SOLDIERS AND POLITICS: A STUDY OF THE POLITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN SOLDIERS DURING AND AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Soldate en politiek: 'n studie van die politieke bewussyn van die swart Suid-Afrikaanse soldate gedurende en na die Tweede Wêreldoorlog

Hierdie artikel bevraagteken die algemene aanname dat die Tweede Wêreldoorlog 'n katalisator was vir die ontwikkeling van 'n politieke bewussyn onder Afrika-soldate wat aan die oorlog deelgeneem het en dat dit ook van toepassing is op die 76 000 swart Suid-Afrikaanse soldate. Verandering in houding onder die soldate sowel as die regering van generaal J.C. Smuts word ondersoek. Veral die aard en duur van díe veranderinge word beklemtoon. Houding ten opsigte van ras kry spesifieke aandag. Verder word die faktore wat die ontwikkeling van politieke bewussyn verhinder het, bekemtoon. Ironies genoeg, wil dit voorkom of albei hierdie aspekte - 'n verandering in houding sowel as 'n gebrek daaraan - kon bygedra het tot die ontwikkeling van 'n politieke bewussyn. 'n Belangrike voorvereiste om enige vorm van politieke bewussyn effektief in die praktyk toe te pas, is solidariteit onder die deelnemers van enige sodanige aksie. Die vraag kan gevra word of daar solidariteit onder die soldate ontwikkel het en, indien wel, hoe sterk dit was. Laastens word bogenoemde aspekte geëvalueer teen die agtergrond van die veranderinge wat hoofsaaklik deur die oorlog in die sosiale en ekonomiese strukture van Suid-Afrika plaasgevind het. In die lig hiervan, word dit dan moontlik om vas te stel of die oorlogervarings van die swart Suid-Afrikaanse soldate inderdaad 'n katalisator was vir die ontwikkeling van politieke bewussyn onder hulle.

This article questions whether the common notion that the Second World War was a catalyst for the development of political consciousness amongst African soldiers who had participated in the war is also applicable to the 76 000 black South African soldiers. Changes in soldiers' attitude as well as in that of the government of General J.C. Smuts are investigated, and the nature and duration of these changes are emphasised. Specific reference is made to racial attitudes. Furthermore, the factors inhibiting change are highlighted. Ironically, it seems that both aspects - changes in attitudes as well as a lack thereof - might have given rise to the development of a political consciousness. However, to render any form of political consciousness effective solidarity amongst the participants was imperative. The question is whether any form of solidarity developed amongst these soldiers and, if so, at what level. Finally, an evaluation is made of the above-mentioned factors against the background of changes in the social and economic structures of South Africa - mostly induced by the War - in order to ascertain whether the war experience was indeed a catalyst for the development of political consciousness amongst the black South African soldiers.

Introduction

> "The war has been to them (the Africans), above all, a revelation of the stupendous power of Western civilization; and they feel that the road is opening for them to share in this might and power."[1]

1 M. Forset, 'The impact of the War on British West Africa', *International Affairs* 21(2), 1945, pp. 209-210.

M. Forset is only one of many who saw the Second World War as a turning point. It had indeed become a truism that war is a crucible in which deep-seated attitudes, structures, institutions and traditions of society are challenged, mostly prompted by the inexorable demands of war. These very demands can also make war a potent agency to transform challenge into change. This article is primarily concerned with this axiom and will question it by examining whether the war had created or influenced the political consciousness of the 76 000 black South African soldiers who had enlisted in the Native Military Corps (NMC) of the Union Defence Force (UDF).

In the historiography on the experiences of African soldiers in the Second World War, it has been stated that as a result of their military service the ex-servicemen developed a new political consciousness and consequently played an important role to challenge and change the political institutions and future of their countries. This explanation is proferred with such frequency that the unwary might accept it without question. O.J.O. Shiroya and J.G. Liebenow tried to present a persuasive argument for East Africa[2] while E. Schleh did the same for West Africa.[3] A.A. Boahen and F.K. Buah accepted it without question.[4] M. Crowder, whilst acknowledging that this might be a debatable point, still subscribes to the notion that "some returning soldiers were to play a vital role in the formation of the political parties that gained independence in the fifteen years that followed the war."[5] However, Schleh's stance has been strongly contested[6] while R. Rathbone forcibly challenges the whole idea.[7] The aim of this study is to ascertain whether the experiences of the black soldiers relate to these notions. The differences clearly surface in the evaluation of what the war and post-war experiences of the soldiers really were and what the semantics of "political consciousness"* actually means as well as what caused it.

In order to address this issue, it is necessary to examine the following aspects which were most likely to be conducive to the awakening or even advancement of political consciousness amongst black South African soldiers during and after the war.

