THE RELATIONS BETWEEN SIR ALFRED MILNER AND W.P. SCHREINER'S MINISTRY, 1898 - 1900.

The University of Cape Town.

A THESIS PRESENTED FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN.

BY

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JUNE 1971.

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PREFACE

This thesis compasses a period in South African history to which a considerable amount of attention has been devoted in recent years. Nevertheless it seemed worthwhile making a more detailed study of the activities of the Cape government. Originally I intended limiting this study to an examination of the relations between Milner and Schreiner, but found it necessary to extend the subject to include Milner's relations with the ministry as a whole, as well as Schreiner's relations with Hofmeyr. Schreiner rarely expressed his private opinion on matters of importance, so that it is difficult to disentangle his views from those of the rest of the ministry. The frankest insight into the personal relations of the individual members of the ministry comes from J.X. Merriman's correspondence, while J.H. Hofmeyr's papers throw much light on the relations of the Cape government with the two republics before the war, and make it clear that Hofmeyr was virtually an ex officio member of the ministry. It has not been easy to find a term to describe this group of people. Only two members of the ministry were members of the Bond, while the term " South African Party ", although used both by Schreiner and Merriman on occasion to describe the Bond and its followers in parliament was not sufficiently well established or clearly defined to warrant its use. Although inadequate I have, therefore, referred to them as the Schreiner ministry, with the reservation that Hofmeyr played an important part in their deliberations.

As far as the subject of this thesis has been concerned, two works have been of primary importance. These are E.A. Walker's biography of W.P. Schreiner, and Dr. T.R.H. Davenport's history of the Afrikaner Bond. Walker's biography of Schreiner was published in 1937, however, and since that time a considerable amount of material has become available which makes a reassessment of the relations between Milner and Schreiner worthwhile. The most important of these are the unpublished Milner papers and the British Colonial Office papers, as well as the papers of the Cape Colony in the Cape Archives, including those of the Prime Minister's Office, the Attorney General's Department and Government House papers up to the end of 1898, when they were removed by Milner to Pretoria, and which are not at present available. At the same time recent research has tended to judge Milner more dispassionately

than Walker and his contemporaries have done. Although Walker's study is both accurate and comprehensive, therefore, a reappraisal of the subject suggests that relations between Milner and Schreiner were more complex than Walker indicated. Dr. Davenport's book on the Afrikaner Bond is invaluable as the only comprehensive study of the Afrikaner community in the Cape at this time, and is closely concerned with Schreiner's ministry as the parliamentary representatives of the Bond. He is not concerned with the individual personalities of the ministry, however, or with their activities except insofar as they affected the Bond, so that a more detailed consideration of the part they played in South African politics does not seem out of place.

If, in this thesis, I have quoted somewhat extensively from actual correspondence, this is because I have felt that the flavour of these relationships is conveyed most vividly in their own words, and I have felt that this has an important bearing on a subject which is concerned as much with personalities as with the policies they initiated.

In conclusion I should like to express my appreciation to my supervisor, Mr. A. Davey, for the help he has given me, to the South African Library for the use of their extensive facilities and the patience with which they have borne with me, and to Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, for the use of the Olive Schreiner and W.P. Schreiner papers.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION - THE CAPE IN 1898.

When W.P. Schreiner became Prime Minister in October, 1898, Sir Alfred Milner had been High Commissioner of South Africa and Governor of the Cape for over a year. Milner, thus, had ample opportunity to make himself acquainted with the country and its people, and to form an opinion of the situation. Nor had he neglected to do so, for he had travelled extensively into remote districts and, initially, met a wide variety of inhabitants. By October, 1898, his views had firmly crystallised, and he was to deviate from them hardly at all. The political situation which existed when Milner arrived in South Africa in May, 1897, was largely the product of the Jameson Raid. In itself an absurd and melodramatic event, it had radically changed the course of South African history, destroying political affiliations which had been built up over previous decades, and dividing the country into English and Afrikaner racial camps. In the Transvaal an opposition to Kruger had been developing which, under the leadership of Commandant-General P.J. Joubert, included able and intelligent men, bent on reforming the corrupt and inefficient administration of the South African Republic. This is not to say that they were not staunch Afrikaner patriots, but they hoped to introduce an enlightened government which might have gone far to winning over the uitlanders, most of whom were more concerned about the irksome restrictions with which they were daily confronted, than with great imperial issues.[1] The Raid, however, destroyed the influence of the progressive party and reinforced the conservative Afrikaners' suspicion of the English, for the subsequent proceedings in Britain suggested that not only the government, but the Liberal opposition also, was compromised by the Raid. Afrikaners saw the Raid in direct terms as an unwarranted invasion of an independent country by a foreign power anxious to dominate them. For Britain it was a far more complex issue, involving not only Britain's supremacy in southern Africa, but also her prestige as a colonial power. Nor did the Afrikaners appreciate the subtleties of English politics which made it difficult for Liberal politicians to condemn a policy with which they had previously been associated. English politics in the nineteenth century was, in a sense, a family affair,

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1. C.T. Gordon - The growth of Boer opposition to Kruger, 1890-1895, 281.

involving a closely-knit group of people, most of whom had fundamentally related values and who were, above all, anxious to preserve Britain's honour. A wholesale condemnation of the policies which led to the Raid might have resulted in a storm which could have rocked Britain to its foundations and was a course which no responsible politician, whatever his party, could sanction. Politicians in the Cape could understand this, but they regretted Britain's attitude, nevertheless. Schreiner explained that :

> " What people feel deeply is the <u>insult</u> of the whole affair ... I am not, in this wretched affair, prepared to say that to elicit everything would have necessarily done good to the situation, - at any rate I am convinced that Sir W. Harcourt and Ellis etc. did what they honestly thought was best both in asking and forbearing to ask questions. But the effect here has not been to persuade the general public as I wish they, both English and Dutch, could have been persuaded, that the Imperial Government had not, even indirectly, any cognizance of the conspiracy afoot and gave no encouragement .... " [2]

In the Cape a profound division occurred. At the time of the Raid Rhodes had been in power, at the head of a government supported by the Afrikaner Bond. In any position which Rhodes might hold, he was bound to be a controversial figure, and even before the Raid there were symptoms of dissatisfaction at his methods. In 1893 three of the most influential and reputable men in Cape politics, John X. Merriman, J.W. Sauer, and James Rose Innes, had resigned from his ministry because, in the last resort, they could not countenance the expediency of his methods. [3] Yet Rose Innes, who was an astonishingly acute observer of the political scene, was conscious that beneath the surface there was another difference in outlook, which went far deeper, for he believed that the Bond was moving in directions which were opposed to the principles of many English-speaking colonists. Rose Innes could understand and sympathise with the lack of attachment which the Dutch colonists felt towards the Crown, [4] but he distrusted certain aims and racial sympathies, as yet not clearly formed, which they valued. In 1898 he expressed this antipathy cautiously to Richard Solomon, an advocate who was later to become Attorney-General in Schreiner's Cabinet, when he explained that : " The idea of working

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2. P.A. Molteno papers (P.M.P.), Schreiner to Molteno, 14.9.1897.
3. J. Rose Innes - <u>Autobiography</u>, 96 - 97; Innes papers (I.P.) Rose Innes to Archbishop Gaul, Kimberley, 28.10.1893.
4. I.P. Innes to Richard Rose Innes, 23.8.1897.

with Hofmeyr, Neethling, Van der Heever, and Co., is to my mind absolutely out of the question .... You cannot depend on these politicians, they are just the men that Rhodes and his gang will undoubtedly get at. " Although he disagreed with the extreme jingoes, he preferred to work with them, for, he said, " I know that they are personally honest and clean, and that on the whole one has much more in common with them when one gets down to the bed rock than with the Bond. " [5] While it is true that even so sagacious a politician as Hofmeyr had incautiously allowed himself to become entangled in Rhodes's financial tentacles, it seems likely that Rose Innes's charge of corruption against the Bond was not on the grounds of personal integrity. He felt, perhaps intuitively rather than consciously, that ultimately what the Bond desired was the supremacy of the Afrikaner nation and that, to this end, they were prepared to sacrifice too many of those principles which the English colonists held to be basic to individual liberty. This view was not true of every English-speaking colonist. Merriman, for instance, who believed passionately in human liberty, found himself able to espouse the Bond cause. But Merriman's personality was very different from that of Rose Innes. He was impulsive and enthusiastic, and he saw the issues of the day in clear relief. He saw the Raid, for instance, as a terrible injustice done to the Afrikaners, and he was prepared to throw all his being into a fight against the tyranny of an empire which could connive at such a crime. For him this was the major issue, rather than the more nebulous issues which Rose Innes regarded as being of primary importance. Rose Innes recognised this when he observed that :

> " For a long time before the Raid they [Merriman and Sauer] had gradually but surely drifted towards the Bond. You have not only got to look at their attitude to such measures as the Scab Act to see that. Then came the Raid and all that it involved. In their eagerness to condemn Rhodes they allied themselves with the Bond . ... " [6]

Of all the major figures in Cape politics during the decade between 1890 and 1900, Rhodes is the least easy to understand, particularly in retrospect. He had the gift of attracting able men and using them to advantage, yet he could be curiously careless in his choice of men when it suited him. He was also able to excite the support of the general

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5. I.P., Innes to Solomon, 7.2.1898
6. P.M.P., Innes to Molteno, 27.9.1898

public. The Raid broke his real power in Cape politics. Once Milner appeared on the scene he became a less significant figure. To contemporaries, however, this was far from being the case. He was still able to command vast and enthusiastic audiences when he appeared in public, and in the Cape the leaders of the newly formed Progressive Party regarded it as vital that he should be at its head - suitably tamed and groomed.[7] This point is worth emphasising, for it is fundamental to an understanding of the formation and operation of the Schreiner ministry. The bogey of Rhodes haunted them constantly. It was their distrust of Rhodes which bound them together and kept them together under stress. Above all they dreaded his coming into office again, and they used this threat both as a warning to one another and to their more extreme colleagues in the republics when they were urged to take stronger action against the machinations of the Imperial government.

Despite these tendencies to division, the colony had not been divided on racial lines prior to the Raid. On the contrary, there was an inclination for English and Afrikaners to unite on some points. Both resented Kruger's economic policy which, since the building of the Natal and Delagoa Bay railway lines, had excluded the Cape from a large part of the lucrative Transvaal trade. The attempts of the Cape government to assert their rights to a predominant share of this trade had led, in 1895, to a tariff war which resulted, on 1st October, in Kruger's closing the drifts across the Vaal to the Cape traffic. On the strength of an assurance from Rhodes and Schreiner, Attorney-General in the Rhodes ministry, that the Cape would support military action financially should it prove necessary, Joseph Chamberlain, then newly appointed as Secretary of State for the Colonies, sent a strong protest to Kruger to the effect that his action was a violation of the London Convention, and Kruger backed down.[8] Kruger's submission was not forgotten by the Imperial authorities who retained the hope, during the franchise negotiations before the war, that Kruger would, in the last resort, give way again. Rhodes professed to hold this view, while Schreiner understood it to be a view commonly, but mistakenly, held in England, and he repeatedly implored his friends there to disabuse their countrymen of the idea.[9] Rose Innes also believed that prior to the Raid there was

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7. E.T. Cook - Edmund Garrett, 142.
8. J.S. Marais - The Fall of Kruger's republic, 38 - 39, T.R.H. Davenport - The Afrikaner Bond, 160 - 162.
9. Innes, 193; W.P. Schreiner Papers (S.A.L.) (W.P.S.P.) Schreiner to John Ellis, 17.6.1899.

dissension amongst the Bond members themselves; divergent interests were clashing, and above all, Hofmeyr's relations with Rhodes, especially after the affair of the Logan contract which had resulted in his own resignation, had caused great dissatisfaction. [10]

The situation in the Cape before 1896 had, therefore, been a fluid one. Although the Bond was an efficiently organised party, it by no means commanded the allegiance of all the Afrikaners in the colony, while the loyalties of the English-speaking colonists were even less regimented. But the Raid closed the ranks of the Afrikaner Bond, and encouraged an Afrikaner nationalism which was bound to arouse the suspicion and opposition of the English-speaking community. [11] It became almost impossible for anyone to adopt a moderate position, although some men desired to do so. Rose Innes tried to take an independent stand, both anti-Rhodes and anti-Bond, [12] while Richard Solomon also tried to keep himself free from affiliations which might limit his independence. The correspondence between the two men, in which each tried to define his attitude, casts an interesting light on the drift of Cape politics after the Raid. Solomon told Innes that : " The only thing that makes public life in this country bearable is independence. To sacrifice that to an unscrupulous fellow like R -- is paying too dear a price for political honour. " Rose Innes was in substantial agreement with this point of view, but he was beginning to question the wisdom of making every problem subservient to the Rhodes issue. To Solomon's criticism of the nascent Progressive Party that : " Their real object is to bring Rhodes back into Africa, and they have the audacity to put forward a programme ... for which most of them don't care a d -- and everyone of which Rhodes, their chief, opposed and will oppose again ", he replied:

> " ... there appears to me to be only one clear course. We have for years past advocated a certain policy. People whom for many reasons we do not trust find it to their interest to advance or to say that they will advance that policy. How in the name of common sense can we run away from it on that account ? We can only do so if we say that the question of Rhodes or not Rhodes is to dominate everything, and as at present advised I cannot say that .... if I say that I will have no assistance in supporting progressive measures from Rhodes or from any man who believes in Rhodes what is the alternative ? Why simply this, that one must take refuge not merely in the camp of the Bond but in the camp of the extreme left wing of the Bond .... for these reasons I wished to take up the position of standing on a platform and not on a name. " [13]

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10. I.P., Innes to C. Cronwright-Schreiner, 2.9.1893.
11. Davenport, 167.
12. I.P., Innes to Dr. Bisset Berry, 8.1.1897.
13. Ibid., Solomon to Innes, 24.1.1898; Ibid., Innes to Solomon, 7.2.1898.

This, then, was the dilemma which confronted moderate men in the Cape after the Raid. Was Rhodes, and the corruption and tyranny he seemed to represent, the most important issue at stake ? The question was a difficult one to answer but, between 1896 and 1898, most men made their decision; and the flexibility which had been a feature of Cape politics, disappeared.

The two parties now confronting one another were the Afrikaner Bond and the Progressive Party. The Bond had attained its power largely through its appeal to, and organisation of, the conservative Afrikaner farmers. Although they were a potentially influential group, since they were both numerous and important to the Cape economy, their influence had been nullified because, unlike the urban English group, they were widely scattered, and they were unaccustomed to combined political action. The Bond had developed mainly under the guidance of Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr, and its firmly controlled organisation had made it a formidable force for many years. Indeed, it would be fair to say that for some fifteen years prior to the Raid no Cape government had been viable without the support of Hofmeyr and the Bond. Rhodes had been quick to see the potential of the new organisation [14] and, in alliance with Hofmeyr, he headed two ministries, from 1890 to 1895. To the Bond, therefore, Rhodes's defection was a double blow, a betrayal of their own faith in him, as well as an act of treachery against the Afrikaner people. Hofmeyr occupied an anomalous position in Cape politics, preferring to guide the party from behind the scenes, to occupying office as a parliamentary leader. For this reason Merriman had christened him the " Mole ", and this nickname gives a peculiarly apt description of his activities which were iunceasing, but for the most part not visible. [15] There were times, however, when his reticence probably did his party a disservice. It almost certainly increased Milner's dislike and suspicion of the Bond for he distrusted the manipulation of affairs when he could neither see nor control it, especially when members of his ministry were involved.

Before 1896, although an opposition to the Bond existed, it was inchoate, unsure of its direction and lacking leadership. When Rose

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14. Innes, 58.
15. Ibid, 58 - 59, 237.

Innes resigned from Rhodes's ministry he became the focus for this opposition, but he was reluctant to assume the responsibility for such leadership. In 1896 however, J.W. Sauer refused to continue as leader of the opposition in parliament and this function devolved on Rose Innes at the head of a somewhat vague group known as the South African Political Association. The S.A.P.A. had been formed in 1895 as an independent party which proposed supporting legislation entirely on its merits. Despite the respect which Rose Innes commanded personally, he was unable to satisfy the jingo element amongst the colonists, who, since the Raid, had become increasingly restless and articulate. From amongst their ranks was formed the South African League, an organisation which possessed the vitality and discipline which the S.A.P.A. lacked, and it rapidly gained a respectable amount of support. Although the League was not confined to the Cape, in that colony it formed the nucleus of the new opposition, combining with the more moderate elements to form the Progressive Party. Rose Innes was invited to become their President, but disliking their pro-Rhodes affiliations, he declined. Nor did he wish to see the S.A.L. and S.A.P.A. amalgamate since he objected to the division on racial lines which the League represented. Edmund Garrett, the editor of the Cape Times and a leading light in the S.A.L., urged Rose Innes to give his support to that movement, since he realised how valuable Rose Innes would be in attracting the moderates. As we have seen, Rose Innes hesitated to commit himself, but eventually he became associated with them in practice, if not in principle.[16] The League played a vitally important part in South African political life in the years immediately before the war. After the Raid South African Imperialists realised that Britain would no longer support any subversive efforts to obtain redress for the grievances of the uitlanders. What was needed was a strong organisation with fixed, clear-cut principles, which, by arranging constant public agitation on controversial issues, could educate public opinion both in England and in South Africa.[17] The South African League was the answer to this need, and was important since it provided a justification for British intervention in South Africa.[18]

Such was the general situation which Milner found at the Cape when

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16. Y. Sank - The origin and development of the Progressive Party 1884 - 1898, 136, 169; I.P., Innes to Dr. Bisset Berry, 8.1.1897.
17. M.F. Bitensky - The South African League. 13.
18. Ibid, 21.

he arrived in 1897, although the lines had not yet hardened irretrievably. So much has been written about Milner himself, his personality and his influence on South Africa, that there is little to add. However, it is perhaps worth drawing attention to certain aspects of his character which had a direct bearing on his relations with Schreiner and his ministry. Milner did not come from an affluent or a well-established family, and early in his life he realised that anything he achieved must be through his own efforts. He possessed a brilliant mind, and in order to win the position he desired, he developed a remarkable degree of perseverence and single-mindedness. These qualities stood him in great stead in his early career and, in South Africa, enabled him to cope with immense quantities of work with an efficiency and clarity of mind rarely rivalled. But it was exactly this ruthless determination to win which made him so unfitted to deal with the South African situation. Olive Schreiner, after reading his book <u>England in Egypt</u>, remarked with one of her flashes of intuition, " well, he is a man who will take good care that <u>he</u> is never on the losing side." [19] But the South African problem was too complex for a simple solution, it needed a man who could compromise, who was prepared to concede some victories to the other side, not a man with Milner's single-minded will to succeed. Moreover, Milner was a fervent imperialist who did not hesitate to state his conviction that it was Britain's destiny to civilise and rule those lands which Britons had settled. [20] Holding such views as these, Milner was peculiarly unfitted for a position which demanded that he work with, even tolerate, people whose outlook on life was totally different from his. [21] The aspect of Milner's thought which primarily affected Schreiner's ministry, however, was his dislike of democratic rule. This has been attributed partly to his failure to gain a seat in parliament when he stood for Harrow in 1885, and it has been suggested that this experience gave him a distaste for popular elections. [22] Certainly this dislike is consistent with his fastidious nature which rendered him ill-fitted for the hurly-burly of electioneering; with his authoritarian temperament; and his desire for logical and efficient administration, and his beliefs were directly opposed to the principles of democracy which, by its very nature, operates by a system of checks and

19. Olive Schreiner papers (O.S.P.) Olive Schreiner to W.P. Schreiner, 30.4.1897.
20. Marais, 172; G.H. Le May - <u>British supremacy in South Africa 1899-1907</u>, 8-9; A.M. Gollin - <u>Proconsul in politics</u>, 123, 127-132.
21. J. Buchan - <u>Memory hold the door</u>, 99; Gollin, 132.
22. Gollin, 21-22.

compromises. He himself attributed his difficulties in South Africa to undue interference from Britain as a result of the pressure of " parliamentary necessities, of Party, of rotten public opinion", while Lord Lothian, formerly one of his " Kindergarten", observed :

> " The unsolved problem of Lord Milner's life was how to reconcile this great tradition of government [of the British Empire] with democracy .... In every fibre of his being he loathed the slipshod compromises, the optimistic ' slogans ', the vote-catching half-truths with which democracy seemed to compromise the majestic governing art . " [23]

In this Milner was radically different from Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary. Chamberlain had attained his position through his mastery of the political machine. He had the mental toughness to be stimulated by public controversy and debate and he had, moreover, a genuine respect and liking for the ordinary voter, ill-informed though he might be. It was this, as much as his realisation of the inexpediency of arousing the British public and parliament by threatening the constitutional rights of the colonies, which led him to support Schreiner's ministry, inconvenient though it might be, and led him to disagree with Milner on the question of suspension of the Cape constitution.

Schreiner provides an interesting comparison with Milner. While Milner had grown up in the cultivated atmosphere of a German university town, followed by Eton and Balliol, Schreiner had spent his childhood in the isolated districts of the Eastern Cape, and enjoyed an irregular education in small country towns. For all its irregularity, he had a distinguished academic career, reading law first at the South African College, then at Downing College, Cambridge, and was finally admitted to the bar at the Inner Temple. To this extent his career roughly paralleled that of Milner. However, his ties with the Afrikaner community remained strong. Besides sharing their affection for South Africa, he had close friends amongst them, and eventually married Fanny Reitz, the sister of F.W. Reitz, President of the Orange Free State and later State Secretary in Kruger's government. In personality Schreiner and Milner had features in common which each appreciated in the other. Both were idealists with strong convictions, the difference being, as Rose Innes pointed out, that Schreiner, unlike Milner, did not try to impose his ideas on the others, but acted upon them himself. [24]

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23. Gollin, 48.
24. Innes, 191.

Both were respected for their integrity. John Buchan, Lord Tweedsmuir remarked of Milner that he was " the most selfless man I have ever known .... He simply was not interested in what attracts common ambition. He could not be bribed, for there was nothing on the globe wherewith to bribe him; or deterred by personal criticism, for he cared not at all for fame." [25] , while Sir Graham Bower, Sir Henry Robinson's ill-fated Imperial Secretary, said of Schreiner that he was " the honestest man I have met in politics." [26] Both were also determined men, however. Milner's inflexible resolve has already been noted, while Schreiner's arrogance was a fault which was frequently criticised. Bower said that he could be " opinionated and obstinate," and a somewhat critical observer, J.T. Molteno, accused him of being " always cocksure that he was in the right, and I have never heard of his expressing at any time doubt that he might have been wrong on any subject or occasion, great or small. " Yet Schreiner's arrogance seems to have been a defect of mannerism rather than of personality, for the same critic also observed that : " He could never see that there are times when offence is the surest defence. You are fighting with one fist tied behind your back when you innocently rely on sweet reasonableness", and comments on his " patience, his courtesy and his big and generous outlook." [27] Rose Innes noted that Milner and Schreiner each accused the other of an inability to understand human nature, and he considered that this was in fact, true of both of them. Milner's idealism led him to try and convert others to his point of view; and to condemn them when they were not, while Schreiner could be more quixotic than sensible. He cites as examples the occasion when Schreiner proposed that the Cape remain neutral in the event of war between Britain and the republics, and another occasion when he held a plebiscite amongst his constituents in order to decide whether he retained their confidence sufficiently to remain their representative in parliament. [28] His sister, Olive, believed that he was not fitted to be a politician at all. He lacked, she told him, an inborn political instinct.

> " It tells you what men really mean, when they shake your hand and promise to vote for you and say that you will come in at the top

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25. Buchan, 102.
26. I.P., Bower to Innes, 30.8.1899.
27. J.T. Molteno - Dominion of Afrikanerdom, 40, 147-148.
28. Innes, 190-191.

> of the poll and need have no fear; it tells you how large masses of people are moving, and will move and must move, and it shows you the line of political action which will arise years beforehand, if you have it in its highest form. It is quite distinct from all principles and views: it is simply a perception of what is, and of what is and is not possible. "

This political instinct, she said, characterised Sauer and Hofmeyr, but was completely absent in Schreiner. [29] Undoubtedly there is some validity in these criticisms of Schreiner's political ability, but the extent of their truth is something to be examined in the succeeding pages.

Milner's first months in South Africa were occupied with his efforts to make himself acquainted with the country. He arrived with strong views on the situation. He had been chosen as High Commissioner by Chamberlain because of his belief in the imperial cause, and because Chamberlain thought that he was the one man who could maintain Britain's prestige in South Africa. [30] The attitude of the British government to the Transvaal was hardening, and before he left England Milner had been involved in the drafting of a dispatch concerning the infringements of the London Convention by the South African Republic. This had provoked his consideration of Britain's position, for Milner did not want to see her adopt an intransigent attitude towards the Transvaal without being prepared to fight in the last resort. He told the Earl of Selborne, Under Secretary of State for the Colonies : " Where I differ from you is in thinking that our being compelled to have recourse to war is very improbable," [31] for he had already accepted the fact that the logical conclusion to the course of action he desired was war. He had been counselled to exercise patience, however, and for nearly a year he held his hand. He had hoped that an effective opposition to Kruger might develop in the Transvaal, but in this he was disappointed. [32] Moreover, he had little knowledge of local conditions at the Cape, which was " the key of the situation ." [33] A closer examination of the political condition of the colony did not please him. Initially he expressed a desire to win the confidence of the Dutch and he had hoped to bring round " waverers", but to do this he had to exercise caution: " ... if I appear to have taken sides at starting my influence in that direction will be thrown away". [34] This attempt was superficial, however. He made little effort to meet the leading Dutch colonists, let alone under-

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29. O.S.P., O. Schreiner to W.P. Schreiner, 30.11.1907.
30. Gollin, 32.
31. Headlam, The Milner papers, i, 38.
32. Marais, 175; 200-202; Le May, 12.
33. Headlam, i, 119.
34. Milner papers (M.P.), V. 7, Milner to Chamberlain, 15.5.1897.

stand their point of view, while the Bond he considered downright disloyal.[35] As far as the English-speaking colonists were concerned the situation was not much better. Above all they lacked strong leadership. Milner's opinion of Sir Gordon Sprigg, the Prime Minister, was low. In May, 1897 he told Chamberlain: " Personally I have no particular liking for Sir Gordon Sprigg ". Although Milner believed him to be honest, Sprigg was not a strong man.

> " He would not resist giving up some important point in the big game to secure an immediate Parliamentary advantage... Though English in sympathy, I should not be surprised to see him sacrifice Imperial interests to regain the support of the Bond, and indeed my chief reason for wishing to keep him in office is that I think things have gone too far for this and that the instinct of self-preservation will now keep him straight on Imperial lines."[36]

Nor, despite his political renaissance, was Rhodes desirable as the leader of the imperial party. The one man who seemed to possess all the necessary qualities was Rose Innes, who, unfortunately, did not aspire to be Prime Minister at the head of such a government.[37]

By the end of 1897 matters were approaching a crisis in the Cape. After the Raid, Sprigg's government had been provisionally supported by the Bond as the only government which could reasonably hope to hold together, and included in the ministry as Colonial Secretary was Dr. T.N.G. te Water who was a Bondsman and a close ally of Hofmeyr. The growing power of the Progressive Party put an increasing pressure on the members of the government to define their position in Cape politics. Milner's outright espousal of the Progressive's cause as evinced by his speech at Graaff Reinet on 3rd March, 1898, added to their strength. Milner explained that this speech, accusing the Cape Afrikaners of disloyalty to the Crown was a " very deliberate utterance on my part. I had for some weeks only been waiting for an opportunity to say what I said at Graaff Reinet." He believed that he could provoke division within the ranks of the Bond:

> " ... there are a number of Dutchmen in the Cape Colony - I think an increasing number - and even in the Bond itself, who, though they do not speak out very boldly, are thoroughly disgusted with the recent proceedings of the Transvaal Government, and are anxious to live on good and friendly terms with their English neighbours, and deplore the course pursued by the leaders of the Bond. It was to encourage and help these people, even more than to warn the extremists, whom I regard as hopeless, that I spoke as I did, and I

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35. Marais, 176-177; Davenport, 177-179.
36. Headlam, i, 63; cont. in M.P., V.4, Milner to Chamberlain, 25.5.1897.
37. Marais, 188; M.P., v.2, Selborne to Milner, 6.7.1897.

am inclined to think that my words have not been without effect." [38] Milner's speech was received with approval both by Chamberlain and the Colonial Office, who noted that he had " put the saddle on the right horse in language to which no exception could be taken - it will strengthen the hands of the loyal members of the Dutch party". [39] Shortly afterwards, however, they withdrew their support from Milner's aggressive policy, presumably as a result of pressure from the Cabinet. [40] The growing crisis in the Cape came to a head when Sprigg decided to introduce a bill to alter the delimitation of the constituencies. The bill was favoured by the Progressive Party who expected to benefit from redistribution since the alteration was needed in the urban constituencies where they were most strongly represented. Although the case for redistribution was good, the Bond objected since they feared above all a shift in the balance of power which might return Rhodes to office. Te Water resigned in protest, to the relief not only of the Bond, but also of Milner, who disliked te Water's Bond associations. [41] During the first session of parliament in 1898 Sprigg succeeded in getting the second reading of the Redistribution Bill carried, but immediately afterwards, on 31st May, he was defeated on a vote of no confidence introduced by Schreiner, and the House of Assembly was dissolved.

If Milner really believed that he could persuade moderate Afrikaners to support his policies, he was to be disappointed by the results of the 1898 elections. These elections, conducted with a virulence unknown to the colony, pitted Rhodes and the Progressive Party against the Bond in combination with some independents including Schreiner, Merriman and Solomon. Schreiner had emerged as the leader of the opposition in parliament during the preceding session, and was thus a prominent figure during the elections, heading the South African Party, as he preferred to call his alliance with the Bond. [42] Milner regarded the primary issue of these elections as being " whether the independence of the South African Republic or the welfare of the Cape Colony as a member of the British Empire, should have the strongest claim upon the Executive and

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38. CO 48/537, conf. desp. 9.3.1898.
39. Ibid, 9.3.1898; G.H. 4/8, conf. desp. 15.3.1898.
40. Marais, 208.
41. Davenport, 182; M.P. V.7, Milner to Chamberlain, 9.7.1897.
42. Marais, 224.

the Parliament of this Colony ", while Schreiner, by accusing the government in his no confidence motion of an unconciliatory attitude towards the Transvaal, also placed emphasis on this issue.[43] On the whole Milner favoured this division on racial lines since it militated against the return of a weak and vacillating government dependent on Bond support, a prospect he abhorred. In this way he would have either a government who supported his policies or a strong opposition which could restrict the activities of the government.[44] The most notable feature of these elections was the unusual expenditure of money, each party accusing the other of corruption. Rhodes accused the Bond of obtaining secret service money from the Transvaal, an accusation vigorously denied by Schreiner. While it is true that some of the Bond candidates compromised themselves unwisely, as in the case of J.W. Sauer who had apparently distributed blankets to native electors, the general consensus seems to be that these accusations had more validity in the case of the Progressive Party.[45] Certainly, the fastidious Milner found their methods distasteful. He commented to Selborne that the elections were " lively but very disgusting. There is apparently nothing which political human nature will not stoop to " ; while, he added, some of the plots of Rhodes's party were " truly astounding, yet I daresay a lingering sense of decency prevents my ever hearing the worst ".[46] He was further disgusted by the attitude of Sprigg's government after it had become apparent that they would not have a majority in the House, and they attempted to postpone the opening of parliament in the hope that they might, in the meantime, scavenge one or two more seats. Milner, however, declined to co-operate, commenting sourly that :

> " The temper of the government and many of their followers is still bad. They talk as if they would stick at nothing. I can only hope that during the next fortnight or so many ingenious and dirtyy combinations will have failed that, in sheer dispair, they will fall back on straightforward policy. I must say that of the plots I have heard of the ' dirtiness' is more evident that the ingenuity'".[47]

By contrast Schreiner conducted his campaign with tact, a fact acknowledged both by Milner and the Cape Times, who also observed that, though his speech to the electors of Malmesbury was a model of moderate

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43. Headlam, i, 255, 256.
44. Ibid., i, 260-261.
45. Marais, 224-225; Davenport, 183-185.
46. Headlam, i, 273; cont. in M.P., V.5, Milner to Selborne, 14.9.1898.
47. Headlam, i, 275-277; cont. in M.P., V.4, Milner to Selborne, 21.9.1898.

expression which " might for the most part have been written by any member of the moderately Progressive party", it did not express the views of the majority of the Bond, an opinion also held by Milner.[48] Despite evidence that Rhodes's agents were active in his own constituency,[49] Schreiner was returned for Malmesbury, while the Bond as a whole scraped to victory with a majority of one on a minority of votes. This election finally made it clear that the colony was divided on racial lines, for only two independents were returned, as opposed to nine in 1894, while only Stellenbosch and Oudtshoorn returned two opposing candidates, a practice which had been quite common in previous elections.[50]

Sprigg's defeat in the elections did not prevent him from trying to cling to office by buying three of the Bond members, David de Waal, and the two members for Caledon with the promise of a railway line from Sir Lowry's Pass to Caledon, and, in accordance with this promise, prepared a railway bill. When Schreiner moved a motion of no confidence, however, he found that his efforts had been to no avail, for, as Fiddes, the Imperial Secretary, observed, " Hofmeyr - who as a tactician could give the Progressives 20 in a 100 and a severe beating - had not been idle ".[51] The result was that the motion was passed and, on 12th October, 1898, Sprigg reluctantly tendered his resignation.

