agitators in questioning the methods of the war in South Africa. *Le Petit Journal* wrote, "the English doubtlessly

²²⁶ "Miss Hobhouse's Meetings," *The Times*, 6 July 1901, 6.

²²⁷ "The Pro-Boers and Miss Hobhouse's Report," *The Times*, 17 August 1901, 8.

hope to intimidate through violence the enemies that they cannot defeat.”²²⁸ The writer described dramatic tear-filled moments as he witnessed hundreds of Boer women living in wet, cold, and understaffed shelters in South Africa. Bare-foot women, many sleeping on the ground, were ripped from their homes and sent by the trainload to any one of forty-seven camps. By May 1901, there were over 40,000 people in such camps with upwards of 500 dying each month.²²⁹ At the end of the war, there were in excess of 115,000 women and children in the British run camps. The Marquis of Ripon stated that,

I am filled with shame at the description of the so-called refugee camps. The fair fame of the country and the reputation for manliness of our people is at stake. No condemnation of the system is too strong.²³⁰

Kitchener’s actions were having an effect on perceptions at home. While pro-war supporters may not have been swayed from bullish positions on the empire, they were certainly becoming weary of the fight. The image of empire did not, in some of their minds at least, include such barbaric actions.

RESOLUTE ENEMIES

It was not just the camps but also the protracted nature of the war that created uneasiness in Britain. The war became much bigger than Milner and Chamberlain had originally intended. With hundreds of thousands of troops in South Africa, British soldiers had little time to relax. Scores of commandos, some as small as a few dozen, accosted Kitchener’s men at every chance. In February 1901, 30,000 more mounted troops were sent to South Africa. It was apparent to those watching closely that there were bigger problems on the battlefield. The *Northern Echo* questioned the “unnecessary

²²⁸ “Boer Prisoners,” *Le Pett Journal*, 20 January 1901, 2.

²²⁹ “Splnt in Liberal Party,” *New York Times*, 18 June 1901, 5.

²³⁰ “The Liberals and the Boers,” *New York Times*, 22 June 1901, 5.

concealment of truth concerning matters in South Africa.”²³¹ The *Dallas Morning News* ran a story on Boer losses, originally printed in the *Scotsman*, that questioned the validity of British estimates.²³² Despite the high numbers of Boers captured and killed by Kitchener, there continued to be sizeable forces roaming South Africa. The papers repeated their requests for honest reporting. It was the prolonged action and its accompanying coverage in the public sphere that awoke the people of Britain from a slumber of denial.

Despite their wives’ captivity and the destruction of their farms, Boer fighters remained resolute long past the expectations of the British public. Such determination on the part of the Boers was a shock to writers who suggested the lack of foreign aid would limit the length of guerilla fighting.²³³ The British were lured into a war based on images of empire and human dignity. Two years into the war, they came face-to-face with the fact that their empire was not nearly as powerful as they imagined it to be. The losses were compounded by the knowledge that British soldiers were denying the dignity they believed they were fighting for. Lured into the war in order to preserve the rights of the Uitlanders, Britons became uneasy with the rights their army was denying the innocent civilians.

Slowly the tone in Britain calmed, and rhetoric turned away from war disputations. The courage, strength, and determination of the Boers shocked and surprised many Britons. The Boers were not the cowards the British public had been led to believe that they were. Even *The Times* was forced to rethink its positions, to a degree, as it began printing articles and letters more favorable to the Boers. Letters poured in

²³¹ “A Dangerous Crisis,” *Northern Echo*, 8 February 1901, 2

²³² “How Many Boers are There?,” *Dallas Morning News*, 26 October 1901, 6.

²³³ “Imperial Parliament,” *News of the World*, 16 December 1900, 2.

which suggested gratitude and respect for the humane way in which the Boers treated the British prisoners despite the poor treatment of Boer families in British hands.²³⁴ Many times the Boers were willing to settle the conflict and even sat at the peace table with Kitchener during the spring of 1901. Amazingly, Milner was not willing to declare peace without the unconditional surrender of the men who first invaded the Cape in 1899. Rather than peacefully stop the international embarrassment that was the Boer War, government officials elected to maintain their policies. General Botha and his men were prepared to continue the conflict, much to the consternation of the government. The Boers refused to submit to the demands of Milner. It was this valiant effort, which helped effect change on perceptions of the empire at home.