What were the hopes and expectations of the soldiers and how did their experiences affect their attitudes? Were there any changes in these attitudes amongst the soldiers as well as in government circles during this period and, if so, what was the nature of these changes? As racial friction was such an overriding force within the South African context, the way the war influenced the ex-soldiers' and the authorities' racial attitudes - and therefore also the political consciousness of the former - will receive particular attention. It is also important to investigate the most important factors inhibiting change as well as their impact as they could have given rise to political consciouness. Finally, was there any solidarity amongst the black soldiers and, if so, what was the level of solidarity during and after the war. In

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For the purposes of this article a very limited definition of the term "political consciousness" is used namely the development of an awareness which might lead to political activism.

2. O.J.E. Shiroya, *The impact of World War II on Kenya: the role of ex-servicemen in Kenyan nationalism* (Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University, 1968), chapters 4 and 5 and J.G. Liebenow, *Colonial rule and political development in Tanzania: the case of the Makonde* (Nairobi, 1971), pp. 160-162.
3. E.P.A. Schleh, 'The post-service careers of ex-servicemen in Ghana and Uganda', *The Journal of Modern African Studies,* 6(2), 1968, pp. 203-220.
4. A.A. Boahen, *Ghana: evolution and change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London, 1975), pp. 153-154 and F.K. Buah, *A history of Ghana* (London, 1980), p. 149.
5. M. Crowder, 'The 1939-1945 War and West Africa' *in* J.F.A. Ajayi and M. Crowder (eds.), *History of West Africa II* (London, 1978), p. 614.
6. G.O. Olusanya, 'The role of ex-servicemen in Nigerian politics', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 6(2), 1968, pp. 221-232; G.O. Olusanya, *The Second World War and politics in Nigeria, 1939-1953* (London, 1973), pp. 99-102 and D. Killingray, 'Soldiers, ex-servicemen and politics in the Gold Coast, 1939-1950', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 21(3), 1983, pp. 523-534.
7. R. Rathbone, 'Businessmen in politics: party struggle in Ghana, 1949-1957', *Journal of Development Studies* 9(3), 1973, p. 149.

examining these issues it is also important to consider the duration of these changes and whether they had fundamentally affected these soldiers and, if not, why not? Having explored these, it should be possible to answer the more general all-embracing question as well, namely to what extent was the war a catalyst for the development of political consciousness?

Changing attitudes amongst black ex-soldiers

The war experience opened up a new world to the soldiers and naturally created new hopes and expectations. Some had travelled widely and came into contact with other races and other countries. To them conditions of life they saw and experienced were far better, compared to what they obtained in South Africa. This gave rise to new hopes. Many ex-servicemen felt that loyalty to the empire at least seemed to justify some reward and, naturally, the turn of the tide of war in favour of the Allies focused thoughts on a better post-war world.

These ex-servicemen certainly did not want and did not expect to revert to their pre-war standards of living. Many regarded themselves as heroes deserving special treatment and had high, even extravagant, expectations of their post-war world. For instance, they thought they were entitled to apply for aid to buy almost anything and that the government had no right to demand any sort of tax from them. Clearly, they were strongly under the impression of real or imagined promises which had been made to them.

The procurement of employment after demobilisation was one of the most important expectations amongst South African ex-servicemen. Some thought that this was an obligation of the government: "once a soldier, the Government is bound to find them soft jobs with good pay."[8]

Others expected that their military experience would come in handy to obtain work. Like many African soldiers, and motor transport drivers, partly on the strength of promises made to them, hoped that they could profitably carry their military occupation over to civilian life and thereby secure employment in keeping with the duties performed while in the army. However, employment for the bulk of 2 000 fully trained transport drivers was not available as white ex-soldiers were preferred to black ex-servicemen. To exacerbate matters, many discovered to their utter dismay that their army licenses did not automatically entitle them to provincial licenses, in effect closing that avenue of employment as well.[9]

Expectations of others were more down to earth. The hoped that the government would help them to build houses, offer vocational courses and grant them stands and farm land on a par with white ex-servicemen. Certain ex-servicemen, furthermore, expressed the hope that they would be granted the right of residence with their families near the places of employment.[10]

Despite these expectations there was also some apprehension, revealing a sense of realism. For example, fear was expressed that the only jobs available would be on the mines and farms where the wages were very low. An unnamed corporal thus expressed his concern about the post-war employment prospects:

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8. Central Archives Depot (hereafter C.A.D.), Pretoria: Archives of the Department of Native Affairs (hereafter N.T.S.), Box 9130, File 68/363, Native Commissioner Pietermaritzburg to Chief Native Commissioner, Natal, 18-9-1942.
9. Military Information Bureau (hereafter M.I.B.), Pretoria: Archives of the Director Non-European Army Services (hereafter D.N.E.A.S. N.A.S.), 3/20/5, Box 13, Director-General Demobilisation (hereafter D.G.D.) to Adjudant-General (hereafter A.G.), 7-12-1945.
10. M.I.B., D.N.E.A.S. N.A.S., 3/30/6/3, Box 21, letter from R. Malgas, undated; N.T.S., Box 9116, File 68/363/2, Additional Native Commissioner, Sekukuniland to Secretary for Native Affairs, 14-6-1943; University of the Witwatersrand, Historical and Literary Division, South African Institute of Race Relations Papers (hereafter S.A.I.R.R.), ("B" Box), 51.5, letter from J. Segoalela, 9-1-1946; M.I.B., Archives of the Native Military Corps Group (hereafter N.M.C. N.A.S.), 3/21 D A 2 Box 16, A. Sinaba to 'Bantu Soldiers' Friend' column, *Indhlovu Tlou,* 29-8-1943 and D.N.E.A.S. N.A.S., 3/7/13/A, Box 9, M. Lekitta to D.N.E.A.S., 24-7-1945.

> "After the war... will all get the one and a half penny jobs? We feel we should be treated by employers on the same basis as European soldiers... It seems to us that by the time we return to civil life, we shall have to start from the bottom?"[11]

An indication that bad times might be in store for them was already evident when they received their demobilisation benefits. When L. Monyamane refused to take his, he commented:

> "What did I get? I got a bicycle - do you think a bicycle is worth the life of a person?"

whilst Henry Thai also complained:

> "They forced me to accept a bicycle. I do not want it. I want a wardrobe, a table, 4 chairs and a stove."[12]

Further disappointment awaited them when they returned home. Some of those returning to the rural areas were not only confronted by the devastating consequences of a severe drought[13] but also found that their families had squandered their home allotments, leaving them with no security.[14] The prevailing rampant post-war inflation made matters even worse. They found that not only were their discharge allowances totally inadequate, but that the additional financial provisions made for them after the war were totally insufficient.[15]

It is not surprising that because of the difficulties some ex-servicemen had to face, a large number were bitterly disillusioned when neither their expectations, nor the promises materialised. Add to this that there were many misunderstandings about post-war assistance and benefits because these had neither been fully explained to them nor had they understood their implications. This might have been favourable circumstances not only for the growth of political consciousness, but also for revolutionary action.

Changes in Government thinking

Because it dramatically highlighted the social and economic changes taking place in South Africa, the war at times appeared to act as a catalyst for progressive political change. On this score Government policies and pronouncements which wavered considerably during the war, were not totally unrelated to the war fortunes. Initially there were signs that the Government might begin to reverse its policy of segregation. For instance during the war promises of black trade union recognition were made in exchange for support of the war effort.[16]

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11. South African National Museum of Military History, Johannesburg: Non-European Army Services (hereafter N.E.A.S.) Paper Clippings, *Umteteli wa Bantu,* 1-8-1942.
12. Interview with L. Monyamane, 8-4-1981 and N.T.S., Box 9126 File 69/363/16, H. Thai to Paymaster Section, undated.
13. See with regard to the shortage of mealies and the threatening famine: C.A.D., N.T.S., Box 7849, File 46/336, E. Brand, Matsoakeng Witzieshoek to Assistant Native Commisioner, Witzieshoek, 12-4-1944 and N.T.S., Box 7849, File 46/336, P.W. Willis, Bushbuckridge to Controller of Food Supplies, 12-1-1944.
14. M.I.B., D.N.E.A.S. N.A.S., 3/1/7 A, Box 2, B. Mochesane to J. Knebe, appended in Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff to D.N.E.A.S., 4-6-1945.
15. Interviews with J. Theledi, F. Mlambo, D. Masuku, A. Mogale, W. Ngqungqa, F. Sexwale and S. Ndungwa, 6-2-1986.
16. J. Lewis, *Industrialisation and trade union organisation in South Africa, 1924-1955. The rise and fall of the South African Trade and Labour Council* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 126.