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48. Cape Times, 12.7.1895; Headlam, i, 262.
49. J.H. Hofmeyr papers (H.P.), V.7, (Election Agent) to Hofmeyr 30.7.1898.
50. Sank, 209.
51. CO 48/538, conf. desp., 19.10.1898.

CHAPTER II

THE INITIATION OF SCHREINER'S MINISTRY

On 12th October, 1898, Sir Alfred Milner called upon W.P. Schreiner, as leader of the Opposition in the House of Assembly, to form the new government. Schreiner chose his Ministers with care, his intention being, as Milner observed, " to make his government one of compromise and conciliation, or, perhaps it would be more correct to say, of comprehension ". [1] The ministry consisted of John X. Merriman as Treasurer, J.W. Sauer as Commissioner of Public Works, Richard Solomon, Attorney-General, A.J. Herholdt, Secretary for Agriculture, and T. te Water as Minister without Portfolio, while Schreiner himself retained the office of Colonial Secretary. It is not easy to estimate exactly how free a hand Schreiner had in the composition of his Cabinet, for although he was leader of the Bond in parliament, the real leader of the party was J.H. Hofmeyr. The presence of two Bondsmen in the Cabinet, A.J. Herholdt and more particularly Dr. T. te Water who was an intimate ally of Hofmeyr's, suggests that the latter had some influence in the choice of ministers. [2] Another candidate for the ministry who was also a Bondsman was David de Waal. His inclusion might have been a wise tactical move since, although a Bondsman, he was also a close friend of Rhodes and, in the new session of parliament he was to hold the balance of power. De Waal claimed that, although he had been instrumental in the choice of Schreiner as leader, it was on Hofmeyr's advice that he was left out of the Cabinet. [3] Although there may have been disagreement over de Waal, Schreiner and Hofmeyr almost certainly concurred with the inclusion of John X. Merriman and J.W. Sauer. The presence of Richard Solomon was the most unexpected feature of the Cabinet, since he had consistently refused to ally himself with the Bond, [4] and it was probably partly his friendship with Schreiner which induced him to compromise. It was hinted, however, that Schreiner had virtually promised Solomon a place in the ministry if Solomon would support his no confidence motion against the government. [5] As a ministry they represented a wide range of opinion in the colony, but their comprehensiveness by

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1. Headlam, i, 282; E.A. Walker - W.P. Schreiner; a South African, 56
2. Walker, Schreiner, 56.
3. Ibid, 56; Davenport, 190; J.H.H. de Waal - Die lewe van D.C. de Waal, 255.
4. T.P., Solomon to Innes, 14.7.1898; Walker, Schreiner, 56; Davenport, 190.
5. P.M.P., E.H. Bisset to P.A. Molteno, 26.10.1898.

no means implied weakness since most of them were men of unusual ability, with strong wills and individual opinions. In a perceptive analysis of the Cabinet, Milner noted that the most cohesive element was their united opposition to Rhodes and all his works.[6] They feared the effect which his unscrupulous methods would have on the morale of the colony, and they dreaded even more the tension which would develop in South Africa as a result of his attempts to further his ambitions. More positively, a unifying factor was their anxiety to preserve peace in South Africa at all costs. From the start they made a determined effort, not only to soothe exacerbated feelings in the colony, but actively to promote goodwill amongst the other colonies and states of souther Africa.

Despite their unity of purpose, from the outset elements of tension existed in the ministry. The very fact that they were men of personality and ability made the likelihood of a clash greater. Apart from Schreiner, the most outstanding character was that of Merriman. He had an attractive personality, warm and impulsive, and was a skilful and experienced parliamentarian. But he would not be an easy bedfellow in the Cabinet, for he was of too independent and impatient a temperament to follow a leader readily, and he rarely hesitated to express his sometimes idiosyncratic views pungently and forcibly. Relations with Schreiner were likely to be difficult, for he would not find it easy to bow to the wishes of a man with comparatively little political experience, and one, moreover, whose conscientious, deliberate manner was calculated to infuriate the more volatile Merriman. J.W. Sauer was Merriman's closest political associate. Like Merriman, he was a skilful and experienced politician, possessed of " a marvellously political nose ". Although, on the whole, he shared Merriman's views, he was more cautious, and readier to compromise on minor issues.[7] Richard Solomon, the Attorney-General, was also a personal friend of Merriman's but their political views diverged widely. Solomon was disinclined to support the claims of Afrikaner nationalism, however bitterly he resented Rhodes and the actions of the more extreme British colonists. His temperament was equally mercurial, however, and his convictions as firm, so that there was always the possibility of a clash between the

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6. Headlam, i, 280-284; Molteno, 39.
7. O.S.P., Olive Schreiner to W.P. Schreiner, 30.11.1907.

two men. Neither of the two remaining members of the Cabinet had such distinctive personalities, nor were they such distinguished politicians. Herholdt was the least disruptive element in the Cabinet, for he was capable and, though a Bondsman, tolerant in his views. Te Water held the most ambiguous position in the ministry. Like Herholdt, he was a member of the Bond, and of all the minister he held the most narrowly nationalistic views. He was not popular with his fellow ministers. Later on Solomon was to refer to him as " that brute Te Water ", while even Merriman regarded him with contempt.[8] He held his position in the ministry mainly by virtue of the fact that he was an intimate associate of Hofmeyr's and was, virtually, Hofmeyr's liaison with the ministry. As such he was viewed with the deepest suspicion by Milner and the British authorities.

It was for Schreiner to reconcile these diverse elements. In accomplishing this he had certain assets which favoured his success. He was a man of great personal integrity, a quality which was almost universally respected, and had a scrupulous sense of justice which neither his personal feelings nor the influence of anyone else could easily sway. He was also a man of fine intelligence and moderate, carefully considered opinions and, in spite of accusations of being only an idealist, he had the ability to recognise the facts of a situation as they existed, and act accordingly. Unfortunately he could also have an unconciliatory manner. His sister, Olive, accused him of arrogance - " the way you sneer at other men, the way you try to do everything on your own ... without asking anyone's advice or ever letting your colleagues know what you are doing !!!! ".[9] His political experience was slight. He had entered politics in 1892, and had immediately been taken into Rhodes's second ministry as Attorney-General. Rhodes's defection had been a terrible blow since he had great admiration for him. For some time after the Raid Schreiner continued to defend Rhodes, but the latter's brazen attitude and his refusal to acknowledge his guilt finally alienated Schreiner completely. Schreiner's association with the Bond had spanned his entire political career since Rhodes's ministry had been supported by the Bond, and the effect of the Raid was to draw him closer to them. During the British

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8. P. Lewsen - Selections from the correspondence of John X. Merriman, iii, 174; P.M.P., E.H. Bisset to P.A. Molteno, 26.10.1898; Walker, Schreiner 109-110.
9. O.S.P., Olive Schreiner to W.P. Schreiner, 21.12.1907.

enquiry into the Raid he had defended the Afrikaner point of view, warning Britain that their ties of nationality meant more to them than their affiliations to the British Crown. His political views, and in particular his conservative opinions on native policy made him acceptable even to diehard Bondsmen.[10] This background, and the fact that, of the possible candidates Schreiner was the least compromised by his previous political career, together with his native ability, persuaded Hofmeyr that he was a suitable leader for the party in parliament.

Milner had no illusions about the extent to which a Bond ministry was likely to sympathise with his views on the South African situation. Yet he was not unhopeful of the new ministry. Although there was a Bond government, there was not at present a Bond policy. He realised that a Bond government of moderate composition would probably hold Afrikaner feeling more effectively in check than an unscrupulous Progressive ministry would. At the same time the Progressives formed an unusually strong and united opposition, who were, for the first time, " pledged up to the hilt to a really Imperial policy ".[11] Under his guidance they could be a major factor in preventing a Bond policy from being implemented. Another factor which would ameliorate the situation, he hoped, would be Schreiner himself. Milner was encouraged by the moderate views which Schreiner had expressed, both in his election speeches and in parliament. Though he believed that Schreiner's views were not those of the average member of the Bond, Milner's encounters with the Prime Minister had thus far led him to hope that Schreiner might have the strength to be the effective, as well as the nominal, leader of his party. Milner even expressedtthe hope that Schreiner might, given time, and if not too harassed by the opposition, be able to " educate " his party.[12] At the same time Milner respected the ability of the new ministers, and their desire to set their house in order. He saw that there was nothing to be gained by prolonging the political excitement. He had found the actions of the Progressives since the elections thoroughly distasteful, and he felt that the ordinary business of the country had been too long delayed.

> " In my opinion an interval of a few months rest from political turmoil, which will give time for their passions to cool and for political leaders to think out a durable policy with some principles in it ... is even more necessary for the Opposition than it is for the Ministry " .[13]

Milner, then, was inclined to make the best of the situation, and to

10. Innes, 39.
11. Headlam, i, 265
12. Ibid, i, 282.
13. Ibid, i, 283-284.

turn it to his advantage, if possible. He was, on the whole, well-disposed towards Schreiner. He appreciated his strength of character, and his integrity, which was in marked contrast to that of his opponents, and he believed that Schreiner might be prevented from straying too far from the Imperial path.

The new ministry was not to be granted their breathing space, however. The Progressives were determined that a Redistribution Act, which they believed would return them to power, should be passed during the new session of parliament. To this end, and backed by the South African League, the agitated both in and out of parliament. Rhodes addressed a mass meeting in Cape Town, resolutions were sent in from Progressive strongholds all over the country, and the opposition refused to allow any work to go forward in parliament until their demands were met. Schreiner, however, was determined not to be hurried into passing an ill-considered act. In this decision he felt that he had the support of the Governor, who later told him : " You know that I always sympathised with your, as it seemed to me, reasonable demand to have more time to examine the question thoroughly, and I am sorry you could not get it ". [14] Eventually Schreiner was forced to submit however, for David de Waal, who felt that the deadlock should be broken, and may have come to some agreement with Rhodes, proposed a joint conference to arrange a compromise. [15] In the event, this was no bad thing for the government. An agreement was quickly reached, and after the by-elections which followed early in 1899 their position was consolidated. [16]

A semblance of peace now descended on the Cape. The government were able to set about their neglected legislation, while the Governor was able to make his long-postponed visit to England. Milner had wanted to return to England for some time, but it was Chamberlain who finally urged him to do so, against the expressed wishes of Schreiner and his Cabinet, who felt that the situation in the colony was still unsettled and that difficult constitutional problems might yet emerge. [17] To Milner, however, the time seemed propitious, with a settlement on redistribution in view and the prospect of relative peace in the rest

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14. W.P.S.P. (U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 8.12.1898.
15. Innes, 173; Davenport, 190.
16. Davenport, 190.
17. M.P., V.6, Milner to Chamberlain, 30.10.1898.

of South Africa. Both Milner and Chamberlain felt that it had become necessary to discuss future policy on South Africa at a personal level. In fact, Milner himself had no doubts about the position which Britain should hold in South Africa, and the methods by which she should maintain it. His Graaff-Reinet speech had been, in a sense, his manifesto. Thereafter everyone knew Milner's views, and the knowledge caused consternation in Britain as well as in South Africa. He was warned that Britain was not yet prepared to implement a militant policy. Selborne insisted that war could only be considered if they were almost unanimously supported by public opinion in Britain.[18] Because of this attitude of the home government, Milner had been forced to reframe his policy:

> " The only thing to do is quietly and in a scientific spirit to knock on the head whenever opportunity offers, the illusion on which the policy of ' laisser aller ' is based .... The only thing we must never do is to give them any encouragement in cherishing the ' coleur de rose ' view of the South African future, if left to itself ". [19]

But he felt that this was not in itself sufficient. More active steps were needed to guide public opinion. As soon as he arrived in Britain, therefore, Milner set out on an exhaustive round of visits to everyone who might have any influence on policy in South Africa. These included leading politicians of both parties, as well as journalists. He found that the " no war " policy still prevailed, but he endeavoured"to stamp on rose coloured opinions" and "sow some seeds" .[20] This policy was not without effect. Although the Colonial Office was not entirely converted to his cause, he gained the enthusiastic support of Selborne while Chamberlain, in spite of his caution, shared Milner's views on Britain's future in South Africa. [21] At the same time his attempts to gain the support of newspapermen was significant in view of the fact that it was the education of British public opinion which was to be one of his most important accomplishments in the months to come. In a cordial letter to Schreiner, Milner gave a slightly different emphasis to his impressions. He remarked somewhat ambiguously that " public opinion has been stirred on Imperial questions as it never yet has been in my life time, and it is impossible to say what may come out of it ", but added that interest in South Africa had decreased, and that perhaps " the policy of letting things come right of themselves

18. Headlam, i, 229.
19. Ibid, i, 237.
20. Ibid, i, 299 ; Marais, 231.
21. R.H. Wilde - Joseph Chamberlain and the South African Republic, 1895-1899, 85-86, 90.

should have a fair trial ". [22]

As it happened, it was while Milner was in England that the situation in South Africa began to crystallise. The South African League, both in the Cape and in the Transvaal, had become better organised and increasingly militant, and articulate. [23] In the Cape, backed by the Cape Times, they used every available opportunity to agitate both in support of their confrères in the Transvaal, and on their own account against the Cape government. This in turn provoked the Cape ministry, who found an unexpected ally in the acting Governor and High Commissioner, General Sir William Butler, for Butler proved to be almost as much opposed to war in South Africa as Schreiner and his colleagues.

The South African League found their first real opportunity for exciting public feeling in the treatment by the Transvaal government of the Cape coloureds working in the Transvaal. [24] Many of these people were skilled workmen, with full citizenship rights in the Cape, but in the Transvaal until recently they had been subject to rigorous pass laws, originally intended for the African labourers fresh from the country. In 1897, through Milner's intervention, their situation had been slightly improved, but it was still an uncomfortable one, and there appears to have been uncertainty about their true legal position. On the night of the 29th October, 1898, the Johannesburg police arrested a number of people in a raid under the pass laws. The South African League took up the matter with indignation. On the 23rd November a leading article was published on the subject in the Cape Times, together with affidavits purporting to come from people who had been treated with brutality by the ZARPs. The writer demanded that the Cape government take some action to protect its citizens. A week later Edmund Garrett, who, as well as being M.L.A. for Victoria West, was editor of the Cape Times, raised the question in the House of Assembly. Schreiner was incensed, for although he was not unsympathetic towards the plight of the coloured people, he regarded the matter as

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22. W.P.S.P., (U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 8.12.1898 ; Walker, Schreiner, 60.
23. Marais, 232; Bitensky, 95 et seq.
24. Marais, 180-181, 235-237.

being out of the hands of the Colonial government. In any case, he believed that the League were moved less by humanitarian zeal than a desire to make political capital out of their plight. [25] In a minute to Butler, the ministers explained the delicacy of their position.

> " Ministers have declined to be led ... into assuming formal functions of negotiation where Her Majesty's Government is, they believe, actively engaged in affecting by friendly negotiations an amelioration of the legal conditions under which some of Her Majesty's subjects exist who have elected to reside in the South African Republic, and they trust that in so declining to be induced into the semblance of unconstitutional action they are not and will not be misunderstood ". [26]

The excitement over the treatment of the Cape coloureds was soon afterwards overshadowed by the dramatic disturbances resulting from the killing of an uitlander, Edgar, by a Transvaal policeman. Although the Cape was not, on this occasion, directly involved, the incident had repercussions in the colony. The South African League took up the affair with great vociferousness, in a manner which indicated both to Schreiner and to Milner, who was still in England, the shape of things to come. The support which the League had gained in the Cape could be seen in the number and character of the meetings they held, at which they bitterly attacked the government of the South African Republic for the outrages which would " lead to the contempt and degradation of every British subject throughout South Africa unless remedied by Imperial intervention ", and they appealed to Britain for protection . [27] Schreiner was appalled. He reprimanded the League, warning them that their actions were only likely to exacerbate racial feelings and that, in any case, it would not be constitutionally proper for the Cape to intervene. [28] More important, however, Butler gave the Cape ministers an opportunity formally to express their opinion of the situation. In a strongly-worded minute they attacked the League:

> " They [Ministers] cannot refrain from expressing their conviction that the extra-Colonial activity of the soi-disant South African League, condemned as such activity is by a considerable proportion of English subjects of Her Majesty both in this Colony and the South African Republic, has proved and will continue to be, by accident or design, an obstacle in the path of all who here or

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25. Marais,240; Walker, Schreiner, 59.
26. C.9415, 69.
27. Marais, 240.
28. W.P.S.P. (S.A.L.), Schreiner to C.P. Crewe, 17.1.1899 ; C.9415, 60.

> elsewhere are working in the cause of advancing South African Union through the harmonious fellowship and co-operation of the different races and jurisdiction composing and governing the people of this great country ". [29]

In this minute Schreiner took the stand which he was consistently to maintain throughout the months to follow - a consciousness of the South African situation as a unity, and the need for a peaceful solution to its problems. At the same time he stressed that the interests of South Africa were those of the Empire, of which the Cape was an integral part. In attacking the South African Republic, the League was attacking the Empire, since their destinies were not separate, but bound up with one another. At the same time Schreiner was reluctant to accuse the Imperial authorities of deliberately fostering unrest in the Transvaal. The bitterness of his attack on the South African League was prompted partly by the need to account for the turmoil in the country, and their activities provided him with a useful scapegoat, while still enabling him to give his loyal support to the constitutional authorities. The ministry did not confine themselves to a condemnation of the League. They also added the weight of their approval to the decision of Butler and Fraser, the acting British Agent in Pretoria, not to forward the uitlander petition asking for the intervention of the Queen, to Britain. They probably agreed wholeheartedly with Fraser that the publicity given to the petition before it was presented to the British authorities would make Britain's relations with the Transvaal government almost impossible if it were transmitted. [30]

Milner put a very different construction on these events. He might complain that he would pay dearly for his holiday, but he was only bemoaning the fact that the situation had not been turned to the greatest possible advantage. For he saw now that in the South African League was the tool he needed " to get things forrader ". Their organisation of demonstrations over the Edgar incident had provided him with invaluable propaganda which no diplomacy could have achieved. [31] From this time he gave them his unstinting support. He was quick to defend them from Butler's attacks. " I may observe that the discovery that

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29. C.9415, 69.
30. Walker, 62; Davenport, 191; Marais, 239.
31. Bitensky, 106.

the League are a lot of reckless fire-eaters is quite contrary to my experience ... " [32] In addition, the Transvaal's treatment of the Cape Coloureds, and the Edgar incident, added weight to his accusations of maladministration in the South African Republic, while the Uitlander petition was potentially even more valuable in setting a precedent as the first " appeal to Caesar ". [33]

Curiously enough, Milner's opinion of Schreiner was not affected by the stand which the Cape government took in this matter. At the end of February 1899, he was still able to find Schreiner " far better than his Cabinet or his party ". [34] Evidently he thought that Schreiner, perhaps, deprived of his own support, had been over-influenced by Butler and the more extreme members of his Cabinet. He did not appreciate fully the strength with which Schreiner held to his conviction that the course the Imperial authorities were following could only bring disaster to South Africa. Nor could he understand that the intrinsic importance which Schreiner's legally-trained mind found in constitutional form, and which giving intensity to his loyalty to the British Empire, inevitably led him also to uphold the South African Republic's claims to independence.

Behind the noisy controversies which disturbed South Africa in the early months of 1899, another trend could be observed; a growing tendency for the two colonies and the republics to find grounds for mutual co-operation. Partly this was natural and inevitable with the increasing complexity of administration as the states reached maturity. The range of their common interests widened to include legal, medical, racial and economic matters. Already during Sprigg's ministry Natal had finally agreed to enter a Customs Union with the Cape and Natal, but it was left to Schreiner's ministry to make satisfactory terms. To ensure its success they were prepared to make considerable economic sacrifice, feeling, as Merriman urged, " that the advantages from a broad South African standpoint far outweigh such temporary loss ". [35] Schreiner was fortunate in finding the atmosphere in South Africa unusually conducive to co-operation. For many years the different states had considered their own interests first, but the Raid, and the

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32. Marais, 242.
33. G.H. Le May - British supremacy in South Africa, 1899-1907, 16; W.H. Hancock - Smuts, i, 83.
34. Headlam, i, 304-306.
35. J. van der Poel - Railways and customs policies in South Africa 1885-1900, 102; P.H. v. 183, 23.12.1898.

threat of Milner's presence, had drawn the Afrikaner elements in the country closer together, while Natal, which up to now had been particularly obstructive, had found in Sir Harry Binns, a Prime Minister who was prepared to collaborate with the other South African states. In a cordial interchange of letters, he and Schreiner discussed their common problems, particularly the implementation of the Customs Convention, and the ticklish question of alien immigration, which was a controversial subject since it concerned mainly the immigration of Asian aliens. The two Prime Ministers found themselves in sufficient agreement to consider tentative plans for a conference on these topics, to which they proposed inviting the Orange Free State as well. [36] These plans failed to come to fruition, however. Chamberlain, prompted by Milner who was still in London, telegraphed to Sir Walter Hely Hutchinson, the Governor of Natal, explaining that, though he was not in a position to oppose such a conference openly, he would be relieved to see the proposal fall through. " If invitation reaches your responsible advisers it would be a good thing if they could be induced to decline. They might say they have already legislated on subject of alien immigration sufficiently for Natal purposes ". This ploy was successful, for Hely Hutchinson responded readily. " I did effectually put a spoke in the Bond wheel by setting my Ministers against a Conference ". He did not feel that his ministers could be relied upon not to co-operate with the Cape government, but he promised Milner, " If he [Binns] has to retire, I shall make the checkmating of the Bond my principal object in forming a new Ministry ". [37]

The failure did not put an end to Natal's desire to settle her differences with the Cape and Free State, however. The Natal government was quite prepared to welcome Merriman when, accompanied by Free State officials, he arrived there to discuss a possible solution to problems arising from the Customs agreement, and it is likely that they reacted favourably to the suggestion of a conference to cover a wide range of interests, despite Hely Hutchinson's attempts to discourage Merriman. [38] Of all the Cape ministers, Merriman was the most ardent supporter of " samenwerking". In addition, he had a number of influential contacts

36. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Binns, 17.12.1898; 9.1.1899.
37. M.P. V.7, Chamberlain to Hely Hutchinson, 6.12.1898; Ibid, V. 11, Hely Hutchinson to Milner, 28.12.1898; Walker, Schreiner, 65
38. M.P., V.11, Hely Hutchinson to Milner, 28.12.1898.

in the republics, and these he now proceeded to sound on their views. He wrote to M.W. Steyn, the President of the Orange Free State, suggesting that the Free State might be able to use its influence to draw the Cape and the Transvaal closer together.[39] He was also able to gain some insight into the opinions of the Transvaal authorities through Edouard Lippert, who, though one of the Rand capitalists, as the holder of the controversial dynamite monopoly, had the confidence of the Transvaal government. This move of Merriman's caused an unhappy disagreement with Schreiner, however, not only because Schreiner's pride was hurt at such delicate negotiations being carried on without his, the Prime Minister's, knowledge, but also because he was shrewd enough to see that Lippert was a most unwise choice of intermediary, being not over-scrupulous, and an object of suspicion to the British.[40] When this door was closed, Merriman had to seek elsewhere for an insight into Transvaal politics, and this he soon found in J.C. Smuts, the Transvaal Attorney-General. He opened his correspondence with Smuts ostensibly to settle a difference over riverain rights, but soon established a valuable exchange with him. To Smuts he now urged the value of a conference:

> " I am convinced that as long as we go on writing and firing off newspaper articles at each other we shall never get nearer an understanding of our mutual difficulties - whereas a talk over common affairs must draw us together. ...Let us begin to settle South African affairs in South Africa - not in a newspaper six thousand miles away ".[41]

Smuts was rather more cautious, warning Merriman that a discussion of differences might only create new difficulties. Nevertheless, he was prepared to consider the matter, for he agreed that South Africa's future might depend on their ability to work together.

When Milner returned to South Africa early in 1899, therefore, he found to his dismay that the Cape government was taking a determinedly independent line. His acquaintance with Schreiner was still superficial, for soon after his return, Schreiner left Cape Town on a protracted tour of the Eastern Province and the Transkei, and Merriman was left to broach the subject of a conference. He found the idea quite favourably received, and he and the Governor were able, fairly amicably, to settle the possible scope of the conference, to include

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39. Lewsen, ii, 335.
40. Ibid., iii, 4-13; Walker, Schreiner, 61-62.
41. Smuts papers; ed. by W.K. Hancock and J. van der Poel, i, 219-220.

such controversial matters as a Board of Health, University, riverain rights, and an Appeal Court, The impression which Milner made on Merriman on this occasion is particularly interesting. He wrote to Schreiner:

> " I hope I may be mistaken, for Milner has [such] a curious nervous fashion of mind that one can never see exactly what he is driving at, but I never came across a man in his position ... who filled me with more apprehension for the future - a well-meaning good man who is destined to wreck the ship unless we look after him, and withal a man who will have to have the looking after very carefully done or he will shy out of the course ". [42]

He was profoundly disturbed, for he sensed acutely Milner's highly-strung, powerful will, but the patronising note of the conclusion suggests that Merriman was inclined to underestimate him. For Merriman, Rhodes was still the evil genius of Cape politics, and he had not yet grasped the fact that a more austere, penetrating force was at work. It would be useful to know how Schreiner reacted to this letter, for it seems likely that he would come to share Merriman's view. At the same time Merriman's failure to understand Milner was partly a result of Milner's reticence with his ministers. His relations with Merriman on this occasion were disingenuous, for he had no intention of encouraging the conference plans, but he could not disclose his views without incurring the accusation of failing in his duties. From the first, therefore, Milner's lack of frankness was to mar his relations with his ministers.

On the successful reception of his proposals by Milner, Merriman proceeded to issue invitations to a general all-South African conference, and to consider in more detail the conditions under which they should meet. Almost immediately an insuperable obstacle became apparent. It seems to have been part, at least of Schreiner's original intention, that Milner should be present as the representative of those British territories which were not self-governing. [43] Milner himself, in stating the terms on which he was prepared to co-operate, did not so restrict the scope of his office, and so great was the distrust of the two republics of the British government, that they were not prepared to participate without this limitation being defined. They feared that the High Commissioner's presence would be interpreted as being that of the Paramount Power, and used as a precedent on future occasions,

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42. Lewsen, iii, 21-24; Walker, Schreiner, 66-67.
43. Lewsen, iii, 40.

implying Britain's right to intervene in the internal affairs of the republics.[44]

Their mistrust was probably justified, for in fact Milner's view of this proposed conference were very different from those which he had given Merriman to understand he held. In this desire to " settle South African affairs in South Africa" he saw a dangerous threat to British Imperialism, " an anti-British Boer intrigue", but he realised that he could not openly oppose this trend without laying himself open to the accusation that he was deliberately sabotaging attempts to promote racial harmony in South Africa. As far as South Africa was concerned, this might not have daunted him, but he knew that Chamberlain's support was dependent on the attitude of the British public, and he could not afford to provoke their suspicion. Behind the scenes, therefore, he begged the aid of the Governor of Natal once more. " Anything you can do to keep Natal lukewarm or critical about such suggestions will be a real help ". At the same time he did his best, by restricting the scope of the conference, to render it relatively innocuous.[45] Under these circumstances, when it became clear, as he had optimistically foretold, that the conference would not come off, he was greatly relieved. He did not attempt to hide his pleasure from Schreiner, whose decision it was to postpone the conference, since Schreiner did not feel that the High Commissioner could now be excluded. He consoled Schreiner cheerfully with the reminder that there was still much useful work to be done within the confines of the colony.[46]

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44. Lewsen, iii, 30-33; 37-38; Smuts papers, i, 228; Marais, 260-261; Davenport, 192.
45. Headlam, i, 304-306, 365.
46 W.P.S.P., (U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 18.4.1899; Headlam, i, 366.

CHAPTER III
DISILLUSIONMENT.

By mid-April 1899 the comparatively relaxed atmosphere of the first quarter of the year, when Milner could spare the time to visit England, and Schreiner to investigate the remoter corners of his colony, had evaporated. The new ministry had started its term of office with the desire to administer the colony efficiently, and to promote the settlement of South African problems by South Africans in South Africa, through creative discussion and co-operation. But in this latter aim they had so far been unsuccessful for the presence of Britain, and her concern with her status in South Africa, were factors which had to be taken sufficiently into account. As Britain became increasingly concerned with the question of her relations with the Transvaal, so, too, did the focus of attention of the Cape government also come to centre on the Transvaal problem. From April until the outbreak of war in October, the Cape government were obliged to confine their activities largely to the promotion of peaceful compromise between Britain and the South African Republic. Milner found it expedient to encourage this attitude although he did so somewhat reluctantly. In the preceding months he had discovered that the ministry was capable of using its energy and initiative to achieve results which ran contrary to his own desires. If he was to continue to work in harmony with a Bond government, therefore, he must channel these energies into paths which at least ran parallel to his own. He knew that the attitude of most of the influential Afrikaner leaders in the Cape, especially Schreiner, Hofmeyr and Sir Henry de Villiers, the Chief Justice of the Cape Colony and one of the most highly respected men in Cape politics, was moderate; that they admitted the need for reform in the Transvaal, and that they feared that war could only bring calamity to South Africa. He believed that their moderation and abhorrence of war could be turned to his advantage. He reasoned that, if these men could be convinced that under no circumstances would Britain yield in her demands, then they must of necessity be forced to put all the pressure they could on the South African Republic to meet Britain's wishes, in order to avert war. At the beginning of May 1899 he told Sir Walter Hely Hutchinson that he was sure that, once they were convinced of the resolution of the British government, " the whole force of the peace-at-any-price party will be

directed to getting the Transvaal to give in. Sir H. de Villiers is decidedly on that tack already, and with a little more pushing Schreiner will follow suit ". [1]

In formulating this policy, Milner was aided by factors of which he was not aware. The Cape and Free State government were indeed agreed that Kruger's administration could be considerably improved. Even one so unsympathetic to uitlander grievances as Merriman was dismayed by what he saw in the Transvaal when he visited the republic in January, 1898. Already in March of that year he had appealed to President Steyn to use his influence with Kruger to improve conditions, in terms which would have delighted Milner:

> " ... one cannot conceal the fact that the greatest danger to the future lies in the attitude of President Kruger and his vain hope of building up a State on a foundation of a narrow unenlightened minority... I am quite sure that you have done what you can in modifying the attitude at Pretoria; but I entreat you, for the welfare of South Africa, to persevere, however unsatisfactory it may be ... Humanly speaking, the advice and goodwill of the Free State is the only thing that stands between the South African Republic and a catastrophe ". [2]

Appeals from Liberals in England reinforced this impression that reform in the Transvaal was necessary. Amongst these was Frederick Mackarness, a London barrister who was later to play a leading part in the conciliation movement in England which set out to obtain a settlement to the war favourable to the republics. Mackarness's ties with South Africa dated from 1883 when he had been Cape correspondent for the London Daily News. At this time he also became friendly with Merriman, and their friendship was renewed five years later when he revisited the Cape. Now he had pointed out to Merriman that the British people regarded taxation without representation as tyranny, and that, if Kruger wanted their sympathy, he must rectify this situation. The Cape government, he said, could play a vital part in urging reform, but if they, who represented the Afrikaner, pro-Transvaal colonists, should fail, support for military intervention by the British government, would increase. [3] The Cape leaders were, therefore, inclined to be receptive to Milner when he intimated to them that he expected them to do their share in securing a settlement with Kruger. [4]

During the first half of 1899 the situation in the Transvaal

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1. Headlam, i, 359; Marais, 272.
2. Lewsen, ii, 301-302.
3. J.X.M.P., Mackarness to Merriman, 10.3.1899.
4. M.P., V.12, Milner to Chamberlain, 29.4.1899.

itself was becoming more strained. Although the Kruger administration was making genuine efforts to reform, the uitlanders were becoming steadily more vociferous. The South African League was the main mouthpiece for the expression of their discontent, and they did so, partly by organising a series of meetings, and partly by presenting a second petition to the Queen, containing a still more extensive criticism of the Transvaal government than the previous one. This petition was not allowed to go astray, and provoked a serious indictment of the Transvaal which Chamberlain laid before the Cabinet at the beginning of May. At the same time the failure of Smuts's negotiations with the capitalists to reach an agreement on controversial problems, which was effected by Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, representative of one of the mining companies, but who was also a staunch Imperialist, reduced the possibility that the Transvaal government might reach a rapprochement with the Rand leaders without the involvement of Britain. [5]

In support of his policy of coaxing Schreiner into line, Milner now decided to give Schreiner proof of the goodwill which Britain felt towards him personally. On the 14th April, he telegraphed to Chamberlain suggesting that the K.C.M.G. be conferred on Schreiner, ostensibly in gratitude for the contribution he had persuaded the Cape to make to the Royal Navy, and the passing of Simon's Bay Naval Defence Act; in other words, for his exhibitions of loyalty to the British Empire. He believed that the offer would be acceptable to Schreiner who " is very sensitive about English opinion", though he might decline the honour because of the Bond. Milner had another reason for making the suggestion, however.