CONCLUSION

The Boer War finally ended in early 1902. The commandos grew weary of the fight, though their continued harassment showed no signs of weakening. Up until the month prior to the May peace treaty, the Boers were regularly besieging towns and capturing vital British positions. But the people as a whole were tired and the men available to go out on commando drastically decreased. Their international reputation was intact and signs that the Boers may yet participate in the government of South Africa emerged. The costly war never saw the Boers completely conquered. However, it is safe to say that it was a very expensive failure for Britain. Though Britain did regain the colonies, doing so cost the better part of £300,000,000, with a loss of almost 25,000 men. It was not just the British who were affected, in fact a sizeable portion of those who died were from the colonies that had enthusiastically sent help. Of the almost half a million

²³⁴ "The Character of the Boer," *The Times*, 19 February 1901, 12.

troops needed for the win, 25,534 came from New Zealand, Canada, and Australia.²³⁵ It is striking, however, that the disenchantment with the empire was much stronger in Britain than in its colonies.²³⁶ The Britons at home felt a certain sense of loss that was not shared throughout the empire. Perhaps it was the loss of Victoria in 1901, or a surprisingly long war may have just worn them out. Regardless, what was gained as a result of the war was a hollow victory at best, one that tarnished the image of the British Empire.

The true long-term victors of the Boer War were the Dutch settlers themselves. They fielded almost 80,000 men, of which 7,000 died. It was the 20,000 innocent women and children who died in the camps, however, that endowed their republics with priceless international support. Though Botha and his commandos were forced to sign a peace treaty with Kitchener, the self-governance policies of Campbell-Bannerman's government in 1905 returned control to the Boers less than a decade later. Such results are far different from pro-war assertions that the Boers had been humbled and forced to respect the British military.²³⁷ It was primarily the British military that benefited from the war. Just in time for the Great War, the British were shown the inadequacies of their leadership and weaponry. Military improvements were one of the few benefits reaped by Britain after the Boer War.

The Boer War was a painful entry of Britain into the twentieth century. Emerging from an era in which they had ruled the seas and countless continents, the country was

²³⁵ Conditions of Service of South Africa and overseas contingents employed in South African War, HMSO 1904. National Army Museum, London. File 8208-199.

²³⁶ "Commonwealth's Loyalty," *Northern Echo*, 21 April 1902, 3 Even as the war was concluded, city councils in Australia and New Zealand continued to take applications for soldiers willing to fight in South Africa. In fact, from the beginning of the war, and through its duration, there were always more applicants than the local councils could accommodate

²³⁷ "The War and After," *News of the World*, 9 December 1900, 6.

forced by a handful of farmers to reconsider its position in the world. Previous wars, fought across the empire, had been largely hidden from the public. Never before had a war been fought in which the voices of opinion could so loudly be heard. While it is obvious that during the majority of the war the government supporters saw the most success in enlisting support, the very nature of the war and the need for such defense of a position paved the way for changing perceptions of the empire. Quite remarkably, it was Chamberlain who so eloquently discerned the results of the war and what they meant for Britain. In defending his position against attacks from Germany, he stated,

Even our great losses in the war that has been forced upon us have brought in their train one blessing of infinite and lasting importance. The war has enabled the British Empire to find itself, and has shown . . . that if ever again we have, as in the past, to fight for our very existence against the world in arms we are supported by the Sons of Britain in every corner of the globe.²³⁸

In a new era that began to shun imperialism and focus on the nation, the Boer War delivered a lesson to the British citizens. They were tested in two battles, one domestic and another foreign, and the test showed them what they really wanted. The fierce competition to influence the outcome of this domestic battle, as the war raged in South Africa, enabled the British to emerge humbled yet better prepared for the issues of the twentieth century.