From the end of 1941 and during 1942, when the prospects of victory for the Allies were extremely bleak, the Prime Minister, General Smuts, made a number of statements in which he declared that the war had not only contributed to the mutual respect which had grown between white and black troops, but had also brought the different racial groups closer together through industrialisation and urbanisation.[17] He acknowledged that the policy of strict segregation had proved to be a failure. In addition he emphasised the dire need for better treatment of blacks, for improving their health, for furthering their education and for giving them a fair share in the general economic life of South Africa. From a letter written at the same time, it is clear that he had indeed grasped some of the fundamental changes taking place in South Africa:

> "I could point ... to the wider African horizons now opening out before us, the migration of the African which has the dimensions of a great revolution and which is giving rise to quite a new economic and social situation ... The dropping of the shibboleths had become necessary, and the time had come for positive action ... Hertzog's segregation policy has proven barren and has created more problems than it promised to solve. Of course everybody in this country is agreed that European and African should live apart and preserve their own respective cultures. But much more than that is called for today in the new Africa."[18]

These pronouncements, together with other similar progressive statements from influential persons such as J.H. Hofmeyr, D. Reitz, D.L. Smit, and F.H. Theron seemed to indicate that the war might perhaps have served as a catalyst for change. Balcks might have benefitted and white South Africans might have been prompted to recognise the need for the abolition of discriminatory and repressive legislation such as the pass laws and the ban on black trade unions in order to fit in with comtemporary industrial realities. The authorities realised that the pass laws, in particular, were a major source of grievances and that the large number of imprisonments due to pass offences interfered with labour productivity. Whilst segregation was still officially in force, there was indeed flexibility and a degree of laissez-faire. The Smuts government did suspend these severe laws briefly between 1942 and 1943 to meet the demands of industry. Police in major cities were instructed to turn a blind eye to pass offences unless they felt that a crime was about to be committed.

The relaxation of pass laws also had political objectives. The government did not wish to antagonise the urban black population at this stage. The African National Congress and the Communist Party of South Africa were taking up many of the struggles of the working classes. Trade unionism had grown immensely in the previous years and blacks in both urban and rural areas were becoming increasingly militant about the conditions under which they lived and worked. Moreover, with such a high proportion of the white male population at war, the government did not have the staff or the funds at its disposal to enforce these laws.

One could argue that this apparent change in government thinking might have created an atmosphere conducive to the development of political consciousness. But as Tom Lodge has pointed out and is clear from the above discussion, this was not at all the primary aim behind these and other more "lenient" measures "taken by the authorities in the early stages of the war so as to avoid confrontation and maintain African political quiescence. Other measures included school feeding schemes, pensions for certain categories of African employees and increased educational expenditure. All these tied in with manufacturing's requirement of a stable, urbanised, and relatively well educated industrial labour force."[19]

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17. C.A.D., J.C. Smuts Papers, A I, vol. 303, no. 142, Speech by J.C. Smuts at United Party Congress, 22-10-1941.
18. C.A.D., J.C. Smuts Papers, A 1, vol. 257, no. 218, J.C. Smuts to M.C. and A.B. Gillett, 20-1-1942.
19. T. Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg, 1983), p. 12

The potential for improved race relations

Another factor which might have contributed to greater openness to develop and express political views, was an improvement in black-white relations. The War created the potential for such a possibility. This was greater in the army than in other institutions, not only because of the close living and working conditions and arrangements, but also because of the high level of interdependence, especially in a combat situation.

There seems to be general unanimity that contact with whites on a large scale shattered the doctrine of the white man's prestige, one of the props of colonial rule. After all, the blacks met ordinary whites on an equal basis daily. To them it was not only a revelation that all white soldiers were not officers but also that there were many white private soldiers. Some of the white soldiers even had radical anti-racial views and communicated them to their black fellow-soldiers. Others demonstrated that there were few essential differences between the lower classes of Europe and South Africa. Of course, this also implied that the black soldiers were no longer subjected to a strict master-servant relationship with the Europeans. To many this fact was the beginning of the end of the white man's prestige. The best proof of this lay in the experiences of the black soldiers who had fought "up north".

In addition to daily - and nightly - contact with whites, other factors influenced the black soldiers to reassess their opinions about whites. Amongst those whose racial attitudes changed, the most important determinant of just how they changed, was whether or not they were in combat. Here the numerous accounts of comradeship in arms are relevant. Racial discrimination disappeared on the battlefield where the imminent threat of death brought about a familiarity and a closeness not possible in peacetime. Blacks were capable of as much heroism as whites; both blacks and whites risked their lives in rescueing the wounded irrespective of race; food and utensils were shared and all received similar medical care. Moreover, the exigencies of war made it imperative that blacks should shoot whites. The myth of British imperial invincibility was shattered with the conquest of Britain's Far Eastern colonies by the Japanese, a so-called "coloured race". In short, the soldiers had learned and observed that without modern technology "a European was no better than an African." Suffering was not a black person's monopoly - the impression which whites had tried to create for such a long time.[20] In the brunt of the battle black soldiers had noticed that war is a great leveller. An anonymous soldier wrote:

> "Do we differ in blood and nerves? We don't. One gun kills black and white and it shows that we do nog differ."[21]

Whilst it is clear that the above mentioned factors and experiences of ex-soldiers had the potential to create a more open society in which political consciousness could develop peacefully, there were other more powerful forces which effectively suppressed the potential of such an overt development.