> " Matter is of some importance as in view of rising storms in Transvaal and great consequent increase of party bitterness in colony I foresee considerable trouble with some of my Ministers ... But I have some hopes of holding Schreiner and Solomon who are not by any means prepared to go all lengths with the Bond and are in their own way attached to the Imperial connection". [6]

Clearly he hoped, by this display of confidence, to encourage Schreiner's pro-Imperial tendencies. More important, he still desired Schreiner's support, and he was not prepared to oust the Schreiner ministry in favour of one headed by Sprigg or Rhodes, for it was doubtful if they

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5. Marais, 248-256.
6. M.P., V. 12, Milner to Chamberlain, 14.4.1899.

could obtain enough support in the country to maintain themselves in office, while the present ministry might at this juncture prove more useful. In the event, as Milner half-expected, Schreiner refused the honour with the excuse that he feared any moderating influence he had with the Bond extremists could be impaired by the acceptance of a title. Milner was forced to accept this decision with complaisance, but his disappointment was reflected in his comment to Chamberlain that no help could be expected from the Prime Minister on the " vital question" of the Transvaal. [7]

Since Milner's attempt to conciliate Schreiner had not been as successful as he had desired, he abandoned the hope that Schreiner might be converted to the Imperial point of view and turned to the employment of more intimidating tactics. At the end of April he had " several long interviews" with the Prime Minister, during which he tried to instil a feeling of unease into him. He warned Schreiner that the situation in the Transvaal had become " intolerable", and that, " I personally would do everything in my power to prevent the opportunity passing without attainment of radical reform ". The Governor's determination had the desired effect for Schreiner, greatly perturbed, responded by promising to do all he could to alleviate the situation himself, since he feared that the intervention of the British government might be disastrous. But he was " greatly in the dark" as to what Britain " really wanted". Milner, however, was not prepared to elucidate for he suspected that Schreiner, though honest, was trying, at Hofmeyr's instigation to beat down the minimum terms for a settlement which Britain was prepared to accept. He accepted Schreiner's offer of help grudgingly, therefore, only on the condition that his advice was followed, but privately he believed that he had succeeded in influencing the behaviour of the Cape ministry:

> " I greatly doubt, whether Schreiner and Hofmeyr, who is certainly behind him in this action, can shake the obstinacy of the South African Republic. But it would be a point gained if we can commit them to the advocacy of substantial reforms and I believe that, if convinced of the determination of Her Majesty's Government, they can be pushed into urging something very radical in the way of enfranchisement". [8]

These interviews had a profound effect on Schreiner. Milner had

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7. W.P.S.P., (U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 20.4.1899; M.P., V. 12, Milner to Chamberlain, 24.4.1899.
8. M.P., V. 12, Milner to Chamberlain, 29.4.1899, Chamberlain to Milner, 2.5.1899; Marais, 271.

shown such inflexible resolution that he could not but realise that there was no alternative to reform but war; yet he still did not know what steps the Cape ministry was expected to take. All that was clear was that more decisive action than polite appeals to Kruger was urgent.

A few days later this uneasiness was reinforced by messages from England which Schreiner, Merriman and Hofmeyr all received, impressing upon them the necessity of obtaining concessions from Kruger. Of these the cable sent to Schreiner by John Ellis had the greatest effect. Ellis was a leading member of the Liberal party in the House of Commons and had been a member of the committee appointed by the House to enquire into the Raid, in 1897. The proceedings of the committee had a strong influence on his future attitude to South Africa, for he deeply deplored Rhodes's actions. The inquiry had brought him into contact with Schreiner who had come to London to give evidence before the Committee. Ellis became one of Schreiner's closest confidants thereafter, for Schreiner had a high regard for his opinion. When, therefore, Ellis received information from an unnamed but authoritative source that " things were extremely critical", and that " even a slight concession would do, but some concession was imperative if war was to be avoided", he immediately sent a strongly-worded telegram to Schreiner.[9] Schreiner, in turn, conveyed Ellis's message to Smuts, intimating that Ellis had based his warning on " sound knowledge". At the same time Hofmeyr received a similar communication from Sir James Sivewright.[10] The latter, formerly a member of Rhodes's ministry, had, after an interview with Chamberlain, informed Hofmeyr that a meeting with Kruger would be acceptable to the British government, and Hofmeyr realised the importance of taking the initiative in arranging such a meeting. Finally Merriman received a brief telegram from Mackarness urging that " No moment should be lost in urging concessions from Pretoria".[11] The source of these messages is obscure but it seems probable that rumours of an indictment of the Transvaal which Chamberlain was just then preparing for the consideration of the Cabinet, or of Milner's despatches to the Colonial Office provoked them. As well as increasing the misgivings of the Cape ministry, however, these messages did suggest a

9. A.T. Bassett - The life of the Rt. Hon. John Edward Ellis, 167; Smuts papers, i, 229-230; W.P.S.P.,(S.A.L.),Schreiner to Ellis, 17.6.1899.
10. H.P., Sivewright to Hofmeyr, 6.5.1899; Davenport, 193, Marais, 273.
11. W.P.S.P. (S.A.L.),Mackarness to Merriman, 6.5.1899.

practical step which they could take to relieve the situation, and feelers were immediately put out to discover whether a conference would be agreeable to the President and the High Commissioner. Through Smuts both Hofmeyr and Schreiner tried to impress upon the South African Republic the urgent necessity for co-operation.[12] Smuts was inclined to make light of their fears, and attempted to throw the ball back in their court by suggesting that it was the Bond victory in the Cape, and Britain's consequent fear of Afrikaner nationalism which had provoked the crisis.[13] He implied that the Cape Afrikaner party had, therefore, a considerable responsibility for the crisis, but both Hofmeyr and Schreiner denied this. Hofmeyr warned Smuts to " cherish no illusions about Colony", and pointed out the danger of Rhodes coming to power should the Cape ministry act less tactfully than they had done,[14] while in a letter to Smuts on 19th May, Schreiner made it clear that their influence with the British government was slight; that: " there no longer existed the same almost determining power ... in shaping the policy of the Imperial Government which used to be seen and felt".[15] In addition, both they and other members of the Cape government turned to the Orange Free State for assistance, urging that co-operation could do no harm, and might do good. Their intention was that the meeting between Kruger and Milner should be as informal as possible, and it was soon agreed also, that Bloemfontein would be a more suitable venue than Pretoria for the conference.

On the whole, responses from the two Boer states seemed propitious, and on 9th May, Hofmeyr broached the subject with the Governor. Ironically enough, Milner was already beginning to think in terms of a direct confrontation with Kruger. On the previous day he had telegraphed to Chamberlain, making such a proposal and suggesting that: " if we can only get into negotiations with them we can compel them either to adopt specific reforms, or else, by refusing them, to show their invincible obstinacy and justify us in taking stronger measures". Milner's idea, therefore, was to present an ultimatum rather than to negotiate a compromise, and he preferred to meet Kruger on his own terms.[16]

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12. H.P., Hofmeyr to Smuts, 6.5.1899, Smuts to Hofmeyr, 8.5.1899; Hancock, 91.
13. Hancock, 91-92; Smuts papers, i, 233-235.
14. Smuts papers, i, 235.
15. Smuts papers, i, 237-239.
16. Marais, 273.

Not surprisingly, he received Hofmeyr's proposal with little enthusiasm. Indeed, he found himself in a delicate position. He did not view with favour an idea which emanated from such a source, but the fact that the scheme was a direct result of the pressure which he had applied to Schreiner a few days previously, and the fact that Schreiner himself was largely responsible for the project, made it difficult for him to reject it. [17] In a telegram to Chamberlain, Milner explained his dilemma:

> " To refuse absolutely would strain relations with Schreiner who I think honestly believes that good might result from interview and urges it very strongly and would afford ground to less well-meaning persons to denounce us for losing opportunity of peaceable settlement". [18]

Moreover, the proposal was most untimely, for it interfered with the plans of the Colonial Office who were preparing just then to take the offensive in the diplomatic battle with the South African Republic. A blue book, to include Milner's most aggressive despatches, and Chamberlain's despatch in answer to the uitlander petition, was being compiled [19], but both Milner and Chamberlain realised that the publication would have to be postponed if the conference plans were to go forward. Any other course would give rise to the accusation that Britain did not really want to negotiate a peaceful settlement. Despite their dislike of the situation, therefore, it was decided that Milner must agree to meet Kruger in Bloemfontein. [20]

As soon as the proposal was made to him, however, Milner began to take the initiative in the negotiations. He wanted to manoeuvre Britain into a position where she could legitimately assume the right to dictate the conditions on which the parties were to meet. On the 10th May, the day following that on which the invitation had been issued to him, Milner, in an interview with Hofmeyr, told him that he had had a " change of temperament"; that he had received a telegram from Reitz, the State Secretary of the Transvaal, on the suzerainty issue, which was framed in " irritating terms". [21] It would seem that Milner was looking for a pretext, either for refusing to attend the conference, or, if it should materialise, to have an assurance that he would gain something from the meeting. In the event, Hofmeyr managed to smooth over the difficulty by offering such an assurance.

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17. Headlam, i, 373.
18. M.P., V.12, Milner to Chamberlain, 10.5.1899.
19. Marais, 265-270; Wilde, 96-103.
20. M.P., V.12, Chamberlain to Milner, 12.5.1899.
21. M.P., Memo by Hofmeyr, 10.5.1899.

but the episode is interesting as an example of the methods Milner used for gaining the initiative when he found himself in a disadvantageous position.

Above all, Milner was determined to ensure that none of Kruger's allies should be allowed to interfere unduly during the conference. The first obstacle was President Steyn, under whose aegis the conference was to be held. When the Governor informed Chamberlain of the invitation, he at once made it clear that he was not prepared to accept Steyn as an intermediary, and in this decision Chamberlain concurred.[22] Milner wrote to Steyn, therefore, suggesting that it would be inconsistent with the dignity of the latter to play a part in the negotiations; his part had been to bring Kruger and Milner together, Steyn had no choice but accept this position.[23] The suggestion that Hofmeyr should also be present at the conference received even shorter shrift. Merriman had suggested on 17th May to Abram Fischer, a member of Steyn's government, that Hofmeyr should be invited to Bloemfontein unofficially, as he believed that Hofmeyr " is the only man on our side who has any weight with Milner", but Milner refused to allow him to go.[24]

The situation was less simple when Schreiner diffidently suggested that he should accompany the Governor to Bloemfontein, ostensibly in order to consult Steyn on the problem of the collection of duties at the Cape ports, but also in order that he should be on hand should Milner desire it.

> " Please do not suppose for one moment that I am trying to force myself upon the situation. Your wish as to my going will determine the question, and you may think the idea not a good one".[25]

The idea that Schreiner should also be present in Bloemfontein was not entirely due to his own inspiration, for, on 17th May, several days before he made the offer to Milner, Fischer had telegraphed Hofmeyr to say that their Transvaal friends had expressed a wish that Schreiner should also go to Bloemfontein.[26] Hofmeyr replied that Schreiner might be persuaded to go provided both the President and High Commissioner were agreeable. But Milner was not pleased. He countered Schreiner's complaint that the British government distrusted the Cape ministry

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22. M.P., V.12, Milner to Chamberlain, 10.5.1899; Ibid, V.12, Chamberlain to Milner, 12.5.1899.
23. Headlam, i, 375-376.
24. Lewsen, iii, 32.
25. W.P.S.P.(S.A.L.) Schreiner to Milner, 22.5.1899; Headlam, i, 391-2, cont. in M.P.V.12, Schreiner to Milner, 22.5.1899.
26. M.P., Fischer to Hofmeyr, 17.5.1899, Hofmeyr to Fischer, 18.5.1899.

by replying that it was largely their influence which had induced him to acquiesce in the conference scheme, but he continued to object to Schreiner's presence in Bloemfontein. To Chamberlain he commented that Schreiner might " weaken his hand", and added: " ... it is no use yielding any more to Schreiner, as, if we mean to take a decided line about the Transvaal, split between the present Ministry is bound to come sooner or later ..." [27] This is the first occasion on which Milner mentioned seriously a rift with Schreiner, but it was perhaps more an indication of his pique at the position in which Schreiner had placed him over the conference.

Chamberlain, however, took a different view of Schreiner's request. He urged Milner to agree to it. He reasoned that if Schreiner were not allowed to attend the conference, he could attribute any failure to Britain's unwillingness really to seek a peaceful settlement with Kruger. On the other hand, if Schreiner were allowed to go, he would try to reconcile Kruger and Milner. If this should not prove possible, Milner must ensure that a refusal to compromise should come from Kruger, when Schreiner, unable to support such an extreme attitude, would surely be drawn into Milner's camp. The only danger he could envisage was that Milner might be forced to decline Schreiner's proposals, while Kruger accepted them, thereby gaining Schreiner's sympathy; but he considered that this would leave Britain no worse off than they would have been had Schreiner not gone to Bloemfontein. He concluded with the hint: " Bear in mind however that the attitude of Cape Prime Minister will have a most important influence on the ultimate decision of Her Majesty's Government". [28] This was a curious point of view for Chamberlain to express, because he had not previously shown much regard for the opinion of the Cape ministry. Traditionally the views of the Cape government had been taken into account by the British government in the formulation of their policy in South Africa, [29] but of late they had been increasingly disregarded. Chamberlain was perhaps aware though, that if the attitude of the Cape ministry could be shown to be unreasonable, or if they could be persuaded to co-operate with Milner, he would have an easier task in converting the Cabinet to the support of his policy in the Transvaal.

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27. Headlam, i, 392.
28. M.P., V.12, Chamberlain to Milner, 26.5.1899; Marais, 278.
29. R. Robinson, J. Gallagher and A. Denny- Africa and the Victorians, 72-73, 213-214.

Whatever Chamberlain's reason for supporting Schreiner's proposal,[30] Milner was not moved by his arguments. In the draft of his reply, he countered Chamberlain's reasoning at some length:

> " In many conversations I have had the opportunity of testing Schreiner's view and I know he would urge my accepting propositions which I feel to be totally inadequate. His going to Bloemfontein would not only cause worst impression in South Africa, dismaying friends and encouraging enemies, but it would almost certainly end with my falling out with him during the Conference. By keeping out of it he remains uncommitted and when the position of both parties is clearly defined he may hesitate to throw in his lot against us, whereas at Bloemfontein with everything still vague he would have much less hesitation about thwarting me".[31]

What perturbed him most, however, was the suggestion that Schreiner's opinion might carry weight with the British government and he devoted considerable attention to minimising the importance of the Bond in South African politics. He claimed that numerically the Afrikaners were in the minority in the colonies, and he considered it an accident that they were in power at all, while at the same time, the situation of loyal British subjects was being disregarded. Milner was concerned then, lest the views of the Cape ministy might effectively moderate British policy in South Africa. He had already seen how they could influence his plan of campaign by acting on their own initiative, and not on his advice, despite the fact that he had previously told Schreiner that this was the only condition on which he was prepared to work with them. He was determined that henceforth their influence should be minimal. At the same time, he was not yet ready to break with the ministry, for, as long as Schreiner proved conciliatory, he continued to co-operate with him. Although the Colonial Office had doubts about the wisdom of Milner's decision, his views were allowed to prevail, and Schreiner did not go to Bloemfontein.

The Bloemfontein conference was never likely to succeed. Neither Milner nor Chamberlain had ever expected it to do so, for neither envisaged the settlement in terms of a negotiated compromise.[32] Even if headway had been made in the negotiations, the probability existed that they would have foundered as Milner created further obstacles.

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30. Wilde, 104-105, suggests that Chamberlain's decision was in the " mainstream of constitutional development".
31. M.P., V.12, Milner to Chamberlain, 27.5.1899.
32. Marais, 279-280.

He had, for instance, already arranged that, if progress should be favourable, uitlander leaders should come to Bloemfontein to settle the terms of the " pacification". [33] Although it was the fate of the uitlanders which was being settled, it seems possible that this move would have exacerbated Kruger, who had already refused to allow the uitlanders to take part in the discussions. [34] The primary obstacle to a successful conclusion to the conference had always been Milner's attitude. To him the conference had never been more than an inconvenient interruption of his plan of campaign. A refusal to meet Kruger,

> " would have been too likely to lead to an outcry both here and in England that we wanted war. Now I don't want war, but I admit I begin to think it may be the only way out. But if so, we must seem to be forced into it". [35]

At best it provided another example of Kruger's intractable behaviour, and therefore justified Britain's actions in the eyes of the world, and, more specifically, in the eyes of the British public. Before he and Kruger met, he wrote to Greene, expressing the belief that " The real turning point of the battle is coming after - and I think very soon after the conference break up". [36]

It did not come as a surpise, therefore, to Chamberlain and the Colonial Office to hear that Milner had brought the conference abruptly to a close, however much they might deplore the haste with which he had acted. [37] Indeed, although the Colonial Office frequently dissented from Milner's view, in practice they supported the line he took during the succeeding months. Chamberlain's impulse at the conclusion of the conference was to issue an ultimatum to Kruger at once, but for once Milner was more cautious. [38] The uitlander case was not yet sufficiently clearly defined, and public opinion, especially in the colonies, was not yet ripe for such a move. Milner could not be certain of the whole-hearted support of Natal, for the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Binns, had died at the beginning of June, and the new ministry was, as yet, an unknown quantity; while in the Cape there were still such influential men as Rose Innes, of whose support he was also not sure, and who, it was worth his while to cultivate. The loyalty

33. M.P., V.4, Milner to Greene, 19.5.1899.
34. J.P. Fitzpatrick - South African memories, 180.
35. Headlam, i, 384-385, cont. in M.P. V.4, Milner to Selborne, 17.5.1899.
36. M.P. V.4, Milner to Greene, 19.5.1899.
37. Wilde, 110-111.
38. Ibid., 113-114; Marais, 286.

of the British colonists was an important factor to be taken into consideration. In the Cape the support of the Afrikaners was likely to be, at best, passive, and there was the strong probability that, in the case of war, many would rise in defence of their kinsmen in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. In addition, there was the unsatisfactory military situation, for Milner was convinced that the troops available in South Africa were hopelessly inadequate, and, if war broke out, Britain would be heavily reliant, in the beginning at least, on colonial volunteer forces. Besides the need for time to reorganise the troops, there was still the faint hope that Kruger might, if pushed hard enough, yield to British demands, and diplomatic channels had to be fully explored.

In South Africa, the news of the breakdown of the conference came as a greater surprise, and to many as a bitter disappointment. Milner's supporters were inclined to view the result in a pessimistic light, considering the failure to be total and war the inevitable end, [39] but Kruger's sympathisers refused to admit that this was so. It was generally felt amongst the Dutch-speaking South Africans that the cause of the failure lay at Milner's door, and that Kruger had been more conciliatory than might have been expected. The South African News, for instance, expressed the opinion that " the President has receded an immense way from what we may call the impossible position, on the franchise ... " , and that his attitude to the uitlanders had changed radically, and Hofmeyr agreed with this verdict. [40] Schreiner too, adopted this argument, that Kruger had proved unexpectedly liberal in his concessions, for he wrote optimistically to John Ellis:

> " I still hope that very good results will follow. It is certain that President Kruger then went ... much further than could possibly have been anticipated; and I am with good reason convinced that, if details had been more debated in a spirit of reasonable compromise, some ... points would have been further conceded ... upon the whole, a man must be prejudiced indeed who would deny that Sir Alfred Milner achieved much at the Conference and I only wish his reply to a deputation here had shown more appreciation of his own success". [41]

Although the criticism of Milner which appears in these words is slight, it does indicate something of the uneasiness which Schreiner was increasingly feeling at the Governor's behaviour. It is plain that he

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39. Cape Times, 8.6.1899.
40. Davenport, 194-195; Ons Land, 8.6.1899; South African News, 8.6.1899; Hofmeyr, 538-9.
41. W.P.S.P.,(S.A.L.),Schreiner to Ellis,17.6.1899. The deputation to which Schreiner referred was organised by Garrett to congratulate Milner on the firmness of his stand at the conference and met him on 12th June. Rose Innes was the only leading opposition member who refused to attend. See also page 43.

felt the onus was on Milner to display " a spirit of reasonable compromise", and he conceived it as his task in the following months to foster this spirit, since he was in a position to exert an influence on both parties. On 11th June, shortly after Milner's return from Bloemfontein, Schreiner asked the Governor in an interview to convey to Chamberlain the opinion of the Cape ministry, that Kruger's franchise proposal was " practical, reasonable, and a considerable step in in the right direction". He added that the Cape government felt that it was right that the British government should be acquainted with their opinion, and Milner admitted that he expressed himself moderately. Milner gathered from this interview, and from Hofmeyr, that the Cape leaders intended putting further pressure on the Transvaal, but he placed little reliance on this. He was determined now to press on with his own plans, regardless of the efforts of his ministry, for he considered that if they should now effect any change in Kruger, it would be entirely due to the resolution of Her Majesty's Government.[42]

Because they felt that useful concessions had already been gained at the Bloemfontein conference, the leaders of the South African Party were determined to put every pressure they could on the South African Republic to effect a compromise with Britain. From the day the conference ended they were in constant correspondence with members of the Orange Free State and Transvaal governments, particularly Fischer and Smuts, making suggestions and offering advice on the best policy to adopt. In addition, Hofmeyr proposed calling a Bond meeting " to damn those who still talk of war as the only solution", and to urge Kruger to concede reforms, for " the Transvaal can lose nothing thereby but succeed in maintaining friendly relations".[43] Both Smuts and Steyn suggested that it was for the Bond to take the initiative in promoting peace; that the fate of Afrikanerdom depended on their loyalty to the brotherhood. They felt, perhaps, that the responsibility lay with the Cape Afrikaners partly because they were in the best position to exert an influence on Milner, and persuade him to adopt a more reasonable attitude.[44] It became apparent, however, that there was some disagreement on the exact role that the Cape should play, for Hofmeyr could not agree that a united Afrikanerdom - " preaching pleasant things " - would be sufficient to alter Britain's policy, while

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42. Headlam, i, 438-439, cont. in M.P. V.13, Milner to Chamberlain, 11.6.1899.
43. Davenport, 195; H.P., te Water to Steyn, 9.6.1899.
44. Smuts papers, i, 243; Walker, Schreiner, 76.

the Transvaal was inclined to take offence at some of the amendments proposed by the Cape.[45] In the end it was decided that Fischer should come to Cape Town to sort out their differences and decide what their next move should be.[46]

While the Cape ministry was trying to salvage what it could from the ruins of the conference, Milner was encouraging his own supporters, and doing his best to convert the " mugwumps " to his cause. On the 12th June, soon after his return from Bloemfontein, he met a deputation of the leaders of the South African League, and told them plainly that Britain was determined to obtain radical reform for the uitlanders by some means. He considered that this speech did much to consolidate his position in the Cape. He reported to Chamberlain that the

> "British South Africans are absolutely <u>united and in better heart</u> than they have been for twenty years. Their confidence in <u>you</u> is profound and they support me with really touching heartiness. The Dutch are wavering".[47]

Although this speech was in reality a precursor of his 4th May despatch, both Schreiner and the Bond press greeted it hopefully as holding out a promise of a peaceful solution to the crisis.[48] One result of this meeting, and Milner's subsequent interview with Rose Innes, who had refused to join the deputation, was that the latter was moved to express publicly his opinion that Kruger's proposals were inadequate. To all intents, therefore, Milner had acquired a valuable convert.[49] The South African League itself, during these months immediately following the Bloemfontein conference, conscious of Milner's approval, vociferously expressed its disapprobation of the policy of the Cape government in a series of " Good Hope " meetings, by passing resolutions condemning their actions. Schreiner was convinced that these meetings contributed greatly to the current unrest but was unable to counteract them effectively in view of the fact that he had pledged himself to prevent the Bond press from commenting on the situation.[50] All this, however, only set the stage for the big offensive planned by the Colonial Office, for it was now decided that the blue book which had been in preparation before the conference, should be published.

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45. Davenport, 195; M.P., te Water to Steyn, 9.6.1899; Ibid, Fischer to te Water, 10.6.1899.
46. Davenport, 195-196.
47. M.P., V.4, Milner to Chamberlain, 14.6.1899; Headlam,i, 428-429; Marais, 287.
48. Headlam,i, 439; <u>South African News</u>, 13.6.1899.
49. Marais, 287; Innes, 175-179; <u>Cape Times</u>, 14.6.1899.
50. Marais, 287; W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Ellis, 5.7.1899.

The appearance of the blue book, [51] even more perhaps than the failure of the conference, marked the beginnings of the final decline in relations between Britain and the Transvaal. The failure of the conference had disappointed men's hopes of a quick settlement, but for many the blue book destroyed these hopes entirely, for the blue book was virtually a public declaration of intention of the British government. It included Milner's " helot " despatch, which maintained that " the case for intervention is overwhelming ", and Chamberlain's reply to the uitlander petition which contained a vigorous indictment of the Transvaal administration. The Cabinet had reluctantly sanctioned the publication of the blue book, for they realised that it committed them possibly to pressing the uitlander case to the ultimate conclusion of war; and the fact that they did so indicated that Milner's despatches, intended to strengthen Chamberlain's hand in the Cabinet, had done their work. The other aim behind the production of the blue book was the " education " of British public opinion, for without their support the government did not feel able to force the issue. The publication of the blue book had been postponed because of the Bloemfontein conference, but, when it was decided, immediately after the conference, that the time was not ripe for an ultimatum, it was decided to publish the blue book to prepare the way for more decisive action.

The first hint that South Africa had of this blue book came when Milner, during the interview with Schreiner on 11th June in which the latter had expressed approval of Kruger's franchise proposals, warned Schreiner that the South African Republic was shortly to receive an important communication from Her Majesty's Government, " and that after that Government S.A.R. being able better to review the situation, would perhaps be more willing to listen to advice". [52] Schreiner conveyed this warning to Hofmeyr who decided, in view of the uncertainty of the situation, to postpone his Bond meeting, to the regret of Smuts who still hoped for an expression of Afrikaner solidarity from the Bond. [53] Reports of the contents of the blue book appeared in the press in South Africa on 15th June, immediately after it was published in Britain, and were received incredulously by the Bond.

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51. C.9345
52. Headlam, i, 439.
53. Smuts papers, i, 248-250.

The Bond press refused to credit the truth of the cable, preferring to wait until the blue book arrived in South Africa before commenting on it. In particular, they deplored the accusations of disloyalty of the Dutch colonists, the South African News commenting : " That Her Majesty's High Commissioner should think such thoughts is a grave, and might easily become a calamitous fact ". [54] Inevitably these reports affected Milner's relations with his ministry:

> " Relations between me and Ministers are getting strained, though we are personally friendly. Of course publication of my despatch of May 4th of which extracts are appearing in the Press greatly annoyed them ". [55]

Schreiner was certainly greatly perturbed, particularly by this despatch, which Milner showed him when the first press reports appeared in South Africa. He told Milner frankly: " It would be idle for me to deny that in many respects it pained me." In consultation with his colleagues, and, with Milner's permission, with Hofmeyr, he decided to delay the publication of the despatch in South Africa for as long as possible. The original blue book would take some weeks to reach the country on the mailboat, when it would become generally available. They hoped by this decision to minimise the effects of the despatch, which were likely to affect adversely Fischer's franchise negotiations then in progress. Schreiner also did all he could to prevent discussion of the despatch in the Bond press, with success, as has been seen above, and he asked Milner to use his influence with the British South African press to achieve the same objects. Although Milner agreed with Schreiner as to the publication of the despatch, he somewhat disingenuously denied any influence with the press. [56]

Milner's relations with the Cape ministry at this time should be seen against the background of these events, for they coloured his attitude towards them. After the appearance of the blue book he felt more confident of the support of the Cabinet in England. In South Africa the growing strength of the South African League, and the enthusiasm of his supporters, convinced him that the English-speaking public were now staunchly behind him. For these reasons he found it less necessary to conciliate Schreiner, for the consequence of a breach

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54. Ons Land and South African News, 15.6.1899; Lewsen, iii, 171; see also Davenport, 196-197, for a discussion of the charge of disloyalty.
55. Headlam, i, 439-440, cont. in M.P. V.13, Milner to Chamberlain, 15.6.1899.
56. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Milner, 20.6.1899; Headlam,i, 443.

with the Cape ministry would be less inconvenient that it would previously have been. He no longer believed that the Cape ministry could effect any radical change in the franchise proposals of the South African Republic, and it may be doubted whether he really wished them to do so. At the same time it seemed possible that a Progressive ministry might now obtain sufficient support to maintain itself in power. Personally, Milner's relations with Schreiner had deteriorated steadily from the time that the Bloemfontein conference had been proposed. As a result of his attempt to co-operate with Schreiner, Milner had found himself an unwilling party to the conference, and he was disinclined to make the same mistake again. He had had quite enough of the " impartial Afrikander",[57] and he confided in Schreiner less and less. The publication of the blue book did much to render their relations more awkward, for one of the indirect results of its appearance was the revelation of the part Milner was playing in the formulation of the policy of the Colonial Office with regard to the Transvaal. It was true that previous to the publication Milner had been regarded with suspicion in South Africa. Merriman had observed early on that Milner's arrival meant trouble to South Africa, and, when he met him in Bloemfontein, Smuts made the same observation. Nonetheless, the general impression had been that Chamberlain was the prime aggressor.[58] Philip Lyttelton Gell, who had been an intimate friend of Milner's since their days at Oxford, and as a director and later President of the British South African Company had an informed interest in the South African scene, questioned the wisdom of dissipating this illusion.

> " I expect it will be best in the long run that your un-moderation should <u>not</u> be known unto all men. Your conciliatory <u>reputation</u> is an asset. If I were J.C., I expect I should be reluctant to dissipate the value of your imputed suavity ! " [59]

That Milner's reputation was effectively destroyed when the blue book appeared may be seen both by the reactions in the Bond press, and by the comments of such Afrikaner sympathisers in England as F.A. Molteno, who, after reading the despatch, became convinced that Milner was the only man in the British government who really wanted war.

> " You will observe particularly, if you look at Mr. Chamberlain's despatch, that he suggested a conference even before Mr. Hofmeyr's and Mr. Schreiner's suggestions had been received, and as an evidence of the Government's moderation, he had even agreed that Sir Alfred Milner should go to Pretoria. Observe it is Sir Alfred

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57. M.P., V.4, Milner to Chamberlain, 14.6.1898.
58. Walker, 76; Lewsen, iii, 56.
59. M.P., V.29, Gell to Milner, 25.5.1899.

> Milner who suggest drastic measures, and I may say that I have heard some time since on very good authority that when he was last here he urged drastic measures, but Mr. Chamberlain would not hear of them. I would not give full belief to this at the time, but every page of this document just published tends to prove such to be the case. Is it to be wondered at that the Conference failed when Sir Alfred Milner was the only man who did not want it, and who wished drastic measures instead". [60]

Schreiner was indeed profoundly disturbed by Milner's despatch of 4th May and he analysed the reasons for his disquiet in a series of long letters to John Ellis. These letters are worth considering in some detail for they are amongst the very few letters extant in which Schreiner ventured privately any criticism of the British government, and, although implicitly rather than explicitly, of the Governor. His sense of duty and loyalty rarely allowed him to do so, for he believed that such criticism would only contribute to the strife, and ruin any hope of influencing the British authorities. His reasons for objecting to the despatch were various. For one thing, he could not believe that the case for intervention in the Transvaal was overwhelming. The Rand population was materially prosperous and competent to conduct its own affairs. Moreover, Kruger had already done much to improve his administration and had indicated that he was prepared to reform the franchise. Schreiner was, in fact, astounded by the accusations made against the Transvaal.

> " Please believe me that both as Minister and personally, I keep a keen eye open to wrong acts and grievances which are referred to. I beg you to persist in requiring information as to the details, - of which we are so ignorant. The broad questions of difference are known, - but it seems to me strange that so many British subjects should be suffering acts of injustice of which we know nothing. We are working and will work for Peace and Reform, - but it is made harder and harder to hope, as the pace is forced." [61]

The principal reason for his distress, then, was that the Cape ministry should have been left in ignorance of Britain's real attitude to the uitlanders, and this theme is continued in his later letters, when he instanced the publication of the blue book as a notable example of the extent to which Milner failed to confide in his Prime Minister. The accusation that the Cape Afrikaners were disloyal also upset him.

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60. P.M.P., P.A. Molteno to C. Molteno, 14.6.1899.
61. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Ellis, 20.6.1899.
62. Ibid., Schreiner to Ellis, 5.7.1899.

He believed that on the whole the Dutch population were " loyal to the core ", while he and Hofmeyr, representatives of the Afrikaner population, were actually working with Britain to obtain a more liberal franchise for the uitlanders. The obscure sources from which illustrations of this disloyalty had been obtained were equally a cause of pain, for they showed only too clearly the prejudice of the author's mind. Schreiner commented bitterly:

> " Then picture, if you can, my feeling of pain and regret at the perusal of the contents of the Blue Book, which it is deemed wise and statesmanlike to bring before the world when conferences and negotiations are in full working. Is this diplomacy ? Can you blame shortsighted people, if they conclude that the proofs point rather to the picking of quarrels." 63

This was as far as Schreiner allowed his criticism of the British government to go, however. He reserved his main attack for the Progressive press who, he believed, were deliberately inciting and misinforming the ignorant public, and making his task of keeping the peace still more difficult. It would seem from these letters that Schreiner was growing increasingly disillusioned. Although he endeavoured to interpret the Governor's actions favourably, it was being forcibly borne upon him, firstly, that nothing was going to deter Britain from achieving the submission of the Transvaal, and secondly, that Milner was largely instrumental in formulating this policy. Above all, however, he was disturbed by the lack of confidence which Milner had shown in him. It appeared that he had misunderstood the footing on which their relationship stood, for not only had Milner failed to confide in him concerning matters which were of real importance to the future of the colony, but he had also placed no reliance on Schreiner's judgment or advice respecting the position and attitudes of the Cape Afrikaners. Yet, despite this personal disillusionment, Schreiner was able to maintain a working relationship between Milner and the ministry during the strained months preceding the outbreak of war.