²³⁸ “Mr Chamberlain’s Response to von Bulow,” *New York Times*, 12 January 1902, 2.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

We are by no means the tolerant and freedom-loving people we have perennially boasted of being.²³⁹

Northern Echo, 1900

There have been times when men of simple, straightforward honesty and transparent clearness of purpose have been . . . necessary to the salvation of the people.²⁴⁰

Daily News, 1902

When the war between Britain and the Boers ended in 1902, important changes within the empire had taken place. For decades, previous governments had been content to remain isolated from the world as the wealth of its colonies buoyed Britain's international position. By the 1890s, the successes of the industrial revolution had produced increased education and fashioned an ever growing reading public. At the time of Disraeli, the public was regularly being fed on imagery of the empire and of the greatness of Britain. When Milner took it upon himself to provoke a war in South Africa, the stage was set for a novel method in which to create and fight a war. The men who began the conflict were very aware of the need for public support. Their awareness of this need is apparent in their diaries, their correspondence, and their actions. Milner did not provoke Kruger in a vacuum. Milner developed a plan to enlarge the empire and with

²³⁹ "A National Disillusionment," *Northern Echo*, 10 March 1900, 2.

²⁴⁰ A G Gardner *Daily News*, 6 March 1902, 4.

single-minded precision made it happen. With the help of other imperialists, the route to war was set and traveled. From day one, the populace was part of the plan, whether they realized it or not.

Rabid competition to control public opinion, by both government officials and members of the press, throughout the war was encouraged by increased readership. Growing public awareness provided a need for a new dialogue on empire, and larger discourse provided for a difference of opinions. Previous wars did not see such ferocious opposition to government policies poured out in the papers day after day. Humanitarians, anti-war activists, and anti-imperial politicians added a new element to this war. For three years the domestic battle to influence Britons roared on while the world watched a great empire flirt with self-destruction. There was a dramatic, almost desperate need to create and perpetuate images of empire. Knee-jerk reactions to every event on the battlefield, by both sides, drew the public into the dialogue.

The diplomatic changes and the end to splendid isolation have been written about extensively elsewhere. It is clear that the war in South Africa forced Britons to adjust their conceptions of themselves. Such reflection brought change that was timely for the Great War, which soon followed. The general public was keen to support the queen's empire for any number of reasons. The Boer War forced citizens to rethink who they were as a people and as an empire. Public debate on the value of the empire helped shift support away from maintenance of the empire by any means necessary. Once the government was no longer able to assume public support, succeeding governments were required to make serious changes in policy, which contributed to the decline of the British Empire.

Dominic Lieven wrote that if Britain were to maintain itself in competition with the United States and Russia, it would have to enlarge itself from United Kingdom to Empire.²⁴¹ The opinions and methodologies of the late nineteenth century imperialists, who fought so fervently to build a greater Britain, are understandable when based on Lieven's premise. The ruling classes understood the increased financial and political benefits that could be gained by building and maintaining an empire. The elites within the press and government officers opposed to expansionism understood the effects of unchecked growth. There was potential for international humiliation and domestic neglect. The war in South Africa was over maintenance of an area of the empire richly endowed with the treasures of the earth. But behind the guns and the veld, there was another part of the war that involved a creeping discussion on identity. For decades, the limitations of public discourse allowed public opinion to be crafted by various political ideologies. For the first time, Britons were no longer defined by sitting governments. Public and private reactions to the Boer War suggest that many citizens were willing to cast off imperialist stereotypes. Agitators on either side of the issue saw this evolution in imperial dialogue and pursued their desired goals vigorously.

W.T. Stead and Arthur Conan Doyle were two of the most famous and prolific writers of the war. Their opposing positions and international fame allowed them access to a large readership. The essence of the war is found in their writings. Stead often invoked religion and once compared pro-war supporters to those who urged the crucifixion of Christ.²⁴² His emphatic charges of injustice clearly showed him as a man who discouraged empire building both geographically and within the human psyche.