Factors and practices inhibiting change

Winston Churchill's statement that Article 3 of the Atlantic Charter affirming "the right of all people to choose the form of Government in which they live and hoping to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them" did not apply to the African colonies,[22] and dashed the hope for political changes after the War. The ex-soldiers did not miss the irony: despite British attacks on German racism and propaganda encouraging them to fight against enslavement by Hitler, colonial administration policy towards Africa was entirely at variance with British propaganda in England. After the War the opposite was applied against Allied colonial powers. Long-running grievances, such as those against racial pay differentials, housing and transport allowances, and eligibility for pensions and provident funds, continued.

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20. M.I.B., N.M.C. N.A.S., 3/36/4 A 1, Box 16, Letter to *Indhlovu Tlou,* undated.
21. M.I.B., N.M.C. N.A.S., 3/21/D A 1, Box 16, Letter to *Indhlovu Tlou,* undated.
22. M. Crowder (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Africa VIII* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 22.

This line of thought also reverberated in South African society where strong forces were vehemently opposed to any change in the *status quo.* It was particularly the intransigence of white politicians which militated strongly against any fundamental changes.[23] Moreover, as the fortunes of war changed in favour of the Allies, it made the possible dependence on black support, loyalty and quiescence less pressing. By the end of the War, the government was ominously silent about changes concerning policy towards black South Africans. It still thought it could afford and easily cope with black opposition. In practice it returned to its rigid racial policies which had continued to lurk in the background. Proclamations such as the Prohibition of Gatherings or Assemblies of Natives No. 31 of 1945, legislation such as the Industrial Conciliation (Natives) Bill of 1947 which denied blacks full trade union rights, the steady tightening of the pass laws, the emergency regulation giving the Railways power to refuse tickets to blacks in the Ciskei and Transkei wishing to travel to the Cape unless they could produce proof that they were taking up specific jobs as well as the vacillation in government circles about the future of blacks in the military, left nou doubt that the government was extremely sensitive to the opposition of the majority of white public opinion to the mixing of races. Consequently it would not countenance any fundamental changes in the *status quo.*[24]

Furthermore, in investigating government attitudes, it is important to address the question of what the authorities believed the effect of the War could be on the soldiers. There was a strong current of uncertainty in the minds of the authorities about the possible danger of subversive political activity amongst the returning ex-servicemen. In this regard the policy was unequivocally clear. The ex-servicemen had to be prevented from engaging in any political activiy that might challenge white rule as Smuts noted in January 1943:

> "I saw a very influential deputation of the Churches who urged me to hurry on the good work, and the necessary reforms in social and political conditions. This is easier urged than done, and the proximity of the elections makes the situation still more awkward. I am going to do whatever is politically possible and may even exceed the limits of political expediency. But I dare not do anything which will outpace public opinion too much just on the eve of an election which may be the most important ever held in this country ... I shall do as much of the right thing as possible, but always keep before me the paramount necessity of winning the election!"[25]

Clearly a body of urban malcontents whose economic goals had not been met, should be avoided. This explains the intention underlying the policy of turning soldiers and heroes back into "natives". It was to prevent them from engaging in possible political activities that might eventually challenge white rule. This attitude was an important reason why the government not only deliberately kept the black ex-soldiers out of the limelight but also preferred that they should return to the reserves. The chances of becoming a political threat in these areas were far less than in the urban areas where dissatisfied soldiers could easier be mobilised.[26]

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23. C.A.D., J.C. Smuts Papers, A 1, vol. 261, no. 198, J.C. Smuts to M.C. and A.B. Gillett, 13-1-1943.
24. C.A.D., N.T.S., Box 1702, File 45/276/1, Proclamation no. 31 of 1945 by Governor-General, 13-1-1945 and pamphlet "Native Affairs in the Union of South Africa", address at a meeting of the Empire Parliamentary Association, London, 10-11-1947.
25. C.A.D., J.C. Smuts Papers, A 1, vol. 261, no. 198, J.C. Smuts to M.C. and A.B. Gillett, 13-1-1943.
26. C.A.D., N.T.S., Box 1804, File 122/276, Notes for opening remarks of Secretary for Native Affairs at the Conference of Native Commissioners, 12-7-1944 and S.A.I.R.R. J.D.R. Jones Collection, O. World War II, AD 843, Box 105, N.A. Mitchell to Mr Lewis, 20-6-1945.