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63. W.P.S.P., c.(S.A.Lt.), Schreiner to Ellis, 5.7.1899.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCHREINER MINISTRY AS MEDIATOR IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CRISIS.

Fischer arrived in Cape Town on the 16th June to discuss the Transvaal franchise with Hofmeyr and the Cape ministers. If it had done nothing else, the Bloemfontein conference had at least clarified the franchise question, for Milner had at last stated the minimum terms which Britain was prepared to accept as a settlement. The task of Kruger's friends, therefore, was to promote a spirit of co-operation, and persuade the Transvaal to meet Britain's demands. When Fischer arrived in Cape Town, he found that he and the Cape colleagues were generally agreed on the improvements which they wished to see made to Kruger's franchise scheme, and which, they believed, would render it acceptable to Milner. Substantially, these alterations introduced a seven years franchise for the uitlanders, while at the same time distinguishing between enfranchisement for the general election of the Volksraad, and that of the President and Commandant-General, election for which required a ten years' residence in the Transvaal. By this scheme they believed that the interests of the older burghers would be safeguarded to some extent, but they admitted that Milner might object to the latter condition.[1] Previous to Fischer's arrival, Schreiner had already discussed these proposals with the Governor,[2] and a few days later Fischer had further talks with him. Milner admitted that the proposed changes were radical and, combined with redistribution, would come very close to his own proposals.[3] He told Fischer, however, that the matter was now out of his hands.

> " I strongly impressed upon him [Fischer] that, if Kruger could be induced to change his present proposals, it would be foolish of him to commit himself to any new scheme without first ascertaining whether Her Majesty's Government would accept it and that we should certainly require that any scheme should be framed in such a manner that there was no chance of its failing to achieve its object owing to difficulties of detail, such as those with which the present scheme abounds. We would require to consult representatives of the Uitlanders, and especially men versed in law to make sure that the conditions were reasonable. "

He wished to ensure, therefore, that Britain had grounds on which she could reasonably reject any new proposals if she desired to do so.[4]

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1. Hofmeyr, 539-540; Smuts papers, i, 254-256.
2. Headlam, i, 439-440.
3. M.P., V.13, Milner to Greene, 22.6.1899.
4. Marais, 291.

Milner's advice to Fischer on the desirability of the Transvaal consulting with the uitlanders before committing itself to a scheme of reform, was reinforced by Schreiner. The latter had been discussing Fischer's mission with the Governor, and, encouraged by his moderate attitude to the modifications proposed by the Cape, was anxious to do his part in promoting a spirit of conciliation. He was not able to agree that the man proposed by Milner, J.W. Wessels, the leader of the Transvaal Bar, who had defended the Jameson Raiders, was the best person to work with the government of the South African Republic, but he felt that the principle was sound.

> " I think there is something valuable in the scheme of getting the Uitlanders to appoint someone to express assent to modifications of the proposals, so as to give a certain finality to the matter and to enlist the sympathy of those who honestly feel with the Uitlanders. At the same time a ' way out ' would thus be gained from the impasse resulting from the termination of the Bloemfontein Conference .... "

Schreiner believed that Fischer was in a position to urge these modifications upon the Transvaal government more successfully than he himself could do, but, governed by the result of his interview with Milner, he was prepared to put every pressure he could on Fischer to ensure that he would persuade the Transvaal to meet Milner's wishes. [5]

Throughout the course of his negotiations, Fischer worked under the most difficult conditions, for his visit to the Transvaal was clouded by a steadily growing distrust of Britain, which was not allayed by the events of June. The day before he arrived in Cape Town the first reports of the blue book, and Milner's despatch, reached South Africa. Although the actual contents were not published until July, the uncertainty the rumours generated nevertheless made his task more difficult. The extent to which suspicion and tension had spread in South Africa is exemplified by the sudden appearance of war rumours. A brief examination of these rumours is instructive, for they show something of the attitude and behaviour of the British South African press in the Cape. The rumours sprang up quite suddenly, the South African News being of the opinion that " a campaign of callous mendacity is being skilfully engineered. It is'worked' by cable from both ends ". [6] In England reports were received that the Boers were arming

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5. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Fischer, 20.6.1899.
6. South African News, 22.6.1899.

and mobilising, while in Cape Town there were further reports that troops were being sent to South Africa. In particular, a report appearing in the columns of the Argus to the effect that Britain was making active preparations for war against South Africa excited the citizens of Cape Town to such an extent that Schreiner was forced to ask Milner for assurance that such was not the case, while te Water had to reassure Fischer. [7] At the same time, on the 21st June, a report appeared in the Cape Times that a party of armed and mounted Boers had been seen drilling in the De Aar district, in preparation for rebellion in the event of war against the South African Republic. On investigation the story proved ludicrously untrue, for what had been seen was a group of Dutch and English farmers practising for a wapenshaw which was held at Philipstown in honour of the Queen's birthday. [8] Trivial though these incidents were, they did contribute to the overheated atmosphere and suggest that there was some justice in Schreiner's accusation that the English press was fomenting unrest.

Another factor which contributed to the failure of Fischer's negotiations was the report of a speech made by Chamberlain on 26th June in Birmingham, during which he condemned the policy of the Transvaal government and declared that: " We will not be hurried on the one hand; we will not be held back on the other. But having undertaken this business we will see it through." [9] The motive for this speech was suggested by Lord Selborne who told Milner that the blue book had not had the effect that they had hoped on public opinion in Britain, and that, as a result, the Cabinet, too, was holding back. He had therefore, urged Chamberlain " to give public opinion a lead ", and Chamberlain agreed that this was very necessary, for, he told Selborne:

> " There is no doubt that opinion in the House of Commons is fluid, and on the whole, I think, bad .... I want to get the water into good condition; and to do everything selon lès regles." [10]

Reactions in South Africa to Chamberlain's speech were bitter, Merriman commenting that it made him " absolutely despair ", while Schreiner asked, " Can it be ... that a settlement is not desired". [11] What hurt the Cape ministry most was the fact that the speech came at a time when Chamberlain knew that a desperate effort was being made to achieve a settlement. It was small wonder, therefore, that Fischer blamed thes

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7. W.P.S.P., (U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 23.6.1899; H.P., te Water to Fischer, 22.6.1899.
8. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Editor, Cape Times, 23.6.1899.
9. J.L. Garvin - The life of Joseph Chamberlain, iii, 416
10. Headlam, i, 445; Garvin, iii, 414.
11. Lewsen, iii, 72; W.P.S.P. (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Ellis, 27.6.1899.

failure of his mission on Chamberlain's ill-timed speech,[12] for the result was a conviction, particularly on the part of the Transvaal and Orange Free State governments, that Britain was not sincere in seeking a peaceful settlement, and their distrust eventually infected their relations with the Cape government, who were bound to be influenced by their proximity to Milner.

Despite these setbacks, and the fact that the reforms which Fischer had secured were regarded by the Cape ministry as insufficient, since Milner had made it clear that he did not consider that the negotiations had been conducted in accordance with the procedure he had previously suggested; that is, the proposals were not submitted to Her Majesty's government for study before being laid before the Volksraad; the situation in the Transvaal was fluid enough to warrant Hofmeyr going to Pretoria to consolidate the work which Fischer had begun.[13] In particular, they were encouraged by the attitude of Smuts who was now working hard to achieve political reform, and who hoped that the advice of the Cape colleagues would give weight to the pressure he was putting on the more recalcitrant members of the Volksraad.[14] On the 1st July, therefore, accompanied by Herholdt in place of te Water, who was ill, Hofmeyr left Cape Town for Bloemfontein, where they met Smuts and P.G.W. Grobler, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the Transvaal. Kruger was at first reluctant to see the Cape envoys. As a result of the good offices of Steyn and Smuts he finally agreed, and they then proceeded to Pretoria.[15] In Pretoria Hofmeyr addressed the Volksraad when they met in secret session, and warned them that if the situation resulted in war, nothing but moral support could be expected from the Cape, partly because they were British subjects, and partly because many of the Dutch colonists were, in any case, unarmed and inexperienced.[16] Evidently he made an impression, for his proposals were largely accepted by the Volksraad.

Despite some unfavourable portents, including the passing by the Volksraad of a redistribution resolution heavily weighted against the uitlanders, and the arrival in South Africa of the British government blue book, the seeds fell, for once, on favourable ground, for

12. Marais, 292; Davenport, 198.
13. H.P., Hofmeyr to Fischer, 30.6.1899; Headlam, i, 447-8.
14. Hancock, i, 99.
15. N.J. van der Merwe - M.T. Steyn; 'n levensbeskrywing, i, 223; H.P., Hofmeyr to Schreiner, 3.7.1899.
16. Hofmeyr, 541-544; Lewsen, iii, 78-79.

Chamberlain was, at this particular moment, disinclined to harry the Transvaal. He told Milner that he was inclined to wait for the result of the Hofmeyr negotiations, for they could lose nothing by so doing. He added: " This carries out the policy of exhausting moral pressure before proceeding to extremities which is demanded by public opinion and absolutely necessary if more than party support is desired."[17] By allowing Hofmeyr to negotiate without interference, therefore, Chamberlain was, at one and the same time, yielding to exigency by placating public opinion, and preparing the way, with a firmer foundation, for Britain's final demands. He was also warning Milner that, whatever the High Commissioner may have expected after Chamberlain's Birmingham speech, the time had not yet come for decisive action. He knew that Milner would be impatient at the delay, and it was necessary that his impatience be soothed by assuring him of the sincerity of the Colonial Office, while ensuring that Milner did not interfere rashly in the negotiations.[18]

The result of Hofmeyr's visit was that the Transvaal was persuaded to amend its franchise regulations, offering the uitlanders a seven year franchise, and coming very close to the requirements which Milner had laid down in Bloemfontein. The part played by Schreiner in these negotiations was not a prominent one, but it is clear that Hofmeyr went to Pretoria with the weight of the Prime Minister's authority behind him. He kept Schreiner minutely informed of all the discussions, either directly or through one of his colleagues, usually te Water, and Schreiner reciprocated by advising him on the legal minutiae of the proposals.[19] In addition, Schreiner was apparently prepared to offer the moral support of the Cape government by publishing the notice of a motion in parliament which would publicise the opinion of the Cape government that a solution to the crisis could be found without resorting to war. In the end, however, he and Hofmeyr decided that this move would probably be unwise since it was likely to arouse the Governor's antagonism, and he might well intervene before parliament could meet, to prevent such a motion being brought before the House.[20] It was natural, therefore, that Schreiner should receive with relief

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17. Garvin, iii, 417-418.
18. Wilde, 117; Headlam, i, 481.
19. H.P., Hofmeyr to Schreiner, and Schreiner to Hofmeyr, 3-4.7.1899.
20. Ibid, Hofmeyr to Schreiner, 3-4.7.1899, Schreiner to Hofmeyr, 4.7.1899.

the news of the modifications which were to be made to the franchise, for it seemed to him that the points upon which Milner had placed specific emphasis in discussions with his Prime Minister had been obtained. Both he and his ministry when they had studied the details carefully, were convinced that Hofmeyr's mission had been successfully accomplished. He told Herholdt that " we are unanimous in thinking that the proposals will and should secure peace".

The Transvaal was apparently reluctant to inform the High Commissioner of the new proposals at such an early stage, for Schreiner was forced to urge that, if he were not informed, the Cape would be placed in an embarrassing position.[21] Eventually they consented, for on the 7th July, Schreiner sent Milner a copy of the proposed modifications. The Governor telegraphed to Chamberlain at once, explaining that he believed that: " The acceptance of ... compromise departing widely from my Bloemfontein proposals would be a great blow to our influence throughout South Africa". He argued that the trust of the uitlanders in the British government would be shaken by the acceptance of such proposals, while the triumphant South African Republic and its allies would become more difficult than ever to deal with.[22] Meanwhile Schreiner had decided that the time was ripe for the Cape government to make its attitude to the negotiations public. For some weeks the opposition press had been attacking Schreiner for his silence, accusing him of an " inexplicable and almost criminal reticence ", and claiming that he and his colleagues were not fulfilling their function as front bench representatives of their party by giving a lead to public opinion in the Colony.[23] It is more likely, however, that Schreiner did not want to place the Cape government in an embarrassing position by committing it to abortive negotiations. The ministry had maintained its reserve against the advice of its allies outside the colony. Smuts had long urged them to come into the open, and commit themselves to the support of Afrikaner unity,[24] while friends in England insisted upon the necessity of impressing upon English public opinion the fact that the Cape Afrikaners had a valid and reasonable point of view to be considered. P.A. Molteno wanted the

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21. H.P., Schreiner to Hofmeyr, Schreiner to Herholdt, 6.7.1899.
22. M.P., V.13, Milner to Chamberlain, 7.7.1899.
23. Cape Times, 22.6.1899.
24. Hancock, i, 248-9, 265.

Cape parliament to pass a resolution condemning war, for, he said:

> " ... your Parliament occupies a position of great responsibility and great advantage at the present juncture. As I have said before, petitions and public meetings and such expressions of opinion may be, and generally are, discounted here; but a Resolution of the Cape Parliament is understood here, carried enormous weight, and is received as the expression of the opinion of the Colony". [25]

The Cape ministry had excellent authority, therefore, for making some public statement of their opinion on the Transvaal crisis, and they did go so far as to compose a minute which they intended to present to the Governor. The actual date of the composition of the minute is not quite clear, but it was apparently written sometime during June 1899. [26] The minute opened by approaching the Governor on a matter " at a time of critical importance to this Colony, whose interests and destinies cannot but be materially affected by the events which may occur in the near future". Having stressed that the interests of the colony were inextricably involved with those of the Transvaal, the ministers drew attention to the fact that they were, nevertheless, kept in ignorance of the real state of affairs, for, they remarked, " ... though not precisely informed of the present position", they " cannot but glean from such sources of information as they have at their disposal" that the crisis might be coming to a head in the near future, and they felt it their duty to express their views on the situation. It was common knowledge that the uitlanders had presented a petition to the Queen requesting the intervention of the British government in the internal affairs of the Transvaal, and it was obvious from "momentous utterances and significant pronouncements" in the House of Commons and the British press, that such intervention was not out of the question. The Cape believed that, by the convention of 1884, the South African Republic had been given full control of its own internal affairs, and they did not consider that recent events justified interference. If such interference should occur, their faith in the "great destiny and noble progress" of the British Empire would suffer a severe blow which would be shared not only by other British subjects but by

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25. P.M.P., P.A. Molteno to C. Molteno, 16.6.1899.

26. W.P.S.P. (S.A.L.), memo by Schreiner, c. June 1899.

foreign nations as well. They believed, too, that such intervention would only exacerbate racial antagonism in South Africa, and they were convinced that if Britain refrained from such intervention, concessions by the South African Republic would be speedily forthcoming.

Though somewhat circuitously worded, this minute made the position of the Cape government quite clear. Under no circumstance could they condone British intervention in the affairs of the Transvaal, and their relations with Britain would suffer if such interference occurred. Yet this minute was never submitted to Milner and the reason is obscure.[27] Schreiner himself noted on the draft of the memorandum that the Cabinet were averse to sending it at that time. There was also the suggestion that they considered it too frank for Milner, and that they decided to convey their opinion verbally instead.[28] It is certainly very probable that Milner would have been bitterly antagonised by such criticism of Britain's constitutional position and the implication that she was alienating the loyalty of her subjects. This was a far stronger stand than the Cape government had yet taken, and could be interpreted as a warning to Britain which might well have provoked a drastic retaliation by Milner and the Colonial Office, and resulted in the dismissal of the ministry. Admittedly, this was speculation, for at this stage such action was not yet contemplated either by Milner or Chamberlain, but it was a threat which had hung over the heads of the ministry from the early days of their office, and, in the light of later events, was by no means impossible.

There can be no doubt, however, that the Cape ministry did make their opinion known to Milner, and they ensured too, that the Colonial Office should be equally well acquainted with them. On the 15th June, in a telegram to Chamberlain, Milner explained that the Cape government did not believe that the present situation justified active interference in the affairs of the Transvaal, and Chamberlain acknowledged this by commenting in return that Her Majesty's Government would use its influence to render it unnecessary. He added, for Milner's private ear:

> " It might be desirable in case of any fresh proposal by Schreiner to ask whether, if we accept his suggestion and Kruger refuses, he

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27. Wilde, 118.
28. Walker, Schreiner, 77-78.

would then admit that intervention was necessary". [29]

It would seem that, at this stage, Chamberlain still considered it worthwhile to try and win Schreiner to the Imperial point of view. The Cape ministry was conscious, too, that the Cape was not the only colony to view war with abhorrence, for in early July Milner told Schreiner that the Natal ministry had offered to co-operate with the Cape government in negotiating a settlement. It was only after protracted discussions, when he was faced with the likelihood of a crisis in the Natal government, that Milner had reluctantly given Schreiner this information, for he was bitterly opposed to the idea of such inter-colonial co-operation. [30] When Schreiner received the news, he told the Governor:

> " We have only refrained from sending a Minute on that subject to Your Excellency because our views are known by Her Majesty's Government and have been, perhaps, too much and too often, brought to your notice by myself in many interviews with which I have been favoured".

He proceeded to press his point, and concluded:

> " I should esteem it a favour, if there is any doubt in Your Excellency's mind whether Her Majesty's Government quite understands our views on this all important subject, if the purport of this letter could be speedily conveyed to Her Majesty's Government". [31]

The text of this letter was actually transmitted to the Secretary of State two days later.

There is no doubt, then, that although the Cape government had not commented publicly on the negotiations afoot during June and July, they had firm opinions on the matter, and Milner, Chamberlain and the Colonial Office were all well acquainted with them. It came as a considerable shock to Schreiner, therefore, when he heard through press reports, on the 5th July, that Chamberlain had informed the House of Commons, in reply to a question from John Ellis, that he had received no representations from the Cape government on the subject of the Transvaal. Such a statement put the Cape ministry in a delicate and ambiguous position, and Schreiner feared that the negotiations upon which Hofmeyr was then engaged, might be endangered as a result. He was obviously greatly disturbed by the situation, for he addressed himself to Milner in unusually determined terms, urging the latter to obtain another public statement from Chamberlain to set matters straight.

" I am sorry to have to urge this upon Your Excellency, but you will

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29. Headlam, i, 439-440; W.P.S.P.,(U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 17.6.1899.
30. Marais, 293-294.
31. M.P., V.13, Schreiner to Milner, 3.7.1899.

realise that we feel deeply that we cannot rest quiet under so damaging an imputation as the cables represent to have been made",[32] The following day, during an interview with the Governor, he told Milner that unless the statement was corrected, he would be forced to make the views of the Cape government public, and he did in fact send such a statement to the South African News on the 7th July.[33] Under these circumstances Milner had little choice but to convey Schreiner's message to Chamberlain. The tone of his telegram suggests that he, too, found himself somewhat at a loss to account for Chamberlain's statement, for he knew perfectly well that it was through his own confidential minutes that the Secretary of State had become acquainted with Schreiner's views. He had suggested to Schreiner that the telegraphic summary might have distorted the statement, but he now admitted privately to Chamberlain that, under the circumstances, he felt it only fair that it should be made public that Schreiner had in fact constantly impressed his views on the British government.[34] As a result of Schreiner's protests, therefore, Chamberlain retracted his statement in the House of Commons a few days later. He explained that although the Colonial Office was of course aware of the views of the Cape government, they had received no formal representation from them. He added that Schreiner had explained that the ministry had only refrained from submitting a formal minute because of their conviction that the British government knew their views.[35] This statement closed the matter, but it was an unfortunate incident, which did nothing to alleviate the growing tension between the Cape and British governments, for Chamberlain's action must have appeared to the Cape ministry as unnecessarily faithless and mischievous. It is difficult to know what provoked Chamberlain, but it seems possible that the silence of the Cape government on the Transvaal crisis, and their desire not to antagonise Britain, let him to underestimate their real position. It undoubtedly suited his purposes to minimise the strength of their feelings on the subject, and he did not, perhaps, expect them to make such a determined stand.

The incident did at any rate show the ministry that they could no longer afford to remain uncommitted. When Hofmeyr's negotiations

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32. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Milner, 5.7.1899.
33. Ibid., (U.C.T.), memo. by Schreiner on a letter from Milner, 6.7.1899; Ibid., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to South African News, 7.7.1899.
34. M.P., V.13, Milner to Chamberlain, 5.7.1899.
35. C.9415, 29.

appeared to be bearing fruit, therefore, the time seemed opportune for Schreiner to make a definite pronouncement on the attitude of the Cape government. When he gave a copy of the proposed modifications of the Transvaal franchise to the press, he also made a statement to the South African News announcing that : " I am at liberty to say that this Government regards these proposals as adequate, satisfactory, and such as should secure a peaceful settlement". [36] This statement was greeted with relief by Bond members and their colleagues, and resulted in a relaxation of tension and restraint. Smuts thanked Hofmeyr for the help he had rendered, saying that he believed that the situation was saved, and rejoicing that Schreiner had " so speedily fulfilled his share of the tacit understanding, and had so roundly expressed his opinion of the situation and the work done by us ". [37] Hofmeyr in his turn proposed calling a Bond meeting to make the terms of the settlement known to the members. This meeting was held on the 12th July, and was the occasion on which the long silence of the Bond on the subject of the Transvaal franchise question was finally broken, for motions were passed calling for a peaceful solution and approving government policy. [38] This meeting was followed by others in various parts of the Cape.

Previous to this, Hofmeyr had had an interview with the Governor, at which he explained the details of the draft bill, and informed Milner of his intention of calling a Bond meeting. Although Milner thanked Hofmeyr for his efforts to mediate, he remained noncommittal on the subject of the proposals. Hofmeyr's visit to the Transvaal had caused him to view the part played by the Cape colleagues in a new light, for it now became apparent that they were able to exert more influence on the Transvaal government than he had supposed. He was evidently not happy that they should continue to play the role of mediator, for he told Chamberlain that, although the Cape government was prepared to continue their efforts to improve the terms of the settlement, he felt that any further parleys should be carried on direct, rather than through " Afrikaner go-betweens ". [39]

Schreiner's statement placed him as Prime Minister in an anomalous

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36. South African News, 8.7.1899.
37. Smuts papers, i, 264-265.
38. Davenport, 199-200.
39. M.P., V.13, Milner to Chamberlain, 10.7.1899; Davenport, 374.

position, for he was now for the first time publicly in direct opposition to the Governor. Milner had made no public comment on the modifications, although he had expressed strong disapprobation in private, but the Cape Times, which was generally a reliable index to Milner's views, commented on the proposals in terms very similar to those of thee Governor. They considered that: " ... one can come to no other conclusion than that the proposals do not afford any sufficient relief from the present difficulty", and a couple of days later declared that

> " ... the platform chosen [by Schreiner] is the one erected expressly as a refuge for those who seek by all manner of subterfuge and deceit the undermining of British influence in the Colony, and the eventual elimination of the Imperial Factor altogether from South African affairs". [40]

It did not escape their notice that a delicate constitutional situation had arisen. Their comments are of interest, for they draw attention to the circumstances which were partly at the root of the tension developing between Milner and Schreiner.

> " Mr Schreiner's letter creates for the moment, an unparalleled situation. It throws the Cape Cabinet into active opposition with Sir Alfred Milner as High Commissioner for South Africa, while they remain in full accord with him as the Governor of the Colony. This is, of course, a condition of affairs which cannot endure if the general interests of Great Britain in South Africa are to be adequately safeguarded and ... if the union of the offices of High Commissioner for all South Africa and that of Governor of the Cape Colony compels the continual betrayal of those interests, then the time will have arrived for the separation of the offices." [41]

While it is true that a pro-Bond ministry would, in the same circumstances, almost certainly hold views which clashed with those of their Governor, if the two offices were separate the influence which they could exert on British policy would be diminished. In Natal the Governor acted as buffer between the colonial government and the High Commissioner, reducing the effectiveness of colonial opposition, but in the Cape this barrier did not exist. Admittedly the Cape was a stronger colony, more accustomed to having its opinion consulted than Natal, but the fact that they had direct access to the High Commissioner enabled them to bring pressure to bear on him which Natal could not contemplate. As Governor Milner had, also, to take into account the interests of the Cape, and he resented the constitutional limitations placed upon his activities. He did his best to belittle the importance of the Cape in the eyes of the Colonial Office and, by keeping the colonial government in ignorance of the intentions of the Imperial authorities, attempted to

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40. Cape Times, 8/10.7.1899.
41. Ibid., 11.7.1899.

reduce their influence. As High Commissioner he had the right to do this, since he could act over their heads on matters of imperial concern, and it was a right he felt free to exercise to its fullest extent.[42] Such a situation could only produce strained relations between the two men.

The Cape Times was not alone in believing that a crisis had arisen, for Chamberlain too considered the situation dangerous enough to contemplate the possibility of dismissing the ministry and dissolving parliament. On the 10th July he cabled Milner asking him his views on such a course.[43] This was a drastic step for Chamberlain to suggest, since he was usually conscious of the detrimental effect which any interference in the constitutional rights of the colonies might have on the British electorate. Yet Milner, although he was aware that such an eventuality might occur, was still unwilling to break with his ministry. He told Chamberlain that his reluctance was due to his belief that at the present time a dissolution would only produce a new House very like the present one.[44] The advice of Sir Edward Grey, director of the British South Africa company, which reached him some time later, is relevant here. Grey thought that Milner would be unwise to risk a breach with the Cape government, for there was no reason to believe that their attempts to reach a settlement had not been sincere, and he did not believe that the enlightened Cape Dutch would be prepared to accept the hegemony of the Transvaal. It was probable, therefore, that ultimately Britain would carry the Cape Dutch with her, and it would be foolish to risk alienating them unnecessarily.[45] A letter to Selborne is also revealing, for it suggests that Milner's personal opinion of Schreiner remained unimpaired, and this did much to ameliorate the tension of his relations with the ministry.

> " And then the Government of the Cape Colony is against the British party too. That means a good deal, not so much with Schreiner, who is avvery fine man, as with some of his colleagues. ... Schreiner alone is all right, the honest and highminded leader of men, whose views are totally different from his, an idealist amidst very hard and discouraging realists. I shall be sorry when the split comes between him and me".[46]

This was a remarkable statement for Milner to make, for relations between him and the Cape ministry were at their worst during the months preceding the outbreak of war. Not only was the ministry trying to pursue

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42. Le May, 41.
43. M.P., V.14, Chamberlain to Milner, 10.7.1899.
44. Headlam, i, 461.
45. M.P., V.14, Grey to Milner, 13.7.1899.
46. Ibid., V.5, Milner to Selborne, 12.7.1899.

a policy of conciliation directly opposed to the wishes of the Governor, but Schreiner himself was deliberately blocking Milner's attempts to prepare the Cape for war, by delaying military manoeuvres and holding up the acquisition of arms. Yet it is open to doubt that Milner really understood Schreiner. He dismissed Schreiner as an " idealist ", which he undoubtedly was, but he failed to grasp that Schreiner's idealism operated within a realistic framework. It was Schreiner's realistic assesment of the situation, of how far he could oppose Milner, and of the extent to which he must support the Afrikaner cause, which maintained his ministry in power during these months. A more impulsive man, like Merriman, would have been more likely to clash with the Governor, and co-operation would have become impossible; while a Prime Minister who was influenced more by Milner would have been intolerable to the Bond and ministry alike. Schreiner's ministry did eventually disintegrate for just this reason, but Schreiner's moderate attitude nevertheless enabled them to stay in power under particularly difficult conditions. At the same time, it was probably Milner's interpretation of Schreiner's pro-Afrikaner stand as " idealism ", which enabled the Governor to work with his Prime Minister. He did not see Schreiner's feeling for the Afrikaner people as natural, but as an attitude assumed because of his idealistic reading of the situation. He was more conscious of the elements in Schreiner's nature and education, his balanced legal mind and his Cambridge training, which his own background enabled him to appreciate, than those which gave him an intimate insight into the feelings of the Afrikaner people, their desire for independence, and their love for South Africa. For this reason he underestimated the strength of Schreiner's conviction in the justice of the Transvaal cause, and misunderstood his motives in co-operating with Britain. It is a tribute to Schreiner's tact and integrity that Milner could express such an opinion, but it seems possible that it was to some extent a misconception. At any rate, it is clear from this letter that Milner certainly felt that it was largely because of Schreiner that he was able to work with the Cape government at all.

After the initial excitement of Hofmeyr's return from Pretoria with the announcement that the Transvaal intended to modify its franchise, the atmosphere in the Cape was expectant but much quieter. Milner refrained from committing himself publicly on the proposals. Although he urged Hofmeyr to persuade the Transvaal government to submit the

proposals to the British government for approval before they put them before the Volksraad, [47] Milner's attitude to the franchise proposals, and his view of the general situation, were quite clear. He felt that British South Africa now strongly supported him, for, he told Selborne, they were united " with enthusiasm and praying God for thorough settlement this time [at] any cost ". [48] South Africa was sharply divided on the real issue of British paramountcy, and the acceptance of a " mutilated " franchise scheme would be regarded as a betrayal by Britain and a victory for the Afrikaner combination. Although he believed the present proposals might form the basis of a settlement, he did not consider them adequate. Chamberlain reciprocated by giving Milner the excuse he desired for prolonging the negotiations, by requiring that the proposals be submitted officially to the British government for approval before the Transvaal went any further. [49] Milner put this suggestion to Schreiner in his most moderate tones, pointing out that if the government of the South African Republic really wished to preserve a spirit of conciliation, they should leave nothing undone to ensure the success of the settlement. It was unreasonable, he said, to expect the British government to evaluate the proposals when they were imperfectly acquainted with them. They asked, therefore, that they should be given time to consider the terms in detail. [50] The request seemed to the Cape colleagues a reasonable one, for Schreiner immediately telegraphed to Fischer in Bloemfontein, giving him the gist of his correspondence with Milner, and urging that both he and Hofmeyr felt that Britain's claims should be considered. He believed that Milner's note indicated a conciliatory spirit and he was optimistic of the result if only the Transvaal should comply with the Governor's wishes. [51]

Although Schreiner did support Milner in his desire to have the proposals submitted to the Imperial government for approval, he also used the opportunity to press Milner to express himself in favour of the scheme, in principle. Milner was displeased, for he considered that Schreiner had given his public blessing to a scheme with which he was imperfectly acquainted. [52] In the meantime, Hofmeyr communicated with Pretoria in the same terms. Their reception was not friendly, however. Smuts replied pessimistically, and it would seem that his faith in the ability of the Cape ministry to effect any real change in Britain's attitude,

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47. H.P., Milner to Hofmeyr, 12.7.1899.
48. Headlam, i, 456.
49. Headlam, i, 456.
50. W.P.S.P., (U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, [11.7.1899].
51. M.P., V.9, Schreiner to Fischer, 11.7.1899.
52. Ibid., V. 13, Milner to Chamberlain, 12.7.1899.

was decreasing. He doubted

> " whether the course proposed will do any good. There is no real indication in what spirit it will be received and after what has happened I am afraid the communication through the Prime Minister which is in any case informal would be resented for obvious reasons ".

Nevertheless, he admitted that changes could be made to the bill, and was prepared, within reason, to listen to the advice of the Cape. [53] But the Transvaal was determined not to comply with the request of the British government, since they regarded this as a threat to their independence, although they were prepared to keep them unofficially informed of their modifications. [54] On the 18th July the " improved reformed scheme " was announced, and received enthusiastically in many quarters, for it embodied most of the suggestions made by the Cape government, including the seven years retrospective franchise, and five additional seats for the Rand, and it came very close to the demands made by Milner in Bloemfontein. Chamberlain made a public declaration to the effect that, if the reports of the scheme were correct, the crisis was at an end, and later on he announced to the House of Commons that the scheme should prove a satisfactory basis for a settlement. [55] Yet it seems likely that Chamberlain was once again yielding to expediency. [56] A rejection of such considerable concessions would have alienated British public opinion. He coupled his congratulations to Milner " on a great victory" with a proposal for another conference in Cape Town to settle points of difference. [57] At this time he had also in preparation another despatch accusing the Transvaal government of bad faith. This despatch had been circulated in the Cabinet, and despite some opposition, it was sanctioned by them. For this reason, and from a speech which he made in parliament attacking the Transvaal, it was apparent that Chamberlain was now fairly sure of the support of the Cabinet, while public opinion was also stirring in his favour. [58] In South Africa there was considerable opposition to the franchise scheme. Milner stood firmly against it, and the various opposition groups, consisting now of the uitlander leaders, the Cape Progressives, and the Natal government, coallesced around him. As before, he was careful to emphasise the growing support for his policy, while minimising the importance of Cape Afrikaner opinion. He warned Chamberlain that even Schreiner had done his utmost to force the Governor to accept an inadequate settlement,

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53. Hancock, i, 266-267.
54. Davenport, 200; Marais, 297.
55. Marais, 298; C.9415, 53.
56. Headlam, i, 469; Marais, 298; Wilde, 120. Wilde suggests that Chamberlain was carrying out a preconceived policy of accepting the Boer proposals and then holding them to his own interpretation of their terms.
57. Headlam, i, 468.
58. Marais, 302- 305; Wilde, 123.

and he feared that to value too highly such half-hearted support would alienate those who genuinely supported the Imperial authorities. [59]

By the end of July, therefore, optimistic hopes of peace were fading, with Hofmeyr warning Smuts that they were "not yet out of the wood", [60] and Sir Henry de Villiers firmly convinced that Britain was "now determined to settle the Transvaal business in a manner satisfactory to themselves", and both urging the acceptance of the joint inquiry proposal as a last desperate resort.