²⁴¹ Dominic Lieven, "Dilemmas of Empire 1850-1918. Power, Territory, Identity," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34, no. 2. (April 1999), 174.

²⁴² Koss, 50.

Quite distant from Stead, and often attacked for it, was the position of Doyle and his fellow imperialists. Upon completion of the war, Doyle wrote, "I can only repeat that the English officers and the English soldiers have shown in this war the profession of arms does not debase, rather ennobles man."²⁴³ Doyle firmly believed that there was great worth to the soul of Britons in having, serving in, and maintaining an empire. He felt no guilt in his part in crafting this image, while Stead assailed him for it and the disservice it provided to the British people.

The debate over empire did not begin with the war in 1899. One can look at past speeches of William Gladstone, Benjamin Disraeli, and even William Pitt to see engaging rhetoric over imperialist identity. The reign of Queen Victoria encompassed a vast era that enabled Britain to grow in power and prestige. Along with this growth came the development of an image. This image of empire, its wonder and mythology, created a public hypnotized by its grandeur. Often the public was willing to commit all for Britain, while at other times, they were simply ill informed, and so their actions were predictably loyal to sitting governments. The Boer War forced departure from this traditional relationship. This new atmosphere struck fear in the hearts of Unionists, while it gave hope to those who opposed the war.

The true winners of the Boer War were the public of Britain. They had lived in a haze of complacency for decades, and the conflict in South Africa allowed an awakening and recognition of identity. As reports from the press and visible anti-war writers emerged, there was a distinct realization that the cost of empire was not always justified. If Kitchener could allow 20,000 innocents to die in camps on the heated veld of South

²⁴³ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct* (New York: McClure, Philips and Co.), 116

Africa, what else had the British done? Had the conquering of India, the Sudan, or North America been as equally brutal? Much to the chagrin of Chamberlain, Milner, and Rhodes, the war opened a new national dialogue that eventually signaled the end of unchecked expansionism. Fewer than five years after the Jingo Election, the people cast out the Tories. Liberal governments, under Henry Campbell-Bannerman, refocused attention on domestic issues and improving relations with the continent.

The national epiphany could not have come at a better time. Germans watched enthusiastically as the British military struggled to defeat the farmers of the South African republics. With a war on the horizon, the humiliating defeats enabled Britons to reevaluate their military and their diplomacy. The protracted war in South Africa provided new feelings and experiences for the British. Other than Majuba, they had not been so soundly challenged for decades. And the challenge to the assumed perceptions of empire was new as well. A great and fearless press competed in a venture that paved the way for multi-sided discourse on the future of Britain and its empire. The fact that the war of words remained as vibrant as it did, despite setbacks throughout the war, is further evidence that the heated national debate had an effect. The election of 1900 returned many pro-Boer Liberals to office despite successes on the battlefield. Liberal victories, however small, showed growing disillusionment with the Tory government's operation of the war. That Campbell-Bannerman emerged from the war as a strong and respected national leader, despite his constant anti-war rhetoric, adds weight to the assertion that people in Britain had evolved. The novel conflict in the public domain aided the nation's self-analysis and contributed to the decline of the empire.

William Gladstone, the man who had enraged imperialists in the first Boer war, voiced a warning twenty years before Milner hatched his plan. Gladstone's domestic agenda saw little room for expansionism and the growing pains associated with it. He begged Britain to,

Look back over the pages of history; consider the feelings with which we now regard wars that our forefathers in their time supported . . . see how powerful and deadly the fascinations of passion and of pride.²⁴⁴

Prior to the war in South Africa, it was easy for the public to forget the lessons of the past. The public stage in which the war was fought was novel and helped citizens to all available information. The papers, pamphlets, and speeches provided avenues for competing dialogues to reach the people. The more literate public readily studied these opinions and reevaluated the ones they had previously held. The lessons learned from the Boer War enabled Britain to awake from an imperial slumber. The competitive nature of domestic dialogue was an important element of British transformation at the dawn of the twentieth century.

²⁴⁴ Pakenham, 1.

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