The attitude and policy of the military authorities towards the black South African soldiers was in line with that of the government. They were extremely sensitive that the exercise of enlisting blacks should not be a threat to the social structure of South Africa. The utilisation of black troops in areas outside South Africa, in particular, was a source of grave social concern.[27] Their contact with social and political conditions vastly different from those in South Africa was seen as dangerous because it might have militated against the presumed acceptance of their inferior status and position in the South African society.

Another concern was the absolute necessity of preventing control slipping from white hands. It was of paramount importance that whites should maintain their dominant position and that blacks should continue to regard them as superior. In short, the sanctity of white "baasskap" should not be violated in any way.[28]

These fears of the military authorities were not completely unfounded. In the war zone outside South Africa it was nog always easy to implement the policy of separation, partly due to lack of facilities but mostly because war circumstances and the exigencies sometimes made it totally impossible. For example, wounded black soldiers found their way into other than Union Defence Force (U.D.F.) hospitals, were placed alongside whites and in all respects received the same treatment. The authorities viewed this as a totally unwholesome situation which albeit very difficult, should be limited to the minimum as it led to undue and unwanted fraternisation.[29]

To allay any white fears that the black soldiers might have acquired ideas which might threaten the whites' privileged position, they sounded various warnings. Welcoming back the first batch of released black prisoners-of-war, Col E.T. Stubbs remarked: "You have been in strange lands. You have seen strange things, and even found yourselves in positions different from those found in the Union, therefore, do not try to be a European Gentleman, but instead be a gentleman according to your customs and culture..."[30]

Further proof that post-war policies should revert to those before the war is clear when one considers the demobilisation scheme and benefits which were still designed on a racial basis. Whites received 100% of the benefits, so-called "coloureds" 60% and blacks 40%. This meant that the white ex-servicemen's demobilisation benefits by far outstripped the paltry benefits of their black counter parts. Sometimes this was blatant discrimination as is clear from the fact that an honourably discharged black soldier received much less than a dishonourably discharged "coloured". Moreover, whites received additional benefits such as land, assistance and preference in the provision of houses and bonuses whilst the blacks had to be satisfied with, in their own words, "worthless medals."[31]

When analysing the post-war policy of the authorities towards the black ex-servicemen, one concludes that they wanted to be rid of them as soon as possible. They had done what had been required and they were only an incumberance. This refusal to change, inadvertently had far-reaching consequences. It meant that the conflicting pattern of race relations continued to exist and can therefore be considered as another favourable condition for the development of political consciousness.

Solidarity amongst ex-soldiers

It has been suggested that these changes, noted above, and military service provi-

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27. M.I.B. D.N.E.A.S. N.A.S., 3/1/1, Box 1, H.S. Mockford to Deputy Adjudant-General, 5-6-1943.
28. M.I.B., N.M.C. N.A.S., E.T.S./PERS/1 B 10, Box 56, E.T. Stubbs to Adjudant-General, 15-3-1943.
29. M.I.B., Archives of the Chief of the General Staff (hereafter C.G.S.), 32/15, Assistant Deputy Director Non-European Army Services to General Officer Commanding Union Defence Force Administration Headquarters, 13-1-1942.
30. M.I.B., N.M.C. N.A.S., 3/21 A 3, Box 14, Typescript of article to be published in all newspapers, accompanying letter, D.N.E.A.S. to All European and Non-European papers, 1-2-1945.
31. University of the Witwatersrand, Historical and Literary Division, M. Ballinger Papers A 410, B 2.14.14, Note by H.S. Cooke, 28-1-1944.

ded a favourable basis for the development of solidarity amongst black soldiers.[32] The argument for the case is strongly based on the important role played in and contributions made to the post-war nationalist movements by some individual ex-servicemen.[33] This raises the question whether this view can be accepted and, if so, to what extent the war stimulated solidarity amongst South African ex-servicemen.

Initially, in order to prevent the development of a united black solidarity group, the authorities promoted the idea that the different black tribes should be grouped together. They trusted that solidarity could thus easily be countered and controlled, because according to their perception tribal animosities surfaced easily and unruly black action could thus be prevented. However, the exigencies of war quickly forced the authorities to overrule this arrangement. A dilution policy was adopted because the army seriously began to fall short in its commitments as far as white combatant manpower was concerned. By the end of 1941 the situation deteriorated dramatically after the 5th Brigade had disintegrated in the battle at Sidi Rezegh. In order to release white soldiers for combatant duties, black soldiers had to replace whites serving in non-combatant capacities.[34]

This move had two important consequences: firstly, the Native Military Corps (N.M.C.) was now split up into small sections and the soldiers assigned to various units of the Union Defence Force (U.D.F.) where their services were needed. The black soldiers were now compelled to leave the relatively familiar parent unit and rub shoulders with whites who frequently regarded them as inferior and therefore also demanded that they perform ordinary manual labour. This left many of them indignant and disillusioned.[35] Secondly, soldiers from different tribes were now grouped together. One would expect that this situation would be favourable for the development of a strong feeling of solidarity amongst these soldiers. However, there is no evidence of this happening. The opposite was true: it neutralised the potential development of a feeling of solidarity. This can be ascribed to the fact that the blacks were now scattered in small groups throughout the whole army organisation and that their numbers were too small in any unit to create a feeling of black solidarity. This suited the authorities but it came about more by default than by design.