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59. M.P., V.14, Milner to Chamberlain, 26.7.1899.
60. Smuts papers, i, 272; Headlam, i, 480.

CHAPTER V

THE EFFECT OF THE TRANSVAAL CRISIS ON THE CAPE COLONY.

The franchise negotiations which took place during the two and a half months preceding the outbreak of war may be summarised briefly. The Transvaal was anxious to avoid the joint inquiry which Britain had proposed, partly because they resented such an intrusion into their internal affairs, and partly because they feared the outcome. [1] Instead they countered the proposal by an offer, on 11th August, of concessions which went even further than Milner's Bloemfontein demands, giving the uitlanders a five-year retrospective franchise for both presidential and Volksraad elections, and a guarantee of reasonable representation in the Volksraad. The negotiations foundered eventually, on the conditions which the South African Republic attached to their offer, which required that the offer should not be regarded by Britain as setting a precedent for intervention, and demanded also that she drop her claims to suzerainty. It seems likely that the offer was in fact made partly with the intention of exposing Britain's real aimsof asserting her paramountcy in southernAfrica. [2] Neither party was optimistic of the results. Milner regarded the offer simply as an attempt by the South African Republic " to confuse [the] issue and cause delay", and suggested that Britain's reply should be one which would render " a direct answer necessary " and preclude " further quibbling and chaffering "; while Smuts, the moving spirit behind the proposal, expected little from it. [3] By this time, so great was their mutual distrust, and so far had Britain committed herself to establishing her suzerainty in southern Africa, that a settlement had become remote, and it was no surprise when the negotiations failed to reach a satisfactory conclusion. From that point it was only a short step to the framing of the ultimatums which led to the outbreak of war on October 12th.

The Cape government played little part in these negotiations, for the initiative had now passed almost entirely out of their hands. As we have seen, Milner was no longer prepared to use the Cape friends as intermediaries, and such prominent Cape Afrikaners as Hofmeyr and Sir

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1. Davenport, 203-204.
2. Marais, 303-314; Davenport, 204; Smuts papers, i, 300-302.
3. Headlam, i, 530; Smuts papers, i, 301.

Henry de Villiers commented on the fact that they had virtually no access to the Governor at this time. Apart from their moral support they could offer the Transvaal little positive help, and their growing despondency is illustrated, for instance, in the correspondence between Hofmeyr and Fischer on the desirability of Fischer visiting Cape Town, when te Water told Fischer:

> " Have not communicated with H.C. for some time, he [Hofmeyr] sees no good his doing so now. Has held out no expectations to him . ... cannot tempt you with hopes of any important results from a visit to Cape Town". [4]

However, they were afraid that any decisive action on their part would jeopardise their position in the colony and lead to the dismissal of the ministry. Smuts, at least, appeared to recognise that theirs must be a passive role, for he told Hofmeyr: " We only do not wish the present Bond ministry to put itself into a dangerous position, for as long as it is at the helm we also shall be bolder. So be extremely careful". [5]

In any case, the Cape government was beset by domestic problems, partly arising out of their loyalty to the republic. In the middle of July 1899 the new session of parliament opened, bringing with it attendant difficulties, while the growing tension in the country told on their relationship with the Governor. For months past Milner had been convinced that war was almost inevitable, although, like Chamberlain, he took the stand that an expeditionary force would probably frighten Kruger into submission. [6] The logical conclusion of such a policy was that military preparations should be increased. As usual, Milner considered the matter carefully and laid his views before the Colonial Office forcibly and clearly. In May, even before the Bloemfontain Conference, he had a distinct picture of the likely pattern of events. He expected the Transvaal to advance into Natal, and, with the Orange Free State as allies, to try and rouse the north-east section of the Cape colony to rebellion. From the first, his main fear was for Kimberley, standing isolated and exposed on the vital railway line to the north. He remarked bitterly:

> " It is part of the irony of the situation that I cannot do anything <u>openly</u> to previde for this. The present Ministry are kept in power by Boer votes. It is melancholy, but true, that they could not, if they would, and perhaps would not, if they could, put Kimberley in a proper state of defence".

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4. H.P., te Water to Fischer, 14.8.1899.
5. Smuts papers, i, 302; H.P., te Water to Fischer, 14.7.1899.
6. Headlam, i, 385.

He added that there was a secret plan for the defence of Kimberley in existence. Another concern was that a revolt in the colony would increase the problems of the Imperial government both during and after the war, and he urged that the only way to deal with the situation satisfactorily was to pour troops into the country without delay. He realised that such an action might cause a break with the ministry, but he considered that the loss would be amply compensated for by the strategic advantages they would gain. [7]

By August Milner had formulated his views more precisely. He wanted the number of British forces in South Africa doubled, and strategic points along the railway line occupied. Even if Natal were to be the main theatre of war, he wanted to see a substantial force in the Cape to check local rebellion. Before he could achieve these aims, Milner was confronted by three main problems. He had to overcome the reluctance of the British government to commit itself so irretrievably to war; he had to ensure that there was a sympathetic and able commanding officer in South Africa; and he had to arrange for the colonial forces to be mobilised and strategically disposed. The first was bound up with his difficulty of convincing the Cabinet and British public opinion, that war was necessary, and he dealt with this by impressing upon them persistently the danger of Transvaal aggression, and by sending out a steady stream of reports warning the British government that the republics were arming heavily. The other two problems were more closely related, and fell more directly within Milner's sphere, both involving his co-operation with men unsympathetic to his views. Sir William Butler, the general commanding the British forces in South Africa, had been a thorn in Milner's flesh from the time he arrived at the Cape. They held fundamentally opposing views on the Transvaal question, Butler's being, ironically, the less aggressive. Despite this they had at first been able to work together, since Milner recognised and appreciated Butler's ability, but they gradually became less and less able to agree on military matters. At first Milner hoped that pressure from the War Office might induce the General to be more amenable, [8] but when this failed, he changed his tactics, for he had come to believe that no compromise was possible. Perhaps strain and overwork had some

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7. Headlam, i, 400-402
8. Headlam, i, 403.

effect on Milner's attitude to the General, while Butler appears to have been a preremptory and impulsive man, disinclined to conciliate Milner. He refused to tell the High Commissioner what plans he had for the defence of the colonies, [9] an omission which infuriated the other, and their personal relations became almost impossible. Butler himself believed that, " As commander of the troops in the Cape Colony and Natal, I held the balance. There could be no war while I was there". [10] Under these circumstances, Milner could see no course but to have Butler removed, and he bombarded the Colonial Office with near-hysterical appeals to have the General withdrawn. [11] At length his request was acceded to, and Butler was persuaded to resign and leave South Africa in August 1899.

Milner's relations with the Cape ministry provide an interesting comparison. Although they certainly hampered Milner's activities, they never put themselves into a position where compromise became impossible, and in consequence, they were always able to exert some influence over him. Milner was very conscious of the difficulties of the situation. On 2nd August, he told Chamberlain:

> " In the Colony, on the other hand, every additional battery or battalion, or the advancing of any troops already here, would certainly lead to friction with Ministers, and might lead to a breach. My attitude towards them, in such a case, would be to bear with mere protests and temporize as long as possible, if they went beyond protests and actually <u>hampered</u> the movement of troops, which they might do",

and a week later he reiterated this view. [12] The situation was complicated by the ambiguous position which, Schreiner told Milner, the Cape government proposed adopting in the event of war with the republics. In an interview early in August he explained that, if Britain would undertake not to use the colony as a base for operations against the republics, the latter would undertake not to invade the colony. Later, in the midst of the stormy debates on the importation of ammunition into the Free State, he took this stand in parliament, explaining that he wished to maintain the colony as a " little place of peace ... standing apart and aloof from the struggle, both with regard to its forces and with regard to its people." [13]

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9. W.F. Butler - <u>Autobiography</u>, 425.
10. Ibid., 414.
11. Headlam, i, 516, cont. in M.P. V.5, Milner to Chamberlain, 9.8.1899.
12. Headlam, i, 514.
13. Ibid., i, 515-516; Cape Hansard, 1899, 333.

This was a quixotic attitude for Schreiner to adopt. Obviously he wanted to prevent war, and if this were unavoidable, his duty was to protect the Cape from its effects as much as possible. When the Orange Free State agreed to the undertaking of mutual non-aggression, he seems to have seized upon the idea as the one way of preserving peace in the Cape, and despite any evidence to the contrary, he was apparently convinced to the last that the Free State would not invade the Cape. Nevertheless, he must have been aware that it was an untenable position. Indeed, some days earlier Sir Henry de Villiers had put the legal position of the Cape to the Orange Free State very clearly, for he believed that they had an erroneous impression of the powers of the Cape ministry:

> "They are Ministers of the Crown, and it will be their duty to afford every possible assistance to the British Government. Under normal conditions a responsible Ministry is perfectly independent in matters of internal concern, but in case of war they are bound to place all the resources of the Colony at the disposal of the British Crown; at least, if they do not do so, they would be liable to dismissal". [14]

There was already precedent in Cape history for such an action when, in 1878, Sir Bartle Frere dismissed the Molteno ministry, which included Merriman, under related circumstances. Neither Milner, nor his ministry, had forgotten the event, and the memory served as a reminder of the constant danger in which the government stood, if it should act too independently. It was highly improbable, therefore, that Milner, who was as autocratic a governor as Frere, would accept the idea of Cape neutrality. For military reasons alone it was impractical, for Milner felt that it was essential that Britain should be able to move Imperial troops freely about the colony. If it should prove necessary to call out the colonial troops and place them under the command of Imperial officers, the active co-operation of the ministry would be required, for this could only be done by the Governor-in-Council. Moreover, Kimberley was an integral part of Britain's original plan of attack, and its defence was vital. [15] Milner did his best, therefore, to disabuse Schreiner of the idea that the Cape could stand aloof from the struggle. Schreiner's real meaning was undoubtedly somewhat obscure. He protested to Milner that his words in parliament had been misinterpreted, but, as the Governor pointed out, they were certainly open to the construction that the colony wished to remain neutral in the event of war between Britain and the South African Republic. Schreiner explained that the colonial forces would be employed in the defence of the colony should it be invaded by the Transvaal or

14. E.A. Walker - Lord de Villiers and his times, 342.
15. Le May, 43.

the Orange Free State, but he did not want to see the forces used beyond the borders of the Cape. However, this attitude was consistent with his belief that the republics would not invade the colony, and with his desire, above all, to prevent civil war, for as long as the republics could be deterred from invading, there was reasonable hope that peace could be maintained in the Cape.[16]

When he was faced with reality Schreiner found that he was forced to modify his position. Throughout August and September of 1899, in a series of difficult interviews with Milner, he fought to keep the Cape free from involvement in the approaching war. The defence of Kimberley was a particularly thorny problem. Although the inhabitants of Kimberley had long been uneasy about their defenceless position, the matter first began to assume importance at the beginning of August, when Chamberlain asked Milner to raise the matter with his ministers.[17] Chamberlain feared that Kimberley could be successfully attacked by as few as 200 or 300 mounted men, but he expected that an increased volunteer force would be sufficient to defend the town. At present all he asked was that a plan of defence be prepared and the requisite arms acquired. Schreiner, on the other hand, was convinced that defence preparations would only aggravate the situation by increasing the mistrust and uneasiness of the Orange Free State burghers; nor did he believe that Kimberley stood in any danger of attack. Before he took any active steps, therefore, he wished to be sure that they were necessary. To help the ministry in its investigation, he asked to see a report which, at the request of the Cape government, Colonel Trotter of the Royal Engineers had compiled on the defence of Kimberley, as well as other relevant reports mentioned by Milner; but Milner was reluctant to produce any of them.[18] The dilemma in which Milner found himself with regard to this request illuminates his relationship with the ministry. He explained to Chamberlain that he dared not impart any military secrets, and as a result, found it difficult to provide them with convincing evidence to justify the preparations he demanded.

> " It is a curious position when one has to discuss the details of defence with advisers who are in close and constant communication with our only possible assailants ... I am sure that Schreiner and his colleagues are incapable of such absolute treachery. But I

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16. Headlam, i, 504-505; Innes, 183.
17. Headlam, i, 515; C.O. 48/542, conf. desp. 16.8.1899.
18. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Secretary of Defence, 12.8.1899; Ibid., draft minute, Schreiner to Milner, 14.8.1899; Headlam, i, 517; Walker, Schreiner, 89.

> am equally sure that there is one of them who under certain circumstances would be capable of it". [19]

The general opinion of the Colonial Office concurred with this view.

> " It will be interesting to learn how much military information Sir A. Milner gave them. Te Water, at least, among the Ministry, would convey the information to Hofmeyr, who would convey it to Steyn, who would convey it to Krüger". [20]

Were they justified in their suspicion ? Indubitably te Water and Hofmeyr were very intimate, and te Water might well have passed any information he received to Hofmeyr, who was, in any case, virtually an ex officio member of the ministry. But Hofmeyr had a strong sense of the constitutional obligations of the government and it seems unlikely that he would have passed such information any further, except perhaps as a general warning that Britain's intentions were being seriously implemented. The mere fact that such distrust existed, however, made it impossible for the Governor and his ministers to co-operate with any degree of openness and confidence.

Not only was Milner's mistrust of certain members of the ministry probably unfounded, but his accusations that they were unco-operative were also on occasions unwarranted. Where they could give the Governor assistance without giving rise to unrest, they appear to have done so, perhaps cautiously, but fairly willingly. Such an accusation had been made when Milner asked that a company of Royal Engineers be given facilities to investigate the working of the colonial railways. [21] An examination of the correspondence does not suggest that the delay in granting the request was excessive. The request was put to Milner on 8th August, 1899. Three days later, on 11th, the Governor forwarded the request officially to the Prime Minister, and a week later, on 18th, the General Manager of the Railways reported that the information required was purely routine, such as he " had been in the habit of giving for many years" and he warmly recommended that the offer that these men be employed on the railways be accepted. On the 23rd August permission was forwarded to Milner with an apology for the delay " occasioned by careful inquiry which the Commissioner had made with a view to meeting the wish of His Excellency". [22] In other words, less than two weeks had elapsed which does not seem to be abnormal, allowing for the usual administrative delays, and the ministry co-operated very willingly, supporting

19. Headlam, i, 517, cont. in M.P. V.5, Milner to Chamberlain, 16.8.1899.
20. C.O. 48/542, conf. desp., 16.8.1899.
21. P.M., 73, 11.8.1899.
22. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Milner, undated [23.8.1899 ?].

the recommendations of the General Manager.

To some extent Schreiner's actions with regard to the defence of the colony were governed by the attitude of the Orange Free State. Although it is not clear which country first suggested the mutual non-aggression pact, the Free State supported the idea enthusiastically, and as late as 12th October they still maintained that as long as the Cape remained neutral, the republics would not invade the Cape, and Schreiner apparently never suspected that they would do otherwise. Schreiner's fear that the movement of troops and preparations for the defence of Kimberley would cause uneasiness in the republic was warranted. Indeed, public opinion in the Free State seems to have been as excitable as that of the colony for, in the middle of August, the ministry received a note asking them to prevent the stationing of troops along the borders because, the note said, it irritated the Free State burghers " to desperation ". Despite the sympathy of the ministry for the Orange Free State, the republic received short shrift on this matter. Te Water reminded them that the Premier was after all a Minister of the Crown. He was doing his best under difficult conditions, and, in any case, he had little control over the movement of Imperial troops. He concluded slightly irritably, " In meanwhile Free State should surely refrain from aggressive steps". [23] This irritation was natural since the accusation on this occasion seems to have been unfounded. All the same, these communications do give some weight to Schreiner's argument that the Free State would be disturbed by unnecessary military preparations, and strengthened his determination to prevent them as far as he could.

None of Schreiner's objections carried much weight with Milner, and he continued to press his case for the defence of Kimberley. On the 18th and 19th August he had unsatisfactory interviews with the Prime Minister on the subject. By the 23rd he had still not succeeded in persuading him to take any action, for Schreiner remained convinced that neither of the republics would attack Kimberley. Milner argued ... that tension was already so high that only the slightest spark was needed to start a conflagration and that, under such circumstances, it was the bounden duty of the ministry to provide some protection for the

23. H.P., Fischer to Hofmeyr, 15.8.1899, te Water to Fischer, 16.8.1899.

exposed areas. He hoped that this argument would induce the ministry to see reason, but, if not, he urged that Her Majesty's government should take the matter into its own hands and take control of Kimberley. He feared that the present situation did not auger well for his relations with the ministry in the event of war.[24] Nevertheless, he was not yet ready to part company with them. Despite his assertions that a large proportion of the colonists sympathised with Imperial policy, when it came to a matter of practical politics, he feared that if the ministry were dismissed they might yet have a majority in the country and any precipitate action would only result in an open breach between the Imperial government and the Dutch-speaking colonists. The slowness of British military activity also deterred him from taking any precipitate action. He told Sir Walter Hely Hutchinson:

> " Cape Ministers are, between ourselves, behaving as badly as possible. In fact I could pick a quarrel with them any day and get rid of them with éclat. But here I am deterred by the slowness of movement from home, I don't want to precipitate a crisis while we are militarily so weak. A new Cabinet would very soon be sent to the country and very likely fail to get a majority. That would not matter if by the time the elections were over the S. African question were settled by a victory over the T.V. But it would be decidedly awkward to have a new House with a raving Bond majority turning up in the middle of the struggle".[25]

It would seem, then, that political realities both in Britain and at the Cape dictated Milner's policies rather more than he liked. As long as constitutional rule by an elected parliament remained in force, his right to interfere in internal affairs were restricted, and the anti-war element could exert some control over affairs.

At the beginning of September the problem of colonial defence finally came to a head. A petition from the citizens of Kimberley urged that the defence of that town be improved at first produced little response from the ministers. Despite their conviction that Kimberley was in no danger of attack, additional pressure from the Governor, and a memorandum from the General eventually persuaded them that something must be done. In deference to Milner's wishes, therefore, they proposed making up the number of small arms to that recommended by the Royal Engineers' report, and to supply sufficient ammunition for these guns,

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24. C.O. 48/542, conf. desp. 23.8.1899.
25. M.P., V.5, Milner to Hely Hutchinson, 24.8.1899; Headlam, i, 519-520.

but they were not prepared to increase the size of the force there. They did not believe that it would be possible to recruit a larger volunteer force in Kimberley itself, while an attempt to recruit them elsewhere, besides fomenting unrest, would probably result in a force of men of an undesirable type, undisciplined and untrustworthy. They hoped that the small volunteer force available, supplemented by the police, under the command of the local commissioner who would be promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, would suffice, for they considered such a force sufficiently flexible to cope with most dangers likely to arise. In return they asked permission to assure the Orange Free State that these measures were purely defensive. They reitereated their fear that these military movements would contribute to the tension in the country. In addition they mentioned their fear that the sight of Europeans arming to fight people of their own race might well incite the inhabitants of Basutoland and the native territories to rebellion.[26] Milner was not satisfied with these arrangements for it was obvious that the ministry had yielded only the barest minimum. A brief consideration of their offer shows that it consisted of very little; a slight addition to the number of small arms and the reorganisation of the forces already available, with perhaps a small supplementary force of police. The following day, therefore, on the 5th September, Milner had a long interview with Schreiner which did much to clarify the situation and seems to have enabled both to appreciate something of the difficulties of the other. The text of Milner's report of the interview which he sent to Chamberlain casts some light on the relationship of the two men; on why, despite their opposing points of view, they were able to work together, for the interview seems to have been conducted in a spirit of reason, and even tolerance.

Milner opened the interview by observing that, although the supply of arms and ammunition was a step in the right direction, it was even more important to ensure that sufficient men were available in Kimberley. Schreiner countered this complaint by pointing out, as he had done so frequently before, that the ministry did not have enough information to enable them to judge the seriousness of the situation fairly. He admitted that if war were inevitable, it was certainly incumbent on the government

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26. C.O. 48/542, conf. desp., 6.9.1899.

to provide for any danger likely to threaten the colony, but he believed that this was more likely to come from the direction of the Fourteen Streams, or on the line between Fourteen Streams and Mafeking, than Kimberley. It would seem from this that the Cape ministry had more or less resigned itself to the prospect of war with the South African Republic. Once this was faced, their concern was to prevent disturbances in the colony itself and, if it were possible, to avoid conflict with the Orange Free State, this danger would be considerably minimised. For this reason Schreiner seems to have concentrated , in these last few weeks, on placating the Free State as much as he could Milner evidently appreciated this stand, but, he remarked, the position of that republic, with whom Britain had no quarrel,and which was free to avoid any conflict, was " to say the least, ambiguous ", But even if the Free State should remain neutral, Milner thought that Kimberley, situated as it was on the railway line to the north, was of such strategic importance that it was open to attack from the South African Republic, not to mention " evil-disposed persons " in the colony itself. He considered the problem of the defence of the northern section of the railway line as one of the most imperative of all the questions of Colonial-Imperial defence. Moreover, he felt that he bore the responsibility for its safety since the country beyond, which depended on the line for its communication with the outside, was directly under his control as High Commissioner. Kimberley was strategically important, not only in its own right, but because it was a central point from which help could be quickly and easily sent both north and south, and an interruption of the line of communication would be a serious matter. In any case, if the police were to control the border adequately, they could hardly come to the defence of Kimberley as well. These arguments seem to have convinced Schreiner that the force in Kimberley must be increased. He remained determined that such a force should not be recruited from amongst the colonists, but he did not object when Milner suggested that a detachment of Imperial troops be used for the purpose. All he asked was that the Orange Free State be be informed that these arrangements were made with no hostile intention towards that state. To this Milner made no protest provided that it were done after the necessary preparations had been effected. The remainder of the interview passed in a discussion of a general scheme of defence for Kimberley.

The interview seems to have given Milner some insight into the dilemma of the Cape ministry, and certainly Schreiner's behaviour softened his feelings towards them, for he concluded his despatch:

> " From the tone of Mr Schreiner's conversation, and from the somewhat altered attitude of the Ministerial press, I derive the impression that the Afrikander party in this Colony is becoming somewhat estranged from the Government of the South African Republic (with which its leaders have been in constant communication, but which does not seem disposed implicitly to follow its advice) and that, in case of a breach, the attitude of Ministers may be less obstructive than at one time seemed probable. It is impossible, however, to be sure that they will be able to control their followers, if they frankly accept their position and do their duty as Ministers of the Crown in case of a struggle with the Republics. Their position is a very difficult one and no-one can foresee precisely what effect would be exercised upon it by an absolute rupture between Her Majesty's Government and the South African Republic. Meanwhile I remain of the opinion which I have always held that, however embarrassing the position ... I should continue to act with extreme forebearance towards a Government possessing a majority in the House of Assembly, and should not go to the extreme length of dismissing them, unless their continuance in office was plainly incompatible with the success of Imperial policy and the safety of Her Majesty's possessions ". [27]

Indubitably the outright victory in this tussle went to Milner, for he had succeeded in obtaining what he had wanted; namely, improved defences for Kimberley, both in arms and in men. Yet Schreiner had gained a point which was in the long run more effective. The colony's contribution to the defence of Kimberley was made with a minimum of fuss, so that the least possible unrest was caused both intthe colony and beyond its borders. In fact Schreiner had yielded comparatively little, enough only to satisfy Milner's demands for some action by the Cape government. The colonists were not to be involved in the defence of their own country, for the additional troops were to be provided from Imperial forces, while the north-eastern districts remained as thinly protected as ever. More important, Schreiner does seem to have succeeded in making Milner understand something of the dilemma of the ministers, and his conciliatory attitude reduced the strain in their relationship, thus consolidating the position of the ministry in the difficult days to come.

It could not be said that Milner was entirely satisfied with the arrangements now made for Kimberley's defence. [28] He considered it a " temporary makeshift ", and his diary records several more uncomfortable

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27. C.O. 48/542, conf. desp., 6.9.1899.
28. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Milner, 8.9.1899.

arguments with Schreiner on the subject.[29] The greatest advantage that he had obtained was the appointment of an Imperial officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Kekewich, to the command of the forces, and the promise of a supplementary regiment should it be needed. Further than this he could not persuade Schreiner to go. There was a suggestion that a civic guard of 1000 men might be raised, but this Schreiner refused to accede to, preferring that Imperial troops should be used.[30] Milner feared that the forces available were spread dangerously thinly, but he seems to have resigned himself to the fact that nothing more was to be got from the ministry. He did not try to exert much more pressure on them. Rather he turned his attention to the organisation of the troops available, and to urging Britain to send reinforcements as soon as possible.[31] As the ministry feared, the news that military preparations were being made in Kimberley alarmed the Orange Free State. Fischer told Hofmeyr that these manoeuvres were forcing his government to arm their western borders, since the Free State burghers were growing increasingly discontented at the apathy with which their government seemed to be regarding the matter. Hofmeyr replied in as conciliatory a tone as he could, assuring Fischer that the ministry was only taking " defensive precautions", but he pleaded that any aggression on the part of the Orange Free State would only result in the movement of Imperial troops " with lamentable consequences".[32] It is evident that the two governments had reached an impasse.

In the meantime another problem was reaching critical proportions, contributing to the strain in the relationship of the Governor and his Prime Minister, and causing considerable public outcry. This was the the question of the importation of arms and ammunition into the Orange Free State through the Cape. Such imports were in accordance with the terms of the customs agreement previously concluded between the two states, and the Cape government, still anxious to prevent any cause for disagreement, had done nothing to impede the movement. The matter first came to public notice when the Cape Times drew attention to the fact that, although the Portuguese were prepared to prevent the importation of arms to the South African Republic, the Cape, a British colony

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29. Headlam, i, 539.
30. M.P., V.8, Milner to Chamberlain, 6.9.1899.
31. Headlam, i, 540-541; W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Milner, 19.9.1899.
32. M.P., Fischer to Hofmeyr, 4.9.1899, 5.9.1899.

had allowed its ports to remain open. The opposition in the House of Assembly reacted promptly to this revelation, asking that, on the following Tuesday, a return of the quantity of arms and ammunition transferred to the Orange Free State and the South African Republic from 1st July be placed before the House. Schreiner responded by producing the information on the spot. In doing so, he explained that everything which had been done was according to " ordinary usage and methods". He also explained that when he had first come to office he had asked that any extraordinary orders should be brought to his attention. He referred to a permit of about 16th July which allowed the importation of a particularly large number of arms into the Orange Free State, but pointed out that, although this was unusual, the Cape government had no right, under the terms of the Customs Convention, to refuse to forward ammunition, nor had they ever done so, except in 1881 when a state of war existed. Rose Innes then inquired whether the government had ever been requested by the Imperial government to stop this passage of arms. It transpired that they had never done so officially, although, Schreiner admitted, the matter had been discussed.[33] These returns brought a storm about the ears of the Cape government, for it was realised clearly for the first time that large quantities of arms had been passing through the Cape to the Orange Free State. In a debate on the following day, the 28th August, Sprigg took the stand that the convention was merely a " trade instrument ", not a treaty of alliance, and that the Cape would be justified in suspending it under the present circumstances. He concluded his speech by asking whether the government was prepared to refuse to issue any more permits until the crisis was over.[34]

Schreiner was in an awkward position, and he did not improve it by reading a message " of peace " from President Steyn which disclaimed any aggressive intention on the part of the Orange Free State except " when attacked , or in defence of its precious rights, or in support or in fulfilment of its obligations". He also repeated his hope that he should be able to maintain the colony " as a little place of peace - a little port, perhaps, in South Africa that is not to be riddled and rent by storm and thunder". The opposition attack on Schreiner was only calmed when Rose Innes rose to define the legal position of the government. He explained that the government attitude was legally correct, and that

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33. Cape Hansard, 1899, 312-313.
34. Ibid., 324.

such action as the opposition demanded might be ill-advised since the responsibility for such a decision rested with the Imperial government, as it involved their relations with a foreign government. Schreiner was hampered in his reply since he was reluctant to bring the High Commissioner into a parliamentary debate, and this delicacy made it difficult for him to defend his position adequately.[35] He explained reluctantly that the Governor knew nothing of the passage of arms through the Cape to the Free State, nor was he informed of the instance in question. However, the whole matter had been made known to him before Sir Gordon Sprigg had tabled his motion, and in future he would be given the opportunity of expressing his opinion before permits were signed. This explanation did not entirely soothe the opposition, for they objected to the fact that the " higher authority " had not been informed of what was going on until it had been made public, and had, apparently, had no opportunity to intervene.[36]

It would seem that the British authorities had indeed been ignorant of these consignments of ammunition.[37] As soon as the matter became public Milner took action. He wrote to Schreiner, expressing sympathy with the difficulties of the Prime Minister's position, and agreeing that, although he did not consider the provisions of the Customs Union Convention as relevant in this case, interference in the passage of goods to the Free State was an unusual step which might well cause the republic to remonstrate. In other words, his objection to such interference was not so much to the illegality of the act, as to the trouble which it might cause - as he knew, a sensitive point with Schreiner. Having offered this sop to Schreiner, he stated his own demands. He considered the present state of affairs as serious enough to warrant a normally unreasonable course. Although Britain had no quarrel with the Orange Free State, that country was arming heavily and there was a strong likelihood that these arms would be used against Britain. He did not consider it unreasonable, therefore, to expect that the British colonies should take the same line as Portugal and refuse further passage of arms until the crisis was ended, but on this occasion he only asked that no permit should be granted without his being informed and allowed to consider it.[38]

When explaining the case to Chamberlain, Milner drew a distinction

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35. Innes, 179-180.
36. Cape Hansard, 1899., 321-338.
37. M.P., V.5, Milner to Hely Hutchinson, 3.9.1899.
38. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Milner to Schreiner, 27.8.1899.

between the power, and the duty, of the Cape government in such a situation. The Cape government, he claimed, had the legal power to prevent the exportation of munitions from the colony, although it could be regarded as an unfriendly act. " This being the case, a nice question arises as to the duty of the Government of the Cape Colony with regard to such exportation at the present time". Milner was inclined to support the view expressed by Rose Innes in parliament; that it should be left to the Imperial government to take the initiative.

> " The Orange Free State is an independent State, but the Colony is only part of the British Empire. It has indeed been the policy of Great Britain to encourage her Colonies in South Africa to deal directly with one another and with the Republics with regard to purely South African matters, as if they were so many independent States. The Customs Union Convention is one result of this policy. But when it comes to strict theory, it is not correct to describe the Orange Free State and the Colony as neighbouring States. It is the Orange Free State and the British Empire which are neighbouring States. Strictly speaking, the Colony has no foreign policy or foreign relations of its own. Its foreign relations are those of the Empire. It is, therefore, for the Imperial Government to decide whether the exportation of arms from the Colony to the Orange Free State at the present time constitutes a sufficient danger to the Empire to justify the breach of comity which would be involved in preventing it. If the Imperial Government were so to decide, then it would, according to Mr Innes, be the duty of the Colonial Ministers to carry out that decision ." [39]

Milner was scathing about the inconsistent position Schreiner had adopted in accepting Rose Innes's thesis of Imperial responsibility on one point, while denying the right of the Imperial government to draw the colony into a war which defended imperial interests. Rose Innes noted this, commenting:

> " The episode is a conspicuous example of Schreiner's strict adherence to constitutional correctness. He submitted himself to adverse and undeserved criticism, rather than reveal what passed between the Governor and himself". [40]

Chamberlain agreed entirely with Milner's view that Britain could demand that the colony should stop the exportation of arms, and replied to this effect, adding: " I doubt if he [Schreiner] will venture to ignore this instruction but if he does question of dismissal would at once arise", [41] thus giving Milner all the ammunition he desired in his prospective battle with the Prime Minister. Schreiner, however, made no difficulty on this occasion. Shortly afterwards the Orange Free State, through Fischer,

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39. Cd. 43, 11-12.
40. Innes, 180. Innes differsfrom the view expressed by Walker that Milner regretted the unpleasant situation in which Schreiner had been placed, and certainly Milner's attitude would seem to support Rose Innes's view. See also, Walker, Schreiner, 93
41. C.O. 48/542, 28.8.1899.

was discreetly warned by Hofmeyr that for the present the wisest course would be for the Orange Free State to avoid importing munitions through the Cape, " including expected consignments", and Fischer reluctantly agreed. [42]

Although the munitions problem had been much relieved, it did not finally end there. A few days later in the House of Assembly, Sir Gordon Sprigg revealed that the armaments for the Free State were still passing through Cape ports. He wanted to know why a permit had been granted for the removal of 500 Mausers from Port Elizabeth. The question put Schreiner in a quandary since it was sprung upon him without warning, and he had no knowledge of the matter. He denied categorically that any permit had been granted by the Cape government since the previous debate. [43] On investigation he discovered that the permit was one of several still outstanding which had been granted when the situation was not regarded as critical, and no-one had thought to remind the Premier of it. [44] He hastened to inform Milner of the details, for he was anxious to assure the Governor that he had not failed to keep his part in their understanding, and he added:

> " I should much value any information which your Excellency [can] give me as to whether the position is now relieved from strain. It is not easy for Ministers to form conclusions upon the very conflicting news which is published in the press". [45]

Milner was not, in fact, entirely displeased about the attacks on the government party in parliament for, he told Chamberlain, he hoped that successful opposition might serve to remind them that their position in the legislation was an insecure one, and deter them " from any course of action which would bring them openly into conflict with the Governor". [46]

Despite Schreiner's conciliatory attitude, Milner's relations with the rest of his ministry was not improving. He was suspicious of any negotiations which were conducted without his knowledge, and he told Chamberlain:

> " You will see from despatches and telegrams how strained the relations are between myself and Ministers. They and Hofmeyr are in constant correspondence with Pretoria, the nature of which I don't know, and I don't ask and they do not tell me anything that passes".