Despite their participation in the war, it appears from the above discussion that the ex-servicemen did not develop a strong sense of solidarity. The lack of a feeling of togetherness and loyalty towards a solidarity movement impeded a possible growth in their political consciousness. In this respect it is important to realise that all demands and protests which were made after the war, whilst certainly having had political overtones, were not necessarily manifestations of a strong solidarity movement amongst ex-soldiers. Again whatever solidarity there might have developed, it did not take place within the military sphere but was rather developing amongst the black labour force in the country as a result of enormous socio-economic changes unleashed by the war. The expansion of war-time manufacturing industry led to an increase in the black working force which in turn, eroded white-black wage differentials and promoted black labour unions.

Evaluation

The main question, already raised in the previous discussion, now remains to be answered: Did change - or lack of change - in racial attitudes, the fall of the white man's prestige, new hopes and expectations and the lack of fulfilling many of them as well as post-war governmental policies towards ex-servicemen raise their political consciousness? When reviewing the foregoing discussion, it may indeed seem to have been the case. After all, some ex-servicemen became more aware of their subordinate political position and started questioning the general conception that it was the natural order for whites to rule blacks.

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32. D. Killingray, 'Soldiers, ex-servicemen and politics', p. 528.
33. O.J.E. Shiroya, 'The Impact of World War II on Kenya', p. 63.
34. M.I.B., G.E. Brink Collection, Box 52, Deputy Adjudant-General to 1 SA Division and 2 SA Division, 7-9-1941.
35. M.I.B., N.M.C. N.A.S. 3/42/1 A 4 Box 10, T/Cpl. G.Makabela to David, 20-2-1945.

Bearing these changes in mind and also the lack of accommodating them, tempts one to conclude that the ex-soldiers would naturally not only have acquired political consciousness, but would also have been in the vanguard of political change. This is why O.J.E. Shiroya could make the following statement:

> "The reference here is not to such modern ideas as Communism, Socialism, Democracy, etc. The ideas ... are those that the soldier learned ... from his own personal experience. As a result of this, he started to reassess others as well as himself. It was not through radical ideas, as he had never heard of those. The 'simple' knowledge did it! The political history of other peoples ... or the realization that he was one of the 'greatest soldiers on Earth' (sic!) or simply through the re-evaluation of his 'colonial master'. Someone else might not find such ideas 'revolutionary' or 'radical' but to the African under colonial rule ... these ideas were enlightening - they made him politically conscious."[36]

Yet, one cannot conclude that the most decisive effect of the Second World War on ex-servicemen was to be found in the "political kingdom".

The crux of the matter is not only whether the Second World War acted as a catalyst to raise the political consciousness of the black soldiers due to their army experience, training and education; an important question is also whether these influences endured and could thus have had the effect of fundamentally changing the lives of the ex-servicemen and through them influenced their societies.

The political role of ex-servicemen in the immediate post-war years and their contribution to the new nationalist parties have perhaps been assumed and exaggerated. Admittedly it is difficult, if not impossible, to establish how many soldiers became politically conscious and even active due to their wartime experiences. However, whilst acknowledging the important point that the war exigencies to some extent created the potential for change, it seems in the final analysis that no real change occurred. This can be ascribed to the fact that black soldiers were always in a minority and in a subservient position in the U.D.F. Only a small percentage left South Africa for service overseas and their actions were very strictly controlled.[37] Moreover, racial prejudice on the side of both whites and blacks were and remained deeply ingrained.

Evidently Shiroya's view is too idealistic and not in keeping with the experiences of the ordinary soldiers. The evidence rather seems to suggest that whatever political consciousness might have developed, those who acquired "radical ideas" appear to have been those who were already politically conscious before they had enlisted. The two most outstanding examples are Potlako Kitchener Leballo and Herman Toivo Ja Toivo.

Potlako Leballo was a flamboyant grandiloquent character and a fervent hater of racial oppression even before he had enlisted. He succeeded in concealing his age and joined a transport unit. He served in North Africa where he led an army mutiny against the racially discriminatory regulations in the army. He remained politically active after the war and eventually became the first national secretary of the Pan Africanist Congress in 1959.[38]

Another prominent ex-serviceman who eventually wielded considerable political power was Herman Toivo Ja Toivo, a founder member and later leader of the South West African People's Organisation (S.W.A.P.O.). He was promoted to a corporal in

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36. O.J.E. Shiroya, 'Development of African politics in Kenya after 1945: The contribution of ex-soldiers', *Transafrican Journal of History* 8(2), (1979), p. 174.
37. About 8 000 of the 76 000 black soldiers who had enrolled left South Africa to join the Allied Forces in North Africa and Italy.
38. This short biographical desription was compiled from the following sources: T. Karis and G. Carter (eds.), *From protest to challenge: a documentary history of African politics in South Africa IV, Political profiles, 1882-1964* (Stanford, 1977), pp. 54-55; J.K. Ngubane, *An African explains apartheid* (London, 1963), pp. 101-102, and T. Lodge, *Black politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg, 1983), pp. 80-82, 215, 245, 305-306, 311-314 and 344.

the N.M.C. and after the war became increasingly involved in politics distinguishing himself as an organiser and leader with considerable acumen. He worked tirelessly and succeeded to create an effective network of S.W.A.P.O. committees in Ovamboland. In 1966 he was one of 37 others accused of terrorism, found guilty and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. Before the court had delivered sentence, Toivo made one of the most profound nationalistic declarations ever heard in court. He was released in 1984, four years before the expiry date of his sentence.[39]

The above examples strenghten the case for the argument that ex-servicemen made no impact as a group but only as individuals after the war. This can partly be ascribed to the fact that other factors such as pre-war experience, education, and status in their societies were more important in moulding them politically than their military experience. Others who became politically conscious were very few and by far rather the exception than the rule. For the vast majority the main effect of their participation in the war was on their physique and not on their minds. It therefore seems that Shiroya's findings can not be accepted as an example of what happened to the South African ex-servicemen.

On the whole ex-servicemen after demobilisation reverted to their pre-war life and lifestyles and were fairly quickly reabsorbed into their traditional societies - thereby becoming indistinguishable from their contemporaries who had not participated in the war - both groups, for example, being employed in the same occupations. They came back from the war with little more than some cash, a few consumer goods, and experiences that could not easily be transmitted to their families. Service in the army might have given them some training, status, health, and some money but these were in many cases rapidly spent on wine, women and cattle. Their main concern was not with political action but with more immediate economic and social grievances.

It is clear that their war experience did not mean that they developed a deeper understanding of the functioning of politics at either local or government level. For the educated men the army surely provided the opportunity to exchange political ideas with other educated men. However, the vast majority of soldiers remained non-literates. There is little evidence to indicate that their experiences had given them a new political consciousness, new ideas or the knowledge and skill to articulate such ideas.

After demobilization some of the men remained bitter about the treatment they had received and the government's failure to provide adequately for them, but this did not prompt them to political action. Written evidence on this issue is flimsy, but oral evidence seems to substantiate this. F. Sexwale, for example, remarked that:

> "I only became political consciousnessly aware in the 1950's. The army did not contribute to that. When we came back from the army we were just back at square one."[40]

The South African war effort brought about major changes in the economic and social structures of the country. It stimulated industrialisation and economic growth, particularly in the private manufacturing industry and caused a tremendous acceleration in the urbanisation process. The percentage of blacks in cities rose from 18,4% in 1936 to 23,7% in 1946 - an increase of over half a million - whilst the numbers employed in industrial occupations rose from about 270 000 in 1936 to 457 000 in 1946.[41] These changes had a dramatic and serious impact on the lives of the black people of South Africa. These were exacerbated when one considers the process of industrialisation and urbanisation within the particular context of forced limitations on South African blacks, such as job reservation, pass laws and exclusion from owning property. For many blacks the result was that despite becoming part of and having their lives changed by the processes unleashed by the

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39. *Die Suid-Afrika Stigting Nuus* 10(4), April 1984.
40. Interview with F. Sexwale, 6-2-1986.
41. *Union Statistics for Fifty Years* 10, p. 33.

war, one major change did not take place: they were till kept in a subservient position. This was one factor which led to the major 1946 mine workers' strike.[42]

The changes which did occur amongst these soldiers can therefore primarily not be ascribed to their military training and experiences but rather to the larger processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. There was a widespread feeling of discontent among many urban and rural workers in many parts of South Africa which included ex-servicemen, but there is little hard evidence to indicate that former soldiers provided an organized active political consciousness leadership or played an extraordinary important role in the new politics of