On the same day, in a second letter to Chamberlain, he commented somewhat acidly on Schreiner's handling of the ammunitions debate.

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42. H.P., Fischer to te Water, 4.9.1899.
43. Cape Hansard, 1899, 384.
44. Ibid., 1899, 402.
45. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Milner, 7.9.1899, 5.9.1899.
46. C.O. 48/542, conf. desp., 6.9.1899.
47. Headlam, i, 500.

> " It will be observed that Mr Schreiner, while gladly availing himself of the defence which Mr Innes's argument afforded him for not having taken the initiative in stopping the export of munitions of war to the Orange Free State, by no means committed himself to accepting the logical consequence of that view, viz. that he would be bound to stop such export, if requested to do so by the Imperial Government".

Schreiner's rash assertion that he would try to maintain the colony " apart and aloof from the struggle" in particular was under fire, for Milner was quick to see the logical extension of such a claim.

> " These words seem to fall little short of a declaration of independence, and amount virtually to a policy of separating the Colony, if only pro hoc vice, from the Empire of which it forms a part ".

Nevertheless Milner understood Schreiner sufficiently well to realise that he would in reality find this " remarkable doctrine " impossible to maintain. Milner was disturbed, however, because he felt that this ambiguous situation was creating conflict in the colony. Moreover, despite Milner's dislike of some of Schreiner's points of view, they were not without their effect on the Governor. He recommended now that, althogh the colonial government must not be allowed to hamper the activities of the Imperial government, it would be wise to have some regard for the feelings of those colonists who sympathised with the republics, and he advised that, as far as possible, the colonial forces should be employed only in the defence of the colony. [48]

Indeed Milner continued to find himself in a cleft stick as far as the Cape ministry, and particularly Schreiner, was concerned. For all their differences of opinion, his personal relations with his Prime Minister remained fairly amicable. He told Selborne that there were amongst the Afrikaners " a few dreamers, like Schreiner, whom personally I still like, though he has not always treated me quite fairly ", [49] but his relations with the rest of the Cabinet were not always as pleasant. All the same he continued to walk warily for he was well aware that a Bond ministry had its value at this juncture.

> " A Bond ministry while it hampers one also exercises a restraining effect upon the rebel faction, and it is conceivable that even if it came to war, we might gain rather than lose by keeping the Colonists on both sides out of it, as long as we had absolute freedom in our own movements". [50]

By the beginning of October the most optimistic were beginning to feel that the prospect of peace was slight, yet, as Rose Innes pointed

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48. Headlam, i, 503-504; W.P.S.P.,(U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 7.10.1899.
49. Headlam, i, 532.
50. M.P., V.5, Milner to Hely Hutchingon, 3.9.1899.

out, even those who were at the centre of affairs were not entirely devoid of hope, [51] and last minute attempts were still made to avert the catastrophe. In the main these consisted of appeals to Britain to reconsider her unyielding attitude to the Transvaal. The ministers and their parliamentary supporters petitioned Britain to approach the Transvaal in a " spirit of magnanimous compromise ", but their attempts were unavailing, while an attempt to produce an appeal acceptable to both parliamentary parties failed even to get off the ground. [52] Sir Henry de Villiers also made a final appeal to Milner, asking that, if war could not be averted, at least the fighting should be confined to Imperial forces. Milner responded with platitudes, although he agreed that the colonial forces should not be employed against the republics except where the colony was attacked; a point which he had in any case already yielded to Schreiner, and the two men ended their correspondence on an embittered note. [53]

As the prospect of war approached, the position of the colony gave Milner grave concern. He had not been successful in obtaining from Britain the requisite number of troops to keep the peace in the colony, and already there were signs of serious discontent in the border areas. Complaints had for instance been received that British soldiers at Orange River Bridge and Stormberg Junction were behaving inconsiderately towards the local inhabitants, and the civil commissioner warned Schreiner that such " unnecessary irritation caused to farmers may lead to serious results". Milner made haste to allay their fears, promising adequate compensation to the farmers where damage to their property was unavoidable. [54] In these uncertain circumstances, the co-operation of the Cape ministry was more than ever of vital importance to Britain. Chamberlain was well aware of this, and warned Milner that they might at any moment " become of great importance ". He urged the High Commissioner to avoid any breach which would increase the likelihood of " open rebellion " in the colony. He considered that the ministry still had a useful role to play for, while they remained in power, Schreiner could still hope to confine the conflict and influence the result of the war. [55] Milner agreed with this view, and admitted that, in general, the ministry were proving helpful. Except in such a case as Kimberley they had not objected to the calling out of volunteers, and they were making every effort to ensure that peace should

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51. Innes, 182
52. Davenport, 206; Walker, 99; Lewsen, iii, 90-91.
53. Walker - Lord de Villiers, 358-360.
54. P.M., 75, 5.10.1899.
55. M.P., V.9, Chamberlain to Milner, 10.10.1899.

be kept in the outlying districts.[56] On the 12th October, 1899, Milner sent a hasty appeal to the Secretary of State asking that, if a blue book should be published, " special care should be taken not to insert anything which could make my position more difficult with Ministers and wavering Africanders".[57] In particular, he asked that the proposed British ultimatum, and his exchange of views on the situation with the Colonial Secretary, be suppressed.

On the same day Milner informed Schreiner, and Schreiner the assembled members of parliament, that war had broken out between Britain and the republics. In his speech to the House Schreiner appealed to them all to use every influence available to keep the peace in the colony, and he outlined his plans for keeping order. He had brought into operation local government agencies by circulating a message to every magistrate and field-cornet asking each individually to maintain a calm attitude in the face of provocation, and to soothe excited feelings. He also asked every man with political influence to do the same, and urged the press and the churches to give their assistance.[58] Despite Schreiner's attempts to preserve the peace in South Africa, and his efforts to keep the colony out of the conflict, the Cape had drifted into war. Nevertheless, something had been salvaged, for his ministry was still in power and able to exert a restraining influence over both the Governor and the rebellious colonists.

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56. Headlam, ii, 18.
57. M.P., V.9, Milner to Chamberlain, 12.10.1899.
58. Cape Hansard, 1899, 648-649.

CHAPTER VI

THE SCHREINER MINISTRY AND REBELLION.

The outbreak of war on 11th October, 1899, created an unprecedented situation so that the Cape government had to grope their way uncertainly to a solution to the problems which confronted them. No one could predict with any assurance what might happen, but from the first some facts stood out clearly. Neither the Cape nor British governments doubted that the Afrikaner colonists were deeply sympathetic towards the republics, although opinion differed on the extent to which they might demonstrate their sympathy. The immediate object with both governments was to prevent civil war in the colony, but for differing reasons. The ministry wished to protect the colony from the evil effects of war, while Milner was more concerned about the military situation, fearing that a full-scale rising in the Cape would prolong the war and increase the difficulties of arriving at a satisfactory settlement at the end. This difference in outlook was reflected in the methods each proposed adopting in order to maintain peace, but the resultant friction was eased when the Orange Free State and Transvaal invaded the colony. In Schreiner's view at least, this put the war on a different footing.

Until the day war was declared, Schreiner had been in correspondence with President Steyn, urging that he refrain from attacking the colony, and Steyn had assured him that he would do so provided that the colony was not used as a base for operations against the republics.. Schreiner seems to have put a sanguine interpretation upon this undertaking, for, having explained that he had no control over the disposition of Imperial troops, which were there, however, only for defensive purposes, he concluded that he would " still confide in the hope that such attack will not be made upon us ". [1] No one seems to have questioned the sincerity of his belief that the Free State would not invade the colony, and even the Colonial Office admitted that the Prime Minister's actions were explicable in the light of such a conviction. [2] The invasion was, therefore, a personal disappointment to Schreiner and he blamed Steyn bitterly for the consequent suffering and misery of the colonists.

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1. Cd 43, 135-136
2. C.O. 48/543, desp. 165, 8.11.1899.

More important, however, it meant that the colony was at war with the republics on its own account. As Schreiner explained to a potentially rebellious member of parliament; " The invasion of this Colony is quite wrong in every way. It is not defence, it is attack ". [3] It meant, too, that however much they might dislike the idea, the Cape government had to accept some direct responsibility for the defence of the colony.

When war first broke out Milner was not at all sure that the Cape government would co-operate with him. He told Chamberlain that he thought it best to give the ministry the chance to prevent risings, [4] but his tone suggested that, given enough rope, he expected the ministers to hang themselves. He was not sympathetic about their difficulties, which he felt they had brought upon themselves.

> " Ministers are in a mortal fright, dreading rebellion here, there and everywhere, and equally dreading military movements and precautions which might excite it. I am playing the most extraordinary game, on one hand urging the military and naval people to use every available man and gun, and raise men wherever they can, on the other hand seeking to screen their movements as much as possible from observation, and to keep them away from points, where the population is especially dangerous. It is a most peculiar egg dance ".

A week after war had broken out he was able to report that the ministry were better than he had feared.

> " Ministers are behaving well. I feel sure it is better not to attempt to dismiss them. They do exercise a certain influence in checking rebellion. If rebellion comes, anyway, it may be impossible to retain them". [5]

The Colonial Office was divided in its opinion that the Cape ministry was effective in checking rebellion, but the general concensus supported Milner in his decision to keep them in power, and they agreed that " the little [Schreiner] has done he has done loyally in circumstances of extreme difficulty". [6] For their part the ministry had the option of resigning - Schreiner admitted that this would have been the pleasantest course for him to adopt - but it was clear to them that a change of government at this stage would only provoke mistrust and increase the likelihood of disaffection. [7] They chose instead to make a co-ordinated effort to check rebellion.

On 12th October, when parliament was prorogued, Schreiner described

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3. Le May, 41; W.P.S.P.(S.A.L.), Schreiner to P.J. de Wet, 23.12.1899.
4. Headlam, ii, 18
5. Ibid., ii, 24, cont. in M.P., V.5, Milner to Selborne, 18.10.1899.
6. C.O. 48/543, desp. 165, 8.11.1899; Ibid., conf. desp., 26.10.1899
7. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Ellis, 31.10.1899; Davenport, 210.

to the House of Assembly the means he proposed adopting to keep the country quiet. He appealed to everyone who might have influence with the public, political leaders, the press, and the church, to urge people to keep calm and behave with tolerance and caution. More practically, he brought the local authorities in action by telegraphing to all the resident magistrated and field cornets, asking for their help in keeping the peace. The labour involved was considerable, and brought in return a flood of replies assuring the ministry of support and asking their advice. The first reports, though revealing discontent and uncertainty, were generally reassuring, apart from a few like that from Calvinia warning that unrest and race antagonism was being fomented by the local Dutch Reformed minister.[8] A valuable result of Schreiner's appeal was the unusual praise which he drew from the British sector of the population which was relieved to see such evidence of loyalty. As the Cape Times commented, he may have acted from motives of expediency, " but at the supreme crisis he has struck the right note ".[9] Schreiner was not the only member of the ministry to take action. They were all, in Merriman's words, " striving with might and main to keep the fire from spreading to our own heather", and Merriman's correspondence reveals equally his concern to prevent unrest, particularly amongst his own constituents in the insecure border areas.[10]

After the initial invasion of the colony, the Free State burghers did not take advantage of its defenceless state and their commandos advanced cautiously. It was not until mid-November that Aliwal and Colesburg, followed by Burghersdorp, were occupied, and the invaders were apparently not markedly aggressive.[11] President Steyn issued a proclamation announcing that the Free State had invaded the Cape only because it was being used as a base for operations against the republics " without the will of the peaceful inhabitants of the Colony being consulted therein ", and that they had no intention of waging war against the colonists who would " continue to enjoy perfect freedom of person and property so long as they do not forfeit the same by committing hostilities " against the Free State forces.[12]

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8. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), F.G. Philpott to Schreiner, 11.10.1899.
9. Cape Times, 11.10.1899.
10. Lewsen, iii, 96; Ibid., 103-104, et seq.
11. Le May, 47-48; L.S. Amery - The Times history of the war in South Africa, ii, 291-295.
12. P.M. 113, 26.10.1899.

By mid-November, however, the rebellion was beginning to assume serious proportions. The invading commandos proclaimed martial law over the areas they occupied, and attempts were made to commandeer the inhabitants, while some went so far as to annex the occupied districts, though this was done without the sanction of the Orange Free State government.[13] One of the main factors the Cape government had to contend with in these circumstances was the ignorance of the colonists, for many were confused about their legal position. Undoubtedly a substantial number seized upon these proclamations as a pretext for joining the republican commandos, this being the purpose for which they were intended, but some seem genuinely to have believed that they were subject to Free State law, or feared the consequences if they refused to cooperate. The ministry decided that the best means of combating this ignorance was through the widest possible dissemination of the real facts. Milner and Schreiner were particularly concerned about the commandeering orders which could have considerable propaganda value, and a proclamation was issued explaining that such orders had no validity; that it would be illegal to obey them; and promising compensation to any colonist who should suffer through his loyalty to the Imperial government. Schreiner himself did not believe that the Free State burghers would resort to violence to enforce their orders and considered that it was only necessary to persuade the colonists to remain quiet in their homes to resist them successfully.[14]

The views of the ministry were explained in some detail by J.W. Sauer when he visited the Dordrecht district on a mission to persuade the inhabitants to keep the peace. By the time Sauer reached the Dordrecht region, it was becoming evident that the rebellion involved more than misguided colonists confusing their legal obligations, for there was evidence of duplicity and outright treachery amongst leading members of the Afrikaner community.[15] Sauer himself believed that his mission did have a quieting effect. He was received with acclaim whenever he appeared in public, and more important, he had an opportunity of speaking personally to many of the influential inhabitants of Dordrecht, Maclean and Elliot. Unfortunately Sauer seems to have possessed a knack of involving himself in compromising situations, and his journey

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13. C.O. 43, 217.
14. W.P.S.P., (U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 16.11.1899; W.P.S.P., (S.A.D.), Schreiner to P.J. de Wet, 23.12.1899.
15. Le May, 50; Lewsen, iii, 100-101; Davenport, 211.

to Dordrecht brought little credit either to himself or to his colleagues. Immediately after his departure Dordrecht was occupied by the Free State forces under Commandant Olivier, and there is good reason to believe that they entered at the invitation of the very people Sauer had been working with most closely, and under cover of Sauer's own visit. Moreover, Sauer was accompanied on this journey by one E.T. Hargrove, a man who was viewed with the deepest suspicion by the British government and who, it was revealed later, was in communication with Kruger. Hargrove was also later instrumental in starting the conciliation movement in South Africa to work for a settlement of the war favourable to the republics. Under these circumstances it was small wonder that Sauer's activities were regarded with misgiving by the British inhabitants of the colony, and outright suspicion by Milner.[16]

Sauer's mission brought into prominence a fear which haunted almost all the white inhabitants of South Africa. This was the threat of attack from the native inhabitants of the country, who might be tempted to take advantage of the current disturbances to further their own ends. A recurrent theme in Sauer's reports to Schreiner, and in Merriman's correspondence, was the rumour that Britain would utilise native forces against the Boers.[17] These fears did not prevail only amongst the colonists living in the border areas, but troubled better-informed men as well, and Schreiner did not neglect to include the native races when he appealed at the outbreak of war to the inhabitants of the colony to keep calm.[18] Their fears were not without foundation. There were reports of stock thefts, specially in the border areas, as well as reports of unrest amongst the Coloured community. The uncertainty was not all on the side of the white colonists, however, for many of the inhabitants of the native territories were equally fearful of the unpleasant consequences which a Boer invasion might have on them and they appealed to Britain for protection.[19] South Africa's long history of native wars does account in part for the nervousness exhibited by the Dutch colonists, but there seems little doubt that the Free State commandos and the rebels were prepared to exploit these fears. The latter used them as an excuse for obtaining arms, and the former as a pretext

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16. Lewsen, iii, 108-109; for a general study of this episode see also I.A. James - The rebellion in Barkly East and Dordrecht,in 1899.
17. Lewsen, iii, 102; W.P.S.P. (S.A.L.), Sauer to Schreiner, 27.11.1899; 30.11.1899.
18. Walker, de Villiers, 364; W.E.M. Stanford - Reminiscences, ii, 201; Cape Hansard, 1899, 649.
19. C.O. 48/542, conf. desp. 9.10.1899.

for invasion. Steyn told Schreiner that commandeering had taken place as " a safeguard for the people themselves against possible attack from natives who had been armed ... by the British Imperial Government". [20] The matter never became one of critical importance during the war, mainly because the entire white population of South Africa was agreeed on the danger of arousing a force which they might not be able to control readily. Schreiner used this fear as a weapon against those rebels who might be foolish enough to support a Boer invasion of the territories. [21] Even the Boer forces were wary of stirring up such trouble, however, and the resident magistrate of Herschel was able to strike a bargain with Commandant Olivier on the basis of both keeping the natives out of the quarrel. He reported this meeting to the colonial government, explaining:

> " He [Olivier] said there was the constant fear of native invasion. I said we also heard of a threatened Boer invasion. He said there would be no Boer invasion so long as the [policy] of the British Government continued as at present. He then guaranteed there would be no invasion and asked me to do the same with regard to natives which I did so long as policy continued as at present". [22]

Any clash between Schreiner and Milner on the subject was limited to minor issues, for on general policy the Cape and British governments were agreed - that no use should be made of the natives in fighting the republics. Milner explained that: " The civil - or political - principle (not to use the Natives except in defence, and in emergency) is clearly laid down". [23] Schreiner was prepared to commit himself so far as to agree that " although the idea of approving of any violence of natives to whites in South Africa is abhorrent to me, the natives in the Territories should certainly be allowed and prepared to defend themselves and their districts against actual invasion". [24] The difficulty was for them to agree on what constituted an emergency, for Schreiner, as usual, was tardy in acceding to any step which might provoke the suspicion of the Dutch colonists. Milner, who was annoyed by Schreiner's vacillation, complained that, with the Boers " dancing about unrestrained " in the Herschel and Barkly East districts, there was bound to be trouble in the territories adjoining these areas. He was anxious to see them properly defended, and in a " severe passage of arms " with Schreiner urged that Major Sir Henry Elliot, the commander of the forces in the Transkei and Griqualand East, [25] be allowed to defend the territories " by any means

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20. Cd 43, 217.
21. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Sauer, 25.11.1899.
22. P.M., 114, 27.1.1900.
23. W.P.S.P., (U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 29.11.1899.
24. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Milner, 24.11.1899.
25. Stanford, ii, 201.

in his power". Milner explained the difficulty to Buller: " Schreiner shies at this knowing that Elliot will, under such instructions, turn out the natives, if necessary for any defence". Milner was not anxious to bring this issue to so drastic a conclusion as the dismissal of the ministry, and fortunately on this occasion there was a solution for, Milner said, Schreiner would agree to wash his hands of the whole business. [26]

In actual fact the problem of territorial defence was approached very cautiously by the British authorities. Although the inhabitants responded with alacrity to a call for volunteers to defend the borders, they were given very little opportunity to protect themselves. Sir William Stanford, who was at that time Under-Secretary for Native Affairs and, enjoying the confidence both of Schreiner and Milner, had been appointed adviser to the military authorities on Transkeian military questions, quoted one occasion when, as a mark of his confidence in a chief whose loyalty to Britain was proven, he issued him with 500 rifles - but without ammunition, this being available for the magistracy if it were necessary. [27] On the rare occasions when Schreiner found that natives had been used in any capacity against the enemy, he was quick to investigate the matter and put to end to it before it became a critical issue. [28] The only situation in which this problem created real dissension was in the Cape Cabinet itself. Schreiner was anxious that the policy of the Cape government should be made public in order to allay fears " stirred up by mischievous articles in Ons Land ". To this end he drafted a detailed minute explaining that the policy of both the Imperial and Cape governments was to keep the natives out of the war and describing the measures taken for the defence of the territories. He gave their reasons for doing so, including, amongst others, that in some districts, notably East Griqualand, the Dutch would have to be employed to fight against their kin if the natives were not armed. The minute was not published however. Schreiner himself recorded on the draft:

> " Matter discussed in Cabinet, but did not submit draft. Differences of opinion. Public statement evidently not possible on the subject". [29]

The reason for their difference of opinion can only be surmised, but, judging from Schreiner's original reluctance to agree to Major Elliot's method of defending the territories, it seems likely that some members

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26. M.P., V.11, Milner to Buller, 6.11.1899, 8.11.1899.
27. Stanford, ii, 201.
28. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Secretary, Law Dept to Davies, Sterkstroom, 1 - 4.1.1900.
29. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), draft minute, 14.12.1899.

of the Cabinet resisted the measures which were proposed.

Although Milner had to agree that the Cape ministry had proved more co-operative than he had expected, he was not satisfied with their attitude. There was a fundamental difference in their reaction to the crisis which made co-operation difficult. The ministry wanted to remain passive, to do nothing which might irritate the sensibilities of their compatriots; Milner on the other hand wanted decisive action. Moreover, Schreiner expressed equivocal views on the part the colony should play in its own defence:

> " An invasion would be an attack upon British Territory, and of course our position would necessarily be that we must repel it, but the labouring oar must be that of the Imperial Government whose war it is. We are not equal to the task of taking up such a quarrel". [30]

Not surprisingly, Milner thought differently, particularly in view of the dearth of Imperial troops in the colony. He would like to have seen colonial troops take on the burden of colonial defence, but he was prepared in the beginning to bide his time before making an issue of the matter. He did so less out of concern for his Prime Minister's views than because he was inclined to agree with Schreiner that there were " more good fighting men in the Colony against us than with us ", and the wisest course for the time being was to keep all the parties quiet. This did not mean that the Cape militia played no part in the war. As early as 16th October volunteer corps were called out and placed under the command of Imperial officers, especially in the predominantly English-speaking areas of the eastern Cape. [31] The ministry put no obstacle in the way of this decision, but shortly afterwards it became apparent to Milner that Schreiner's conviction that Britain's should be the labouring oar was to be implemented, financially at least, for the ministry declined to pay the war wages of the volunteer troops. In view of the fact that Natal was doing so - albeit with the help of a loan from the Imperial government - this decision found small favour with the Colonial Office, or with Milner who regarded it as an attempt to discourage the use of local recruits. [32]

By November it was becoming evident that the forces available were

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30. Walker, de Villiers, 360.
31. Headlam, ii, 125 - 126.
32. C.O. 48/543, desp. 156, 31.10.1899; Headlam, ii, 25-26.

hopelessly inadequate for combatting the invasion and Milner decided that the time had come to draw on local recruiting fields. He felt that the argument, that the advantage to be gained by such an action would be invalidated by the number of superior fighters who would be roused against them, was rendered untenable since " it is practically certain that all the really bellicose sympathisers with the Republics will join them in any case". [33] All the same, he was careful to step warily, for the suspicious Dutch colonists were quick to put an unfavourable interpretation on any attempt to recruit the local inhabitants. On 9th November, in consultation with Schreiner, he issued a proclamation which was intended to allay any fears the colonists might have that they would be commandeered by Britain to fight their kin in the republics, and they were assured that all they need do to remain loyal was to keep quiet and give the enemy no help. [34]

Milner's desire to recruit local forces was reinforced by General Sir Redvers Buller who had a poor opinion of the part Schreiner was playing in the war. He complained that " when he will do nothing, when his Government apparently fold their arms and allow rebellion to walk unchecked", Schreiner had no right to complain about the British forces. He told Milner:

> " The main question on which I should like to have a definite statement from the Cape Government is this - Are they prepared to check disloyalty in districts by police action; if so do they wish to have troops to support the police when executing the necessary movements ... ".

As a result of Buller's pressure, Milner found himself in the unfamiliar position of urging a more moderate policy. He suggested that they see Schreiner on the subject under discussion and recorded that " after a long conversation " Schreiner was persuaded to accede to the recruitment of the inhabitants of the Middelburg and Cradock districts. [35] Schreiner's objection to the recruitment of local forces was not as ill-considered as Buller believed. He had previously told Milner that " spasmodic efforts to arm bodies of men here, there and everywhere " would be ineffective in dealing with disaffection, and Milner had agreed that properly co-ordinated forces under the authority of Imperial commanders would be better. [36] Moreover, he realised that the colonial forces were inadequate for suppressing the invasion and rebellion,

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33. Headlam, ii, 125-126
34. P.M. 75, 8.11.1899; Le May, 49.
35. M.P., V.11, Buller to Milner, 10.11.1899.
36. C.O. 48/593, conf. desp., 20.10.1899.

and he feared that their employment for this purpose could have disastrous consequences for the colony. When more troops arrived in the country and decisive action could be taken he wrote to Milner urging " the importance and quieting effect of a military movement, now that reinforcements of great strength have arrived in the Colony". [37]

A major cause of conflict between the Governor and the colonial government was the proclamation of martial law. On 16th October, almost immediately after war had broken out, martial law was proclaimed in the invaded region of the colony north of the Orange River. On 3rd November it was extended to De Aar and the Orange River area, but it was not until 15th and 16th November that the rebellious districts round Colesburg, Molteno, Aliwal North, Wodehouse, Queenstown, Cathcart, and others, were included. [38] On each occasion the proclamation of martial law followed upon invasion and rebellion, and was in no way an effective weapon against the enemy. Dissension arose because the British authorities wanted to see martial law used as a preventive measure against the rebels, while the Cape authorities strongly deprecated its use in this manner, believing that its effectiveness was nullified by the resentment it aroused. The trouble was that martial law was not a usual state of affairs, and presented both legal and human problems with which the colony was ill-equipped to deal. Unlike the situation in the republics, martial law had no proper place in the legal system of either Britain or her colonies, being " the law of necessity in the face of grave emergency ". In fact, martial law was no law at all, but " the suspension of ordinary law ". [39] Since no provision was made in the Statutes for martial law, any acts committed under it had to be legalised by a special Indemnity Act passed retrospectively by the colonial parliament. Another problem was that neither the civil or the military authorities were accustomed to administering martial law, for martial law had not been proclaimed in a British colony for more than thirty years. Some guide was given by the directions which Lord Carnavon had laid down for the administration of martial law in the crown colonies, but since the Cape had responsible government, not crown colony rule, neither party felt themselves bound by these directions, and the situation remained obscure.

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37. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Milner, 23.11.1899.
38. J.H.Snyman - Rebelle-verhoor in Kaapland, 14.
39. Amery, vi, 544; C.O. 48/545, conf. desp., 17.1.1900.

Two problems arose out of this obscurity.[40] One was the actual method by which the law should be administered, for the officers performing this function were generally inexperienced, and it was not surprising, therefore, that some should exceed their duty or carry it out inefficiently, thereby contributing to the abhorrence with which martial law was regarded. Since the relation of the civil authority to the military was not properly defined, there was a difference of opinion on the power properly retained by each. The interpretation of martial law varied widely with the standpoint of the authority involved. Buller was inclined to take an extreme view. He told Milner that martial law had no particular value except that " it enables the military to deal with offenders against their military interests without fear of habeas corpus ", and he deplored a limited application of the law, advocating instead that it be extended for four miles on either side of the railway line from De Aar to Cape Town.[41] Such a view was hardly likely to recommend itself to a lawyer like Schreiner, or to Merriman, with his deep concern for the liberties of the private citizen. Milner found himself torn between the two extreme points of view. His naturally authoritarian temperament and his desire for efficiency inclined him to support the supreme control which martial law vested in the military authorities. At the same time, as Governor of the colony, his concern must be for the political consequences of its administration. As Milner pointed out, war was a rough business, and account could not be taken of the sensibilities of the colonists.[42] Some innocent people were bound to suffer, and the best which could be done was to administer the system as fairly as possible. All the same, until he was sure of his position, he dared not cross the wishes of the ministry. The ministry approached the problem from a more idealistic point of view. They had not wanted the war, which they considered unjust in its origins, and they were not prepared to suffer its consequences. In this they were not alone, for most moderate colonists disliked the imposition of martial law, and men such as Rose Innes, objected to it.[43]

When martial law was proclaimed, General Buller issued a circular of explanation for the benefit of the magistrates and other civil authorities. The crux of the circular lay in the fact that he claimed that under martial law persons who were suspected of aiding and abetting the

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40. Snyman, 9-10.
41. M.P., V.11, Buller to Milner, 2.11.1899.
42. C.O. 48/545, conf. desp., 10.1.1900.
43. I.P., Milner to Rose Innes, 1.1.1900.

enemy could be arrested without a warrant and held until they could be brought to trial.before special military courts. The military authorities were anxious to avoid interfering with the ordinary work of the civil administration, or with the jurisdiction of the civil courts, and he urged the magistrates to carry on as usual under the restriction :that they were subject to the " paramount interest " of the Senior Military Officer in their district. This circular triggered off a series of long minutes between the ministry and the governor in which each sought to define the powers of martial law in the context of the situation as it existed at the Cape. Solomon, the Attorney-General, produced two reports analysing the circular and explaining the objections which the Cape government had to its contents. He admitted that one of the purposes of martial law was to detain suspected persons without the usual formality of a warrant, but it was not the object of martial law to obtain convictions " on mere suspicion or on evidence which would not be recognised as sufficient in Civil Courts of Justice ". This would be a highly illegal procedure. Martial law was by its nature illegal, and Solomon considered it very unwise for such questionable procedure to be adopted since such acts might be declared null and void by the Supreme Court, and could hamper the passing of the Act of Indemnity by parliament. If the civil courts should be closed it might become necessary to establish special courts in order to facilitate the trial of detainees, but until such time, he strongly urged that only the civil courts be used for this purpose. On the strength of these reports, and on that of a complain from T.P. Theron, a member of parliament and chairman of the Bond, complaining about the maladministration of martial law in the Britstown district, the ministers submitted a minute to the governor urging " the wisdom of exercising the greatest moderation in the use of powers under Martial Law". They suggested that in the districts where court martials were established the local resident magistrates be appointed as a member of the court in order to ensure that some legal knowledge be made available to the courts.[44] At this stage the ministry seems to have been entirely in agreement in their views on martial law; that it was an undesirable necessity, but that its powers should be restricted by normal legal procedure as far as possible.

Although the ministers agreed in theory, in practice they came to

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44. P.M. 75, 25/27.11.1899.

differ, since they could not decide on the conditions under which it was necessary to proclaim martial law, while Milner's views on the subject were even more widely divergent. This became apparent a couple of weeks later when Milner, at the request of the military authorities, asked that martial law be extended to the districts of Hopetown, Philipstown and Hanover, concluding that he felt that the application was one " which under the very critical circumstances of the moment, it would be very difficult, if not impossible to refuse". The ministry could hardly refuse to grant such a direct request, nor did they, but they made it plain that they agreed to it with the greatest reluctance. They did not consider conditions to be as critical as Milner stated. For one thing Milner was mistaken in describing these districts as having a common boundary with the enemy, since this only applied to Philipstown. Moreover, such military information as they were able to obtain led them to believe the enemy advance into this area had been checked, while the inhabitants showed no signs of rebellion. They urged that:

> " ... at a time so critical as the present, when feeling has already run so high on the subject of the war now in progress, an unfortunate extension or mistaken application of Martial Law in some district of the Colony might cause very serious consequences to arise in the shape of more or less widely spread disturbance and commotion".[45]

In view of these strongly worded objections from the ministry Milner, acting presumably on his previously ennunciated policy of waiting until events proved him right, refrained from issuing the proclamation. Circumstances soon supported him, for Methuen's advance was checked, thereby increasing the danger of rebellion in the districts concerned. More difficult to resist was the pressure from military commanders urging the extension of martial law not only over the previously mentioned areas but over a large region including Middelburg and Cathcart.

Milner took this opportunity of expressing to the ministry his views on the value of martial law. The whole point of martial law, he said, was that it enabled the military authorities to take precautionary measures. " To wait till a particular place is either directly threatened by the enemy, or the actual scene of disturbance ... is to wait till the principal use of its application is gone ". To the ministry's complaint that martial law provoked disturbance he replied that where a district was quiet martial law would not be felt since it did

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45. P.M., 75, 9.12.1899.

not interfere with the normal administration of a district, and the plain fact was that, whether martial law existed or not, soldiers on campaign were bound to indulge in some needlessly provocative actions. He emphasised that martial law did at least exert some kind of control over the soldiery. " Whatever its defects, it is better than pure arbitrariness and far less demoralising both to officers and men ". He promised, however, that greater care would be taken in future to regulate its administration. Milner was far more favourably disposed towards the application of martial law than he had allowed the ministry to realise. His basic lack of sympathy for the rebels partially accounted for this - he was, for instance, convinced that its effect on the minds of disaffected persons was " wholesome ". Indeed, he seems really to have believed that at heart most of the Dutch colonists were treacherous, and his only fear was lest this latent treachery be provoked. For this reason he was prepared to be cautious.

> " At the same time, and while cherishing no illusions as to the attitude of the Dutch population, I think it most foolish to show by our action, how deeply we suspect them, especially as this may end by driving them over to the enemy ". [46]

The overriding consideration, however, was that the military authorities were unanimously in favour of the proclamation of martial law, and under the prevailing conditions it was only fair that they should be the judges of its efficiency. [47]

Yet Milner had to admit that martial law as an instrument for preserving peace was valuable only as long as it was efficiently and fairly administered, and this, unfortunately, was by no means the case. Not only did he hear " every day ad nauseam from Ministers and their supporters " reports of unjust and arrogant behaviour of the military, but investigations verified these complaints. He did not allow his ministers to know how troubled he was by the situation, but privately he expressed his feelings strongly. He explained to Chamberlain that loth as he was to interfere in military matters, it was difficult to avoid doing so. " What ", he asked, " is purely military in this country ? " Every military movement is so dependent on political conditions and forecasts that there can be no sound strategy without taking them into account ". [48] Later he complained about the " clumsy expedient " of martial law:

> " The consequence is a condition of great administrative and judicial confusion, heightened by the constant passive obstruction of

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46. C.O. 48/545, conf. desp. 10.1.1900; Le May, 56.
47. I.P., Milner to Innes, 1.1.1900.
48. Headlam, ii, 32.

> Ministers to the system, the establishment of which they have been compelled to allow; by the conflicting views as to the nature of martial law on our side; and by the natural and pardonable blunders of military officers in exercising unfamiliar powers in a country of the idiosyncracies of which they were mostly ignorant ". [49]

On another occasion, more frankly, he admitted that " the way in which some military officers are interpreting Martial Law is foolish and mischievous ". [50] Eventually he found the position to be so unsatisfactory that he was driven to complain to Lord Roberts, who had recently arrived in South Africa as the Commander-in-Chief, that he could not condone the extension of martial law until its administration had been more efficiently organised. [51]

Milner's paramount reason for tolerating the obstructiveness of the Cape government, however, was that at this stage, in January 1900, the British army had not succeeded in establishing its supremacy in South Africa. Because of this the Imperial authorities were reluctant to have a ministerial crisis on their hands, especially while there remained some hope that the Cape ministry might still be able to restrain its recalcitrant citizens. Chamberlain urged Milner not to clash with his ministers, advising that it would be better if possible " to go on with present Ministry than to provoke further demonstrations of disloyalty by absolutely breaking with them ". [52]

Milner's minute proposing the extension of martial law had an unhappy effect upon the Cabinet. Merriman, particularly, was bitterly opposed to the extension, and the discovery that, without his knowledge, the rest of the Cabinet had agreed to Milner's request to proclaim martial law over the districts of Tarka, Cradock and Middelburg infuriated him, while further " heated and somewhat acrimonious discussion " did nothing to soothe exacerbated feelings. [53] The ministry's reply to Milner's minute of 29th December was broadly a repetition of the views they had expressed previously, but there were some new points put forward. They were dissatisfied at the lack of communication with the military authorities and they commented on the advisibility of

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49. Headlam, ii, 60.
50. Le May, 62.
51. C.O. 48/545, conf. desp., 7.1.1900.
52. Headlam, ii, 50; Le May, 51-52, 56-57.
53. Lewsen, iii, 135

discussing the subject with them. Nor were they convinced that the military authorities were capable of judging the prevailing sentiment in the districts they occupied when they had to decide whether or not martial law should be implemented. The ministry had received advice from resident magistrates which was contrary to that of the military and which they felt was more reliable since it came from experienced men who were well-acquainted with the districts they administered. Despite these objections they did not oppose the further extension of martial law but they used the advantage which their consent had given them as a lever to urge Milner to agree to their recommendation that a judge of the Supreme Court be a member of every court martial trying cases of high treason, as a guarantee that the liberty of the people would be protected. [54]

The period between January and March 1900, when the first critical months of the war were over and Britain was beginning to establish her military position, gave Milner and the ministry an opportunity to reassess the situation and consider the priorities which confronted them. The ministry had proved itself able to pull together when coping with the immediate task of keeping the peace in the colony. Now they had to face the long term problems which had arisen out of the present position. These included the trial of the rebels and their punishment, and the attitude of the Cape government to the settlement with the republics. Of these the first which had to be attended to was the type of court which should try rebels. As the situation stood at the beginning of the war, under martial law persons suspected of collaboration with the enemy could be held for questioning without a warrant. No provision was made for their trial, however, which, since they could not be held indefinitely, was becoming a matter of some urgency. Buller, in his circular to the civil authorities on martial law announced that the Senior Military Officer had the power to detain anyone " pending his trial by a special court constituted by the Military authorities ". The Attorney-General was gravely disturbed by this statement and insisted that " as long as the Civil Courts are open, all persons arrested by the Ministry for the commission of crimes against the laws of the land, should be handed over to the Magistrates to be dealt with by them ". He considered that the object of martial law was only to prevent the aiding and abetting of the enemy, not to convict persons who had done

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54. P.M. 75, 29.12.1899 / 4.1.1900.

so, for this would be to commit an act of treachery which was a transgression against the normal laws of the country, and was punishable by the ordinary civil courts. Furthermore, since martial law was by its nature illegal, any courts convened under this law were also illegal, and sentences passed by them would become null and void once martial law had been withdrawn. [55]

Further consideration of the problem led to a divergence of opinion amongst the members of the Cabinet. They appear to have been generally agreed that court martials could not be avoided altogether, but they were anxious to ensure that they were legally conducted, and that there should be some civil representation. They recommended that in each district where such a court was constituted, the local resident magistrate be a member of the court, and later went further by recommending that in cases where the court had to deal with major offences a judge of the Supreme Court be enlisted. [56] Solomon, meanwhile, had entered into a correspondence with Lord Kitchener on the matter. Kitchener had suggested that a judge review the proceedings of court martials trying cases of high treason before confirmation of the sentence by the Commander-in-Chief. Solomon objected that such a policy would not enable the judge to assess the case fairly and put forward their previous suggestion once more, giving the reason that this would " give confidence to persons who are tried before it and also their friends ". To this Kitchener agreed. Some members of the ministry were less amenable, however. Merriman's diary records that there was bitter disagreement in the Cabinet, " the legal wing, Schreiner and Solomon, inclining more and more to the side of authority as lawyers always do". [57] He and Sauer expressed their views forcibly, Sauer saying:

> " To allow a Court Martial, in which tribunal I have little faith, to deal with offences cognisable by the Civil Courts is a course I sharply disapprove of ",

while Merriman added:

> "I was under the impression that High Treason was a civil crime and not a military one; and that court martials only dealt with military offences. I am afraid that the appointment of a judge of High Court as a member of a military court which is supra legem gives our tacit agreement to the notion that the civil law is suspended de jure as well as de facto ".

Solomon replied:

> " We give a tacit consent to nothing more than what was concurred to when we proclaimed Martial Law. By getting the military authorities to consent to a Judge presiding at certain trials by

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55. P.M. 75, 25/27.11.1899.
56. Ibid., 75, 29.12.1899 / 4.1.1900.
57. Lewsen, iii, 137-142.

Court Martials we distinctly improve the administration of Martial Law ". [58]

On this occasion Solomon won the day, and he had the support not only of Schreiner and Herholdt, but also the Colonial Secretary. [59] Although this difference was not of major importance, in it lay the seeds of future dissension. In 1900, when the advancing British troops cleared the rebellious districts of the enemy, and the question of the fate of the rebels became immediate and acute, strain was placed on the already shaky bonds which kept the ministry together.

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58. P.M., 114, 30.1.1900
59. C.O. 48/545, desp. 26,3.2.1900.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE MINISTRY

By March 1900 Lord Roberts had managed to clear the invaded districts of the Cape of the enemy, with the result that the problem of the punishment of the rebels became a matter of urgent consideration. Many, encouraged by the announcement that, if they laid down their arms and returned to their homes, they would not be arrested, had begun to drift back and added to the dimension of the problem. Reports of maltreatment of the rebels under martial law increased.[1] Despite the inefficiency of the administration of martial law, Milner was anxious that control should not slip out of the hands of the military authorities, and he urged Lord Roberts to organise the operation of the system more efficiently. He recommended that military courts be established in those districts under martial law where they had not existed before, but suggested that co-operation with the civil magistrates be continued. At this stage Roberts declined to implement Milner's suggestions since he was, he said, too preoccupied with his advance to Bloemfontein.[2] A couple of weeks later Milner, accompanied by Solomon, was able to make a tour of the disaffected districts. This visit served to confirm Milner in his previous impressions. He found that there was appalling administrative chaos:

> " ... so great and so maddening to anybody with an orderly mind, that I have spent the last five days in racing about from one rebel district to another trying to introduce some elements of co-operation, uniformity and system into the jumble. Result fairly satisfactory ".[3]

But he also found that " the state of affairs which is being revealed in the North-Eastern districts is staggering ", that in some of the constituencies " practically the whole Dutch population was under arms ", and, worst of all, " prominent Bondsmen and political supporters of the Government, are in it up to the neck ".[4]

The result of this visit was that both Milner and Solomon began to consider in greater detail the punishment of the rebels. Solomon's correspondence with Schreiner during this tour shows the evolution of his ideas on the subject, while a comparison with that of Milner's

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1. Lewsen, iii, 168.
2. C.O. 48/545, conf. desp., 14.3.1900.
3. Headlam, ii, 106.
4. Le May, 61-62.

at the same time suggests that Milner may have had some influence on his opinions. Solomon was deeply disturbed about the situation. He told Schreiner: " There is nothing which worries me so much as the trial of these people ". Although he knew that the ministry was anxious to preserve the authority of the civil courts, it seemed to him that normal procedure was the least desirable. " I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that in the present condition of things in the Colony it is almost hopeless to expect fair jury trials ". Trial by court martial would be fairer but again was unsatisfactory because of the illegality of these courts. Finally he came to the conclusion that the Imperial parliament should appoint a commission to try cases of treason. Such a course at least had the virtue of speed since the colonial parliament, because it was not yet due to reassemble, could not pass any legislation for some months. Solomon was well aware that this was a highly controversial recommendation. It would be regarded as an interference in the internal affairs of the colony, but, he said, " as a matter of fact the Imperial Government have a good deal to say about the treatment of the rebels ", and he felt the present condition justified such unconstitutional action. There was also the difficulty that the colonial parliament might refuse to indemnify people who had been involved in these trials, in which case they would have to resort to the Imperial parliament anyway. This would have far more serious consequences in the long run than a voluntary appeal by the Cape ministry. He added that he had mentioned his ideas to the Governor who agreed with him.[5] A few days later, on 28th March, Solomon set out his views more formally. He explained that a distinction would have to be made between those rebels who were men of influence and had deliberately led others into rebellion, and those who had been guided by them, or who had been unwillingly commandeered. The former were guilty of high treason and must be tried accordingly, while the latter, he felt, should not be criminally prosecuted. In the case of the former, he again advocated trial by special commission. Above all, however, he urged that, in the present condition of the colony, something should be done immediately. As far as the rank and file were concerned, he suggested that, although they should not be brought to trial, they should be disfranchised, at least for a period, since this was the inevitable result of a conviction for high treason at the Cape.[6]

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5. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Solomon to Schreiner, 22.3.1900.
6. Ibid., Solomon to Schreiner, 28.3.1900.

At the same time that Solomon was formulating his views, Milner was explaining the situation to Chamberlain. His opinion of the rebels was uncharitable.

> " I have no doubt that Schreiner has been grossly deceived. He is an obstinate dreamer, who has set up before himself an imaginary idol labelled ' Afrikaner ' and endowed it with all the primitive virtues, while the real animal, with all his good qualities, is without an equal among white races, for duplicity and cunning ". [7]

Holding such views as these, Milner was unlikely to advocate clemency for the rebels. He agreed that trial by jury was out of the question, and explained that, for the moment, he was not interfering in the ministry's consideration of the " vexed question " of the final trials.

> " I have my own ideas about this, but for the moment I am trying hard to force the Ministry to face the question and propose something for themselves. My line is this; ' What do <u>you</u> advise me to do with 3000 admitted rebels ... It is not enough for you to grumble at Martial Law or preach clemency, and make excuses for treason ".

The answer to this question, he observed, would probably split the ministry, for they were divided both on this question, and on the question of the annexation of the republics. With the colony in this state of political chaos he was convinced that only the intervention of the Imperial parliament would provide a way out of the impasse. However, since he could see that there would be objection to such a course not only from the colony, but from Britain, he was prepared to wait until " the necessity for such interference will become apparent to the most obtuse". [8]

Milner was right in his observation that the solution to this problem was likely to split the ministry, for the reaction to Solomon's proposals was violent, and led to a heated Cabinet meeting. Merriman recorded that they had a " very acrimonious discussion ". Solomon complained afterwards to Merriman that " I am a bit tired of hearing you and Sauer making insinuations against my administration of justice in the presence of that filthy brute Te Water who ... rushes over to the City Club to repeat everything to Hofmeyr ". Merriman hastened to assure Solomon that no such imputation on his integrity had been intended, and admitted that they were all in a state of nerves. [9] Although they were personally reconciled, Merriman was nevertheless in profound disagreement as far as Solomon's proposals were concerned. He was bitterly opposed to martial law as it was at present administered, and he urged

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7. Le May, 62.
8. Headlam, ii, 106-107.
9. Lewsen, iii, 174-176.

that it be immediately withdrawn in those districts which had been cleared of invaders. He advocated that the rebels be treated with magnanimity, recommending that, as far as the rank and file were concerned, an Act of Amnesty be proclaimed by the Queen. He admitted that some persons were guilty of crimes against the common law and agreed that there were advantages to the constitution of a special court but, as Solomon had expected, he objected strongly to the proposal that the Imperial government should play any part in its composition. He maintained that such a court would be illegal in the Cape, and would, moreover, set an unwise precedent. As for Solomon's proposal for disfranchisement, he could not believe that the Attorney-General was serious in making this suggestion, an attitude which augured ill for the future. [10] Te Water took a more extreme stand, refusing to countenance any form of trial for the rebels but trial by jury and objecting to the reflection cast upon the integrity of the Afrikaners by Solomon's assertion that trial by jury would result in an unfair trial. [11] Herholdt, on the other hand, supported the views put forward by the Attorney-General, since he felt that unusual circumstances warranted unusual solutions. [12]

Milner's attitude to the division in the ministry was governed by his interest in the settlement of the war, rather than a desire to punish the rebels. By the end of November he had already worked out the details of the settlement he desired. He was determined that the war should not be fought for nothing; that Britain's paramountcy should be finally established in South Africa.

> " The ultimate end is a self-governing white Community .... There must be one flag, the Union Jack, but under it equality of races and languages. Given equality all round, English must prevail, though I do not think, and do not wish that Dutch should altogether die out ". [13]

The greatest obstacle in achieving such a state was the condition of the Cape. After the war, Milner recommended, the republics should have autocratic government, and he hoped that if that area were swamped by British settlers, British paramountcy would be ensured. He envisaged that, if the rebellion in the Cape should spread, the constitution of the colony would have to be suspended, in which case the entire country, apart from Natal, would come under Crown Colony rule. [14] Milner was strongly opposed to the Cape continuing under its old system of government once the war was over. He told Chamberlain : " We cannot go back

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10. Lewsen, iii, 176-179.
11. W.P.S.P. (S.A.L.), Te Water to Schreiner, 2.4.1900.
12. Ibid., Herholdt to Schreiner, 3.4.1900.
13. Headlam, ii, 35-36.
14. Ibid., ii, 37-38.

to the old system of allowing the country to be governed by rebels under constitutional forms ", and he emphasised the influence which the Bond had in undermining the loyalty of the colonists and the civil service. He feared that, if the government remained in the hands of the Bond, the colony would be virtually lost to the British Empire. He suggested, therefore, that if the rebellious districts were temporarily disfranchised the loyal majority in the rest of the colony would tide them over the danger period. A month later he elaborated on these views.

> " The loyalists ... will not submit directly afterwards to be governed by the representatives of men, who have been fighting to overthrow the State. You cannot be a rebel today, trying to overthrow the Constitution, and a voter tomorrow, claiming to exercise all the privileges which the Constitution gives you ".

Personally, he said, he recommended that the rebellious districts be separated from the rest of the country and governed by commission, while a fresh election be held in the rest of the colony. But, he added tentatively, some colonists recommended the temporary suspension of the colonial constitution, although he considered such a course too drastic.[15] Milner felt that the problem would have to be faced fairly soon since parliament was due to reassemble in July. He thought it unfair that members whose constituencies were in revolts, and here he had Merriman and Sauer in mind, should be allowed to help " in voting down the loyalist minority ".[16]

The Colonial Office sympathised with Milner in this awkward situation, and they agreed that the meeting of parliament could have a mischievous effect. This was particularly so when parliament, constituted as it was with a Bond majority, was expected to pass an act indemnifying actions committed under martial law of which they so bitterly disapproved, and also perhaps, to agree to the appointment of commission to try the rebels, with whom they sympathised. Nevertheless, they did not consider it worthwhile clashing with the Prime Minister in order to avert the summoning of parliament. Despite their sympathy for Milner, they were not happy about the course he proposed. They feared that a policy of disfranchisement might drive other members of the Cape parliament into opposition to Britain, while a fresh election, even in a diminished colony, did not seem desirable at this stage. Worst of all, should these

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15. M.P., V. 26, Milner to Chamberlain, 31.1.1900.
16. Headlam, ii, 61.

attempts to produce a loyal majority fail, the position would be worse than ever. Moreover, the arbitrary appointment of an entirely loyalist ministry would have its disadvantages. If they could not command a majority, they would not dare allow parliament to meet, which would provoke strong criticism both at the Cape and in England, while the unrepresentative demands they might make could hamper the formulation of a workable settlement at the end of the war. They concluded, therefore, that the only reasonable course they could take was to allow the Schreiner ministry to remain in office. There was one loophole out of this dilemma, however. If Schreiner's ministry should resign, there would be an opportunity for the appointment of a more suitable ministry. Chamberlain himself, was certainly opposed to Milner's proposals, minuting: " As at present advised, the drastic views of Sir A. Milner seem to me impolitic and unnecessary ".[17] He was prepared to consider an election in the colony only if Milner could assure him that the Progressives had a reasonable hope of attaining a majority.[18] In these circumstances Milner and Chamberlain had an interest in seeing the Schreiner ministry fall, and it is not surprising, therefore, to find that Milner was inclined to encourage the breach in their ranks. He told Chamberlain:

> " Cabinet deeply divided and may split up which would be best thing that could possibly happen, as if the downright traitors could be expelled I believe majority might be found for the rest reinforced by some Progressives ".[19]

The two problems of martial law and the punishment of the rebels continued to plague Schreiner's ministry during April and May 1900 and finally produced its downfall in June 1900. The approaching political crisis was exacerbated by the fact that the colonial parliament was due to reassemble in the middle of the year. If the Prime Minister failed to summon parliament the country would be governed unconstitutionally since parliament had to vote supply for the new financial year. If parliament were summoned, other difficulties were created, since this parliament would be called upon to deal with crucial legislation which had arisen out of the war. Milner considered it unreasonable that members who were representatives of rebels should be allowed to weight the vote against the two most important pieces of legislation; that which would indemnify acts committed under martial law; and that dealing

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17. M.P., V.44, 7.3.1900., conf. prints for C.O.; Garvin, iii, 574.
18. M.P., V. 25, Chamberlain to Milner, 8.3.1900.
19. C.O. 48/546, 31.3.1900.

with the punishment of the rebels. Chamberlain, however, was opposed to any interference with the Cape constitution, so it was necessary that the problem be resolved before parliament met in order to ensure that the legislation would be carried, and prevent the necessity for the intervention of the Imperial government.

As we have seen, Solomon's proposals for the punishment of the rebels had aroused bitter opposition in the Cabinet, with Sauer, Merriman and te Water ranged against Solomon, Schreiner and Herholdt. Schreiner was in the difficult position of having to reconcile their differences if he could, while at the same time meeting the demands of the British government. For a time it seemed possible that the crisis might be averted. On reading Merriman's criticisms of his proposals Solomon admitted that there was something to be said for them. His tone was conciliatory for he pointed out that he was at one with Merriman in his dislike of convictions which were carried out under martial law. This was why he had suggested that a separate court be appointed, if possible by the Cape parliament, but if not by the Imperial parliament, which would obviate the trial of high treason by court martial. " My great anxiety is to have fair trials and in order to secure that I am quite prepared to sacrifice a little of constitutional liberty ". [20] In the meantime, Merriman and Sauer sought the advice of the Chief Justice, Sir Henry de Villiers. Sir Henry was of the opinion that, rather than allow Britain to interfere with the constitution rights of the colony, it would be better to accept a trial in Cape Town, but on further consideration he felt that they should rather consent to an appeal to England than risk the dissolution of the ministry. These efforts to secure a compromise reduced some of the tension in the Cabinet, and Merriman was able to record the discussion as a " shade less acrimonious", although no result had been achieved. [21]

While the argument was still raging in the Cabinet, Chamberlain, prompted by Milner, began to take an interest in the matter. In a despatch of 10th March, forwarded to Schreiner by Milner a month later, he drew attention to the fact that he was receiving complaints that loyalists

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20. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Solomon to Schreiner, 2.4.1900.
21. Lewsen, iii, 184-185.

in the colony were suffering for their duty to the Crown, while rebels were escaping scot free. This was a grave injustice, the recurrence of which he was anxious to prevent, and he suggested that this could be done by two means: by the compensation of the loyalists; and by the adequate punishment of the rebels. Neither of these proposals, nor Chamberlain's method of propounding them, was likely to appeal to the ministry. In order to ensure that compensation was promptly paid and correctly evaluated, he wanted commissioners appointed to investigate the claims, while the money was to come from the colonial purse, if necessary with the help of a loan from Britain. None of the ministers looked kindly on this proposal [22] which was in any case overshadowed by the question of the rebels. On that question Chamberlain supported the idea of a special commission and hoped that it might prove reasonably acceptable if it included as a member a lawyer who had the confidence of the Afrikaner population. [23] Chamberlain supported the opposition of the ministry to the appointment of a special commission by the Imperial parliament. In a private note he told Milner:

> " ... you will remember that the action of an Imperial Commission would be sharply watched and criticised by the Colonists who would, not unreasonably, throw all the blame upon us if its proceedings did not satisfy them. If, as is not improbable, such a Commission leaned towards leniency there would be a great outcry from the British party. If Schreiner carries his measure by the help of Progressive votes the responsibility is theirs ". [24]

Chamberlain preferred, therefore, that Milner should somehow obtain the support of the Cape ministry for the measure, and suggested that the threat of the indefinite prolongation of martial law, with the corollary that sentences passed by court martials were likely to be more severe than those passed by a commission, might persuade the ministry to see the matter in a more reasonable light. [25]

Milner himself was not optimistic about the results of such a policy, believing that it would be better to " cut the Gordian knot by the action of the Imperial Parliament " [26], but he realised that he was bound to exhaust other possibilities first. As well as being the two ministers directly responsible for the punishment of the rebels, Schreiner and Solomon were the most likely to succumb to his influence, and, after several long conversations, Milner persuaded Solomon, with Schreiner's

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22. Walker, Schreiner, 113-114.
23. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Milner to Schreiner, 9.4.1900.
24. C.O. 48/546, 28.4.1900.
25. Le May, 65.
26. C.O. 48/ 546, 22.4.1900.

consent, to draft a bill for the creation of a special commission to try rebels and confirm acts committed under martial law. In the meantime Lord Roberts had agreed that he would not confirm the sentences of court martials until further orders. He was, in any case, also in favour of a statutory commission since, he said, " the sentences are more or less a farce when they must come to an end concurrently with the termination of Martial Law. For no-one supposes or wishes that Martial Law will be in force a day longer than is absolutely necessary ". [27] The result of Milner's pressure and their own deliberation led the ministry , in a minute of 27th April, to agree in principle to trial by special commission. They had come to this decision, they said, after considering the other possibilities and reaching the conclusion that both trial by jury and by court martial was undesirable. They proposed, therefore, that a tribunal composed of two judges of the Supreme Court and a barrister of standing should receive its commission from the Governor on the advice of the Executive Council, while the control of all prosecutions to be brought before the commission should be vested in the Attorney-General. In this way the prosecution of the rebels would be controlled by the colonial authorities, and there was a reasonable possibility that under these conditions and if put forward by the Cape ministry, the colonial parliament might be induced to carry these proposals. [28] Milner considered this a " great step in the right direction ", but he would have preferred Britain to have greater control over the proceedings of the commission through the appointment of a British judge as president. [29]

In persuading themministry to agree to a special commission, Milner apparently hoped that they might desert their colleagues.

> " The great body of Bond Members are likely to adopt an irreconcilable attitude, but I think that if the Ministry made the Bill strong enough to satisfy the reasonable Progressives they could carry it by a small majority. In my opinion it is the safest course for the Ministry to take a strong line and not run the risk of falling between two stools ".

Unfortunately he had not been able to persuade Schreiner to go so far. Although Schreiner was prepared to see the leading rebels punished, Milner observed, he hankered after amnesty for the rank and file. Schreiner hoped that the Progressives, who were at present prepared to accept disfranchisement for a term of years as an adequate punishment, might be

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27. Headlam, ii, 79-80.
28. Cd. 264, 13.
29. C.O. 48/546, 28.4.1900.

persuaded to acquiesce in an amnesty if it were proposed by the Imperial government since the Cape government could not decently make such a suggestion on behalf of their own political supporters, nor had they the constitutional right to do so.[30] In making this suggestion Schreiner was feeling his way to a resolution of the crisis of the ministry. He felt personally that it was just that the rebels should suffer some punishment since they had transgressed the laws of the country and brought about the prolongation of the war, with the consequent increase of suffering both of English and Afrikaner colonists, but he knew that other ministers regarded the rebels as unfortunate victims of British policy rather than traitors to their country. Nevertheless, as long as the ministry could usefully serve the country, especially as the representatives of the rebels, it was important that their unity be maintained, and Schreiner was anxious that their differences should be settled.

A solution seemed to be in sight when , at the end of April, Merriman proposed that the ministry ask Britain for a complete amnesty for the rebels. In a minute to which he attached great importance, and to which he had devoted a great deal of thought, Merriman urged that it was reasonable to request amnesty since the rebellion had not been of a serious character, subsiding as soon as the republican forces had been withdrawn and accompanied by few cases of outrage either to people or property.

> " Feeling assured, therefore, that those principles of justice tempered with mercy that have marked British policy elsewhere, and that have contributed in so great a measure to the stability of British rule, will on the present occasion be followed in South Africa, Ministers submit that the ends of justice would be served by the selection of a certain limited number of principal offenders to be tried ... For the remainder, Ministers believe that the interest both of sound policy and of public morality would be served if Her Gracious Majesty were moved to issue, as an act of grace, a Proclamation of amnesty ..."

An amnesty would be politic too, in the interests of a satisfactory settlement after the war, since it was vital that the European races should maintain a united front if peace and civilisation were to be maintained in South Africa.[31] Merriman stressed the importance of the precedent of the British settlement in Lower Canada after the rebellion of 1837-1838, when a general amnesty was declared on the advice of Lord

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30. C.O., 48/546, 28.4.1900.
31. Cd. 264, 14-15.

Durham. He told Schreiner that he considered the analogy more than valid in view of the fact that the Canadian rebellion had been the result of a conspiracy organised by responsible leaders, and was accompanied by much bloodshed. [32] Merriman's minute was received favourably by the Cabinet, and he recorded, on 24th April, that the Cabinet"discussed amnesty in good temper and spirit", Schreiner commenting that the minute deserved " to be filed with the greatest distinction among our most valued records ". [33] Only Solomon had reservations, and asked for time to consider the question, but finally three days later, came round, and the minute was forwarded to Milner at the end of April. [34]

Even before he had received this minute Milner had looked upon the idea of clemency with disfavour. Chamberlain, who was motivated more by expediency than a desire to see the rebels punished, agreed with him because he feared the reaction of the loyalists if the rebels were allowed to go scot free. He felt that it was necessary, therefore, that the British government should at least make some token show of punishing the rebels. They might show their magnanimity rather by convicting a certain number of rebels with the intention of pardoning them a few months later, but added, " we must have disfranchisement ". Chamberlain's fears that the Cape loyalists would create difficulties if too great a clemency was shown to the rebels had some validity for they had already published a protest in the London Times, threatening to turn disloyal if such a course were followed. [35] In any case, Chamberlain was not happy about complete amnesty since he felt that it did not allow for the difference in the degree of guilt which existed even amongst rank and file. [36]

Milner, on the other hand, wanted to see the rebels punished not only because he regarded it grossly unjust that they should not pay for their crimes, but because he hoped that by insisting on such a course, he would drive a wedge between the extreme and the more moderate members of the ministry. When the amnesty minute was presented to him he realised that the weakness of the ministry's position lay in the fact that the initiative for amnesty had to come from Britain since it was the only way in which the proposal might find acceptance in the eyes of

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32. Lewsen, iii, 191-192.
33. Walker, Schreiner, 114.
34. Lewsen, iii, 188.
35. Le May, 67.
36. C.O. 48/546, 28.4.1900.

of the loyalists. By pressing for the disfranchisement of the rank and file he would almost certainly ensure the division of the ministry since the solution to their disagreement could not be found amongst themselves, but had to come from Britain. By now he was fairly certain of the support of the Attorney-General, but he was less sure of Schreiner who, he feared, still had an undue influence over Solomon.[37] Herholdt, too, would support the disfranchisement proposals, and he thought that there was also the faint possibility that Merriman might be brought round, but the remaining two ministers would probably resign. With the support of the Progressives and a few personal followers of Schreiner, a disfranchisement bill could then be passed by parliament. Alternatively, if the ministry resigned, a Progressive ministry would be able to count on the support of Solomon and Schreiner with the same result. Milner added:

> " Apart from my own strong conviction that absolute amnesty would be a mistake I should welcome any course likely to split Ministry and its supporters. If present ministerial policy remains united and in power, nothing can in my opinion avert any ultimate impasse from which intervention of Imperial Parliament will be only means of escape ".

By putting his case in this way, Milner could be reasonably sure of Chamberlain's support for his policy since he was well aware that the Colonial Secretary was strongly opposed to Imperial interference in colonial affairs.

Milner was fairly certain that this policy would be successful. In a long conversation with Schreiner he had been able to gauge the feelings of the ministry. Schreiner had again urged the wisdom of amnesty, but, Milner said, he had reason to believe that Schreiner was prepared for an unfavourable answer and " if he had a formal expression of the views of Her Majesty's Government in his hand would go back to the Cabinet and try to induce them or some of them to meet those views". It was only necessary to ensure that Britain player her cards correctly. He warned Chamberlain : " A great deal depends on the terms of the answer of Her Majesty's Government to the amnesty minute ". It must "breathe a spirit of clemency .... References might even be made to the clemency already shown ". But the principle that absolute amnesty could not be extended to colonists who had collaborated with the enemy must be

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37. C.O. 48/546, 22.4.1900.

asserted. The delicacy of the problem lay in the alternatives which Britain might propose to the indictment of all the rebels for high treason. " Both Prime Minister and Attorney-General are extremely averse to such an indictment to which I also see great practical difficulties ". Solomon, hesaid, advocated an enquiry by either a judicial or a separate commission who could investigate and schedule the names of all the people implicated in the rebellion whom they did not wish to bring to trial. These people could then be disfranchised for a period. Milner suggested, however, that Britain might make her own terms slightly stiffer by proposing fines in those cases where men had actually fought against the government. " This might be ultimately abandoned on Ministers agreeing to deprivation of political rights. It would be something to bargain with ". [38] In other words, by appearing to relax her terms in order to reach a compromise with the Cape ministry, Britain might induce Schreiner, always conscious of reasonable concession on the other side, to break with the extreme Bond in support of Britain's conciliatory proposals.

Accordingly Chamberlain replied with a cautious minute expressing sympathy with the objects of the Cape ministry as stated in the amnesty minute, and assuring them that above all Britain desired that harmonious co-operation might be attained after the war. " Clemency to rebels is a policy which had the hearty sympathy of Her Majesty's Government ", he said, " but justice to loyalists is an obligation of duty and honour ". The problem was how to harmonise these two policies. He felt that " in the interests of future peace it is necessary to show that rebellion cannot be indulged in with impunity ". However, the rebels had so far been treated with great leniency. In order to arrive as some standard for the punishment of rebels he suggested that they be divided into six categories according to the severity of their crime, and that these then be investigated by a judicial commission or other special commission as Milner had proposed to him. The general amnesty Chamberlain rejected outright, as being too controversial and demanding too lengthy a consideration by Britain at a time when urgent decisions must be taken. Nor did he consider the Canadian precedent to the point, since that rebellion had taken place under constitutional conditions which the British government had subsequently recognised as being unsatisfactory. The Cape rebels had no such pretext and their rebellion was of a far more serio

38. C.O. 48/546, 2.5.1900

nature, entailing greater suffering on British troops. [39] Further consideration of the ministers' minute did not cause Chamberlain to alter his opinion. [40]

Chamberlain's rejection of the amnesty had a decisive effect upon the future of the ministry. Schreiner had decided to summon parliament for 22nd June. Despite Sprigg's private protest to the Governor that parliament should not be allowed to meet until Schreiner had given a definite assurance that the ministry would submit a bill providing for the appointment of a special judicial commission for dealing with the rebels " upon the lines sketched by you in our conversation on Saturday ", Milner agreed, feeling that it would be inadvisable to postpone it. [41] This meant that the period in which the problems of the ministry could be settled had a definite limit, for it was out of the question that Milner would any longer allow a Bond majority to decide the future of the colony. In addition, Chamberlain's refusal to accept the amnesty minute meant that Schreiner's hope of obtaining a compromise within the Cabinet had virtually disappeared. Merriman, for instance, considered Chamberlain's reply " singularly vindictive ". [42] His memorandum on the subject rejected Chamberlain's proposals in uncompromising terms. He was no reason why the ministry should pander to the loyalists.

> " I confess that I do not understand the meaning of the word ' loyal ' in this connection. If Mr Chamberlain means the party who have approved the policy of this war, and who have, both before its outbreak and since, by writing and speaking rendered the task of keeping peace almost impossible then I think that he fatally misapprehends the political situation in this Colony ".

Merriman did not believe that punishment for rebellion would act as a deterrent. These people had been driven to rebellion only as a desperate act of protest, and it did not inflict a moral disgrace upon them. He considered the policy now proposed as vicious one intending to put the Afrikaners into the same political position as the uitlanders were previously alleged to have been, and equally dangerous in its effect. Moreover, the commission which was to investigate the allegations against the rebels would supercede the ordinary functioning of justice in the colony, which was " repugnant to the very fundamental principle of free institutions". In all, he considered that Chamberlain's proposals made a " mockery of free institutions" [43], especially in view of the fact that Chamberlain had given his reply before he had received the complete text

39. Cd. 264, 7-8.
40. P.M., 76, 7/8.5.1900.
41. M.P., V. 27, Sprigg to Milner, 30.4.1900; C.O. 48/546, 28.4.1900.
42. Lewsen, iii, 204.
43. Cd., 264, 40-42.

of the amnesty minute.

Schreiner's last efforts to retain the loyalty of the ministry were unavailing. He paid a private visit to Mrs. Merriman with the intention, she believed, of persuading Merriman, through her influence, to modify his views - with little success, however. [44] He also asked Milner to have martial law withdrawn from the districts of Cathcart, Steynsburg, Molteno and Queenstown. He urged that a cogent reason for doing so was that " the more moderate and restricted operation of Martial Law is, the more readily will, or should the Legislative assent to the necessary Act of Indemnity ". [45] The dissident ministers remained unaffected, however. Now Schreiner's only real chance that he might keep the ministers together lay in the fact that they did now know whether Britain was goind to demand disfranchisement for life or for a period only. Given no other alternative, the ministry might possibly be induced to accept disfranchisement for a limited period. Milner, however, was determined that this shift should gain Schreiner nothing. He told Chamberlain that he was hourly expecting news of a crisis in the ministry. " My only fear is that it may be averted " [46] and he pleaded that Chamberlain's reply to the ministers' query on the length of time disfranchisement was to be enforced be " quite uncompromising ". He considered that Chamberlain"might, in my opinion, point out that any conviction for treason would ipso facto disfranchise for life ... there is really no reason why, if we spare them the other and severer penalties for rebellion, it should not entail its full political penalties ". He could not afford to lose Schreiner's support by proposing penalties which were too harsh however.

> " I think at the same time that it might be desirable to leave a door open for a bargain, fixing a term of years instead of life. In my own opinion there are practical difficulties and objections to keeping thousands of men off the registers for years. The only object of striking them off at all is : firstly to place a stigma on rebellion, and secondly to weaken the rebel party at the polls in the immediate future and at the next election in particular ". [47]

Chamberlain found this policy acceptable, minuting that he was prepared to " buy " Schreiner by a concession on disfranchisement, if the Prime Minister was prepared to support the Progressives in passing an Indemnity Act and in the appointment of the commissions. He co-operated

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44. J.X.M.P., Mrs. Agnes Merriman to Mrs. Julia Merriman, 20.5.1900.
45. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Milner, 14.5.1900.
46. M.P., V. 26, Milner to Chamberlain, 23.5.1900.
47. C.O., 48/546, 30.5.1900.

with Milner, therefore, to the extent of sending him an open telegram advocating disfranchisement for life, and a second, secret, telegram directing Milner to make a bargain for a limited term.[48] Milner never, in fact, told Schreiner that Chamberlain was prepared to agree to disfranchisement for a term of years, although he hinted to him that Britain was unlikely to make an issue of disfranchisement for life if Schreiner would compromise on other points. Milner was sure that Schreiner had realised this, " but I thought it would strengthen his position if it appeared that he had not gone the whole way with us but proposed rather better terms for the offenders than we altogether approved ".[49] The fact that Britain was demanding disfranchisement for life, however, only made compromise more difficult.

On June 11th, 1900, Schreiner was forced to submit a memorandum to the Governor explaining that, owing to a fundamental difference in opinion on the punishment of the rebels, the Cabinet had reached a deadlock. In addition, he had to inform the Governor that the majority of his supporters in parliament did not support his proposals regarding legislation on the subject. On 13th June, since the ministry was still unable to achieve unanimity, and without support from his party, Schreiner deemed it his duty to hand in his resignation.

Schreiner resigned not only for the constitutionally correct reason that his ministry could not act in accord, but also because, for some months past, his relations with the Bond had become increasingly strained. In particular, he and Hofmeyr had become less and less able to agree on the action the party should take on the war, and Hofmeyr was suspicious of the influence which Milner might have over Schreiner. This suspicion was not without foundation. Early in 1900 the Bond decided to hold a congress, which they had postponed the previous year, and the date was fixed for March. As soon as Milner heard of this he persuaded Schreiner that a congress at such a time would be " inopportune and mischievous " and asked him to intervene.[50] This put Schreiner in a delicate position, since he was not a member of the Bond, and did not want to interfere in their domestic affairs, and he turned to Hofmeyr for assistance. Hofmeyr, however, declined to help, adopting an ambiguous attitude. He told Schreiner that " I have no more to do with

48. C.O. 48/ 546. 18.6.1900.
49. C.O. 48/547, 18.7.1900.
50. C.O., 48/545, 27.2.1900; Davenport, 213.

the calling together of any Congress for next month than I have with the sitting of the British Parliament this month ". He explained that this was decided by the Provincial Bestuur of which he was not a member, and suggested that Schreiner should apply to them, since they would doubtless give consideration to Schreiner's wishes. Schreiner, however, was still reluctant to interfere, and once more asked Hofmeyr to intervene. The tone of Hofmeyr's reply was disingenuous, to say the least.

> " I hope you have now convinced yourself that your astonishment that I could have decided to hold a Bond congress next month was misdirected, though you, of course, do not say so.
>
> I regret that you decline to approach the ' Moderatuur' with regard to the Congress, which you view as inseparable from great risks, as, in fact, probably doomed to lead to ' the Deluge'.
>
> I cannot help confessing that I am of an opinion that a politician who holds such strong views on the subject, and who is moreover in correspondence with at least one member of the ' Moderatuur ' on a matter connected with the Congress, is not only at liberty, without violence to any delicacy of feeling, to communicate those views to that member, but is even in duty bound to do so without delay ....
>
> As for myself, my presumed Bond dictatorship notwithstanding, I have not been consulted by any member of the ' Moderatuur ' on the feasibility or desirability of postponing the Congress. I am not even in correspondence with any of them, and have, therefore, nothing like that fine opening which de Waal's letter gives you. I also feel some delicacy in the matter and I believe with more reason than you have ". [51]

Overcoming his reluctance, therefore, Schreiner asked de Waal whether it would be feasible to postpone the Congress, and appealed to Hofmeyr once more for his support. Hofmeyr rather grudgingly complied, and de Waal, in consultation with J.A. van Zyl and T.P. Theron, agreed readily, explaining that " in less stormy times I shall be able to explain to you why it was not possible to postpone the Congress unless either you or Mr Hofmeyr intervened ". [52] Milner and Schreiner were not alone in considering a congress undesirable at this stage for the day after the whole affair had been settled, Merriman wrote to T.P. Theron expressing his doubts on the wisdom of such a meeting. He urged that it was essential that the Afrikaners maintain in the moderate stand they had so far taken, in order to ensure that they had a right to a voice in the final settlement. [53] Until this time Hofmeyr had given Schreiner his unstinting support. The war had been a terrible blow to him, however,

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51. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Hofmeyr to Schreiner, 19.2.1900, 21.2.1900. N.F. de Waal had previously written to Schreiner to ask him if he could use his authority with the military to facilitate the movement of Bond members to the congress.
52. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Hofmeyr to Schreiner, 22.2.1900; Ibid, N.F. de Waal to Schreiner, 24.2.1900; Walker, Schreiner, 108.
53. Lewsen, iii, 157-158.

and strained his already uncertain health. Now it seemed that his own ministry were advocating policies which were contrary to the interests of the Afrikaner people, and he feared that Milner might have an undue influence over the Prime Minister. In adopting this noncommittal attitude to Schreiner, Hofmeyr may also have been motivated by a desire to dissociate himself from any proposal which might be thought to emanate from Milner.

Hofmeyr's attitude to Schreiner was important, since, despite his disclaimer, he had considerable influence in the Bond, and his favour was essential to the maintenance of Schreiner's position as parliamentary leader of the Bond. Schreiner's deteriorating relationship with the Bond was made more difficult because, with the turn of Boer fortunes in the war, the Bond had become increasingly vocal in its criticism of British policy, and particularly the administration of martial law. In the early months of the war Shcreiner, and those who thought like him, had had enough influence to restrain the Bond from contributing to the unrest in the colony. Later, by preventing the meeting of the Bond congress in March, Schreiner was able to strike a bargain with Milner who agreed in return to prevent the Progressives from giving public expression to their opinions.[54] This"truce of God" was broken not by the Bond, but by a movement calling themselves the Conciliation Committee of South Africa. This committee, which was allied to a parent body in London which included amongst its members such men as Percy Molteno and Frederick Mackarness, stated that its objects were: to assist the London Committee to obtain information; to restore peace; to assist those who had suffered during the war to obtain redress; and to promote the recognition of the republics' right to independence. The movement promoted a peace campaign which culminated in a mass meeting at Graaff-Reinet at the end of May, and which also provoked demonstrations from the opposition demanding the annexation of the republics by Britain.[55]

Although many of the leading members of the Bond gave the movement their support, Hofmeyr was cautious about committing himself and refused to join, but he admitted that he sympathised with their motives.[56]

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54. Headlam, ii, 100.
55. Ibid., Davenport, 213-215.
56. Hofmeyr, 558-559.

The ministry was equally cautious. Solomon did not agree with the policies of the Committee, particularly its resolution calling for the independence of the republics. " However drastic it may be ", he told Schreiner, " the best policy for South Africa now is to have the British flag in the Republics ", and he urged Schreiner to have nothing to do with the movement.[57] Unfortunately other members of the ministry were irrevocably associated with the movement, at least in the eyes of the British authorities. One of the leading figures was E.T. Hargrove, who had, the previous year, accompanied Sauer on his ill-fated mission to Dordrecht. He had also had an interview with President Kruger which had caused the latter to write to President Steyn in January 1900 saying that Hargrove had given him to understand that Sauer and Merriman were " ready to range themselves openly on our side, to make propaganda in the Cape Colony provided an official declaration is given that the Republics only desire to secure complete indapendence ".[58] When Bloemfontein was taken this correspondence fell into the hands of the British authorities, causing Milner to ask Schreiner to investigate the matter. Although Merriman and Sauer were able to exonerate themselves, Milner was determined to take advantage of the incident by publishing the letters which had passed between Hargrove and the ministers. " I think that the public are entitled to the enlightenment which this correspondence affords with regard to Mr Hargrove, the nature of whose proceedings during his recent unauthorised visit totthe Head of hostile State appears to me to be of some public importance ".[59] Merriman and Sauer both objected to this proposal since the correspondence was bound to reflect badly on them, but Milner ignored their protests.[60]

In spite of the increasing agitation in the colony the Bond now decided to hold its long-deferred congress. N.F. de Waal explained to Schreiner at the end of April that they had reached this decision because, in the altered condition of affairs in the colony, the moderate Bondsmen feared that they would lose their influence if they persisted in trying to prevent the expression of public opinion. " Besides ", he wrote, " we cannot continue to prevent the expression of opinion of one half of the people of this colony, simply because we are afraid of counter demonstration from the other half ". He was anxious, however, that

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57. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Solomon to Schreiner, 22.3.1900.
58. Davenport, 215.
59. W.P.S.P., (U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 24.4.1900.
60. Ibid., Merriman to Schreiner, 25.4.1900.

their parliamentary party should not be compromised by this decision. On Schreiner's advice, Hofmeyr's opinion had already been sought.

> " I fully agree with you that we should in this matter be guided by the opinion of Mr Hofmeyr. Unfortunately Mr Theron had not succeeded in getting from Mr Hofmeyr an expression of his views sufficiently clear to decide any line of action. Reading between the lines I am of opinion that he wished to hold the Congress ". [61]

On the strength of this Schreiner reluctantly agreed that a congress be held immediately before the opening of parliament in June.

In the meantime Bond dissatisfaction with Schreiner's policy was growing. Merriman recorded in mid-April that from conversation with Hofmeyr he understood that some of the Bond were so discontented with the government and Schreiner that they were even prepared to consider a reconciliation with Rhodes. [62] The parting of the ways came when it became clear that Schreiner intended supporting the disfranchisement of the rebels, a policy which Hofmeyr refused, under any circumstances, to countenance. He considered it a " vindictive measure of political partisanship " and begged Schreiner not to make any decision until he had consulted the party whose interests were at stake. [63] Schreiner agreed readily, pointing out that the government was in favour of amnesty if it could be obtained, but that they had to deal with the situation " as it stands"; and he expressed a hope that they might be able to reach a compromise which would be acceptable to the Bond. [64] Hofmeyr's own account of the ensuing discussion suggests that he found Schreiner's attitude unsatisfactory.

> " I asked whether any provision would be made with reference to such men, whose property had practically been confiscated or destroyed by the military, and who had been already imprisoned for months. Mr Schreiner could not or would not say.
>
> I asked whether Mr Chamberlain's proposal was that minor offenders should be disfranchised for life, or only for a limited period of years. Mr Schreiner could not say.
>
> Some discussion ensued. I abstained from giving a final expression of opinion on the Schreiner proposals, but pointed out, that it would be of great importance to the party to know what Mr Chamberlain really meant, before they would be able to decide as to the relative merits of the Chamberlain and Schreiner proposals.
>
> I abstained from anything that could be construed as an attempt at compulsion ". [65]

Their relationship deteriorated rapidly after this meeting, descending

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61. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), N.F. de Waal to Schreiner, 30.4.1900.
62. Lewsen, iii, 186.
63. Hofmeyr, 558-559.
64. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to Hofmeyr, 23.5.1900.
65. Hofmeyr, 556.

just before the South African Party caucus met, to bickering over whether Hofmeyr had supported the meeting of the Conciliation Committee at Graaff-Reinet or not. This was an argument in which Hofmeyr played a discreditable role, refusing to recognise Schreiner's overtures to peace.[66] When the caucus met on 8th June, therefore, the atmosphere between the two was not conductive to a reasonable discussion of the problems on hand. The real question at issue was whether the party was prepared to accept any measure of disfranchisement at all and this, after vigorous discussion, they refused to do. To avoid the dissolution of the ministry they would have been prepared to support the Indemnity Act and the creation of a special tribunal for the punishment of the ringleaders, but the disfranchisement proposal went too far.[67] Schreiner was unable to compromise on this point, however, and when he found that he could not carry the majority of the party with him, he decided that his only course was to resign.

Schreiner's decision did not please either his erstwhile colleagues or Milner. Merriman would probably have preferred Schreiner to resign his office as Prime Minister on the grounds that he was in the minority, thus making it necessary for Milner to call upon one of the other ministers to reform the Cabinet.[68] Milner, on the other hand, was anxious that Schreiner should remain in office, since Sprigg, the most likely alternative, did not appeal to him as Prime Minister. Even when it became clear that Schreiner's following in his party was slighter than he had first expected, he urged Schreiner to try and fill the places in his ministry from amongst his followers or moderate Progressives. Schreiner, however, refused, saying that his followers were unfit to be ministers.[69] Moreover, by avoiding too close an association with the opposition, Schreiner evidently still hoped to retain some influence in the Afrikaner party. Schreiner himself was in favour of a ministry with Rose Innes at the head, including Sprigg and Solomon, to which he was prepared to give his independent support. Of this suggestion Milner observed " I doubt whether Schreiner's independence would not be more conspicuous than his support ". In support of this offer Schreiner tried to persuade Sprigg to waive his right to office to which,

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66. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Hofmeyr to Schreiner, Schreiner to Hofmeyr, 7-9.6.1900.
67. Davenport, 218-220; Lewsen, iii, 209-210.
68. J.X.M.P., Mrs. Agnes Merriman to Mrs. Julia Merriman, 16.5.1900.
69. W.P.S.P., (U.C.T.), Milner to Schreiner, 12.6.1900.

as leader of the opposition, he was entitled, but Sprigg was not prepared to be so altruistic.[70] Milner was piqued at Schreiner's attitude.

> " Public telegrams give misleading impression of attitude of Schreiner. He is and always has been against us while [every] effort has been made to conceal that fact as far as possible even from himself and I believe that I have got as much out of him as was humanly possible. The reason why he took his present so-called loyalist line was that he saw that attitude of downright opposition to Imperial Government advocated by his colleagues was bound to end in the suspension of the constitution .... He will do what he can short of jeopardizing his position with the Afrikanders to avert the crisis. If he cannot avoid it he will be able to say ' I told you so '. Had his loyalty been genuine he could of course have kept office in which case he was certain to have been able to pass the necessary measures ".[71]

Schreiner's refusal to stay in office had created a difficult situation which Milner did not expect to resolve easily. He was so pessimistic at first that he told Chamberlain that, although he would try all possible combinations amongst the opposition leaders, he fully expected that the constitutional machinery would break down. Although he did not say so to Chamberlain, his harping on this possibility suggests that this was the alternative he would have preferred. Milner did not regard Rose Innes as a likely choice for Prime Minister. He feared that Innes would not be able to find enough followers amongst the Progressives who regarded him as a " Trimmer ". Nor did he think that Sprigg, " who thinks of nothing but himself ", would serve under Rose Innes, while Rhodes who disliked him, was likely to undermine his authority.[72] In any event the question did not arise since Sprigg seized the opportunity when it was offered to him to return to office. On the 18th June the new ministry was formed with Sprigg as Premier and Rose Innes as Attorney-General. Solomon had eventually declined to join the new Cabinet on the grounds that he might injure Schreiner's following if he did so, but he promised the ministry his full support.[73]

When parliament met on 22nd July the balance of power was a delicate one. The Progressive government was in the minority and were dependent upon Schreiner and his small band of followers to remain in power. These included Solomon and Herholdt, who had followed Schreiner partly because he disapproved of Hofmeyr's treatment of him, David de Waal,

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70. C.O. 48/546, conf. desp., 19.6.1900.
71. C.O., 48/546, 15.6.1900.
72. C.O., 48/546, 15.6.1900.
73. C.O. 48/546, 15.6.1900.

the two members for Vryheid, the members for George - Charles Searle and H.J. Raubenheimer - and a couple of others. The government's position was strengthened slightly by the fact that four of the opposition were numbered against the rebels, and were unlikely, therefore, to be of much value to their party.[74] When Schreiner resigned he had hoped to adopt a moderate independent line, but, like Rose Innes before him, he found that this was a position which it was virtually impossible to maintain. In spite of his disagreement with the Bond on the subject of suitable punishment for the rebels, he had no intention of breaking with them entirely. On informing N.F. de Waal of his resignation he expressed his desire to continue working with the Bond, and de Waal reciprocated this wish.[75] On one of the major issues, that of the annexation of the republics, he was in agreement with the Bond. While still in power he had, partly at Merriman's instigation, drafted a minute on the subject, recommending that after the war the republics should receive limited independence under British suzerainty. Though not liking Schreiner's phrasing, Merriman heartily endorsed these views, but the ministry as a whole had not been able to reach unanimity since Solomon preferred to see the republics annexed by Britain.[76] Milner believed that the Bond were " playing Schreiner with great skill " angling for his support on other important issues, in particular the annexation issue. " They mourn over him in affectionate sorrow, but are wise enough not to attack him. They only criticize, delicately, cleverly, his conciliatoriness ... and appeal to his loyalty to his old associates ".[77] This was not entirely true, but certainly neither Schreiner not the party knew quite how to handle the situation which existed when parliament reassembled. The South African Party caucus was at first prepared to accept Schreiner and postponed an important meeting in order that he might be present at their discussions. Schreiner himself was sensitive about his position, hesitating to force his presence on them. He told te Water that he would attend party meetings only if invited to do so. The party decided at this stage also, not to elect a new leader - wisely Merriman thought.[78] As the session progressed, however, and Schreiner came out more strongly on the side of the government, the rift between him and the Afrikaner

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74. Davenport, 222-223.
75. H.P., Schreiner to de Waal, 13.6.1900.
76. W.P.S.P.(S.A.L.), draft minute, 30.3.1900; Lewsen, iii, 176-177.
77. Headlam, ii, 114.
78. Lewsen, iii, 226-227; W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Schreiner to te Water, 23.7.1900.

group increased.

The session proved to be a stormy one since the members had to deal with the highly controversial questions of martial law, and the Indemnity and Special Tribunals Bill. This bill consisted in the main of those proposals put forward previously by Solomon and Schreiner. A special court composed of two judges of the Supreme Court and an advocate of ten years' standing was to try ringleaders, while special commissions were to investigate the circumstances of the rank and file rebels who, if found guilty, were to be subject to a penalty of five years disfranchisement. The bill was ably piloted through parliament by Rose Innes, with the support of Schreiner and his followers. The part Schreiner played did not earn him Milner's commendation, however. He accused Schreiner of sitting on the fence, and complained that he was afraid of opposing motions put forward by the Bond for fear of alienating them.

> " The leaders of the Opposition know this perfectly well, so are constantly introducing such motions, which Schreiner supports for fear of losing his hold on the Bond, and the Prime Minister accepts for fear of losing Schreiner. Ministers' policy is in danger of being destroyed in detail and becoming indistinguishable from that of the Bond ". [79]

Milner was particularly annoyed at the proposal that a Special Committee of the House be appointed to investigate the operation of martial law, and it was only after he had appealed privately to Sprigg that he was able to dissuade him from going ahead with the idea. Later he remarked that it was only " the the constant exercise of <u>personal pressure on individuals</u>, a courseas unprecedented as it would certainly under ordinary circumstances be undesirable ", that he was able to prevent the game being given away point by point.[80] In spite of Milner's accusations that Schreiner was pandering to the Bond, Sprigg's ministry was able to retain its tenuous hold on power throughout the session because of his support.

The parting between Milner and Schreiner came about only when Schreiner resigned as member of parliament and withdrew completely from political life. Schreiner's constituents in Malmesbury had become increasingly dissatisfied at the part Schreiner was taking in the debates. In the middle of August 1900 A.C. Koch, one of Schreiner's

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79. C.O. 48/547, 10.8.1900.
80. Headlam, ii, 121, cont. in M.P., V.26, Milner to Chamberlain, 22.8.1900.

most influential supporters, wrote to Schreiner explaining that they were deeply disturbed that Schreiner had allied himself with the very people against whom he had fought the election in 1898. Schreiner took the line that he had never " promised to surrender to a majority of either party or a caucus the right of judgment upon matters of importance to the whole Colony ". [81] A second letter revealed that their differences on important matters of policy were wider than Schreiner could hope to bridge. He decided, therefore, to hold a private referendum amongst his electors to discover whether he still retained their confidence. A scrutiny of the returns suggested that he did not, and at the end of October Schreiner resigned from parliament. The only member of his ministry who continued wo work with Milner was Richard Solomon. Their relationship became closer in succeeding months, when Solomon followed Milner up to the Transvaal and became Attorney-General in the new administration. Milner regarded him as " a ' brand snatched from the burning ' and a promising convert indeed ". [82]

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81. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), A.C. Koch to Schreiner, 16.8.1900; Ibid., Schreiner to Koch, 17.8.1900.
82. M.P., V. 26, Milner to Chamberlain, 22.8.1900.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION.

Schreiner's ministry fell only when Schreiner could no longer reconcile the two forces which pulled the Cape colony in different directions. On the one hand were those who deplored the war and refused to accept its consequences, even though acts of treason had been committed by those they were protecting. On the other, Milner and the Imperialists wanted to use the rebellion as a pretext for ensuring the supremacy of the British party in the colony for some time to come. These opposing views were closely related to that difference in outlook which had caused the war originally - a belief in the right of the colonies and states of South Africa to almost complete autonomy, as opposed to Britain's right to assert her paramountcy in that region.

In the course of the war Schreiner was one of the few men to change sides, in practice as least. Circumstances, rather than a desire to break with the Afrikaner party, led him to do this, however, and when he lost the support of the Afrikaner group entirely, he withdrew from political life. Rose Innes attributed the clash between Schreiner and the other leaders of the South African Party to a fundamentally different interpretation of the role of the ministry. Merriman, he held, " regarded himself as a servant of the people, responsible only to parliament " , while Schreiner thought of himself rather as the servant of the Crown. Rose Innes himself was inclined to Schreiner's point of view. Although the ministry could not function effectively without the support of parliament, it owed its appointment to the Crown, and could be dismissed by the Crown without the sanction of parliament.[1] Nor was this power a mere formality, for Chamberlain and his advisers always negotiated on the principle that, in the last resort, the Cape ministry could be dismissed. The fact that the need never arose is due largely to Schreiner's grasp of political realities - he once told Hofmeyr that he had to deal with the situation " as it stands " - and his skilful manipulation of the relations between the ministry and the Governor. His opponents, naturally, interpreted this differently, as a tendency weakly to give way in extremity[2], but this is unfair for Schreiner, whatever his faults, was not weak.

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1. Innes, 187.
2. Hofmeyr, 558.

Admittedly Schreiner was in a strong position to bargain with Milner. His party had a majority in parliament, so that an opposition ministry would have had an uncertain life. Moreover, the opposition lacked a leader whom Milner could rely upon since he considered Sprigg weak and lacking in principle, Rhodes was too wilful and erratic, while Rose Innes was reluctant to accept the responsibilities of leadership. Finally, although they were unaware of it, the government had the tacit support of the Colonial Secretary who was strongly opposed to any unconstitutional activity. All this does not gainsay Schreiner's achievement in maintaining his ministry in power under difficult circumstances, however. Schreiner's personal relations with Milner were good even when the tension between the Governor and his ministers were at their worst. Milner's pique at Schreiner's resignation owed its origin to his annoyance that he could not persuade Schreiner to remain as Prime Minister, rather than to any objection to him. This was valuable since it helped Schreiner to smoothe the working relationship between such diverse elements as Milner and Merriman, thus enabling his ministry to stay in office far longer than it might otherwise have done.

An accusation which was levelled at the Cape government, particularly by sympathisers in Britain, was that they did not give their supporters in Britain enough help in making their opposition to the policies of the British government effective. Percy Molteno, for instance, wrote to Schreiner, saying :

> " I cannot help regretting that the whole matter was not brought into the position of a constitutional struggle when your Parliament met last year and had the opportunity of repudiating the interpretation put on things by the H.C. in his despatch of May 4th - the ignorance here even of members of Parliament is profound. A constitutional struggle there would have aroused them to enquire what it was about ". [3]

Molteno thought that Schreiner had neglected his duties as Premier and representative of his people by not attempting to prevent " the virtual suspension of responsible Government ". Molteno's thesis turned upon the fact that he took a very similar line to that of Merriman on the rights of the colonial government, for he told Schreiner:

> " ... it seems to have been not sufficiently realised that a colonial Premier has a duty in representing a Colony as a separate

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3. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Molteno to Schreiner, 17.5.1900.

> entity and only while he represents the people who put him in that position can he remain Premier. He is no mere servant of the Crown at the choice of the latter ".

He wanted the Cape government to make a protest which would receive attention in England and attract the notice of the public and members of parliament into making more searching enquiries into the conduct of the British government.[4] Others were less extreme in their views but equally anxious for action on the part of the Cape government. John Ellis wanted information which would " justify a crusade in the House against the unconstitutional methods ... practised out there "[5], and suggested the establishment of a " bureau of information " to supply them. The Cape ministry, however, failed to respond. The reason for this was not that the ministry did not appreciate the needs of these sympathisers, but that they believed such action was likely to endanger their relations with the Governor. Schreiner, in particular, was very cautious about doing anything which might disturb the delicate balance which persuaded Milner that Britain gained more than she lost by retaining the ministry.[6] If the help they gave to the Liberal opposition in England seemed likely to endanger the safety of the Conservative government, they laid themselves open to the attack of behaving unconstitutionally themselves and would in all probability find themselves dismissed. Also, Schreiner held strong views on the obligations which a Premier owed to his Governor. As a minister of the Crown he could not attack the Crown, and he would not have countenanced such behaviour on the part of his ministers. His extreme reticence on the subject of Milner even in confidential letters to John Ellis indicates the firmness with which he held this view. There can be little doubt that this caution enabled the ministry to avoid a clash with Milner which might well have proved fatal to their interests. On the other hand, the need which government supporters in Britain felt for some kind of public protest emanating from the Cape which would justify their attack on the British government, was supplied by the development of the conciliation movement. The result was an increase in public aggression in the colony between the two races which did nothing to smoothe the relations of the Governor and his ministry.

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4. J.X.M.P., Molteno to Merriman, 22.2.1900.
5. W.P.S.P., (S.A.L.), Ellis to Schreiner, 7.3.1900.
6. See also p. 53.

In other respects, Schreiner's reluctance to act precipitately was perhaps less successful in its results. His fear of alienating republican sympathisers in the border areas led him to impede the adequate protection and defence of those areas. There seems little doubt that if these areas had not been invaded the inhabitants would not have risen to rebellion.[7] The fault did not lie entirely with the Cape government, a fact acknowledged by the Colonial Office, who remarked that " It would be unjust to hold the Colonial Government responsible for this state of affairs which they could not even have averted had they like the Government of Natal made every preparation beforehand against it ".[8] Yet the fact remains that the difficulties which the Cape government had to cope with were increased by the number of colonists who rose in rebellion. If this could have been averted their problems might have been to some extent diminished. It is possible, therefore, that by hindering the movement of troops, Schreiner did the colonists a disservice.

Despite some weakness displayed by the ministry, for the possibility cannot be dismissed that they might have resisted Milner more strongly than they did, they governed the colony in trying circumstances with moderation and sense. This moderation enabled them to prevent the colony from disintegrating under the pressures inflicted upon it, and placed a check on Milner's activities. Under these conditions, therefore, there can be little doubt Schreiner's ministry played a valuable part in protecting the Cape at the outset, from the worst effects of the war, and the presence of Schreiner himself contributed largely to their success.

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7. Le May, 48.
8. C.O. 48/543, secret, 26.10.1899.

NOTE ON SOURCES

Apart from standard texts, my major source of information has been private papers. Of these the most important are the W.P. Schreiner papers, the larger portion of which are deposited in the South African Library, and consist of three groups; the listed papers, one letter-book, and several volumes of unlisted papers dealing mainly with the period after the outbreak of war, and Schreiner's final quarrel with Hofmeyr. A smaller number of Schreiner papers are deposited in the Jagger Library, University of Cape Town, and comprise mainly notes which passed between Schreiner and Milner, and correspondence on the Hargrove affair.

The unpublished Milner papers add invaluable information to that already provided in the published papers but, as far as the subject of this thesis is concerned, serves rather to confirm than to alter the impression which appears from the published papers. They are important in that they give a fuller analysis of the relationship between Milner and the Schreiner ministry, and this is further supplemented by the Colonial Office papers. Both collections also throw light on the attitude of the Colonial Office, and particularly of Chamberlain, to the ministry.

Of the remaining papers the Merriman papers are the most important. The most valuable have now been published, though a few of the remaining also proved useful. The Hofmeyr papers provided a great deal of information on the negotiations between the Cape government and the republics prior to the war, while the Innes papers and the P.A. Molteno papers were most helpful as a general commentary on the period concerned. The minor collections were also consulted. The De Villiers papers, recently deposited in the South African Library, proved disappointing, most of the relevant material being already published in E.A. Walker's biography of Lord de Villiers, while the Te Water papers in the Cape Archives contributed nothing.

Of published works the most important is E.A. Walker's biography of Schreiner. In most cases I have been able to make use of the same, or closely related papers as those which Walker used, so that, as a

general rule, except in cases where Walker provides information not obtainable elsewhere, or his point of view seems particularly relevant, I have not referred to his work in the footnotes. My references are obtained from the second edition, published by the C.N.A. in 1960, which although it has been abridged in part, does not vary from the original edition in the relevant section.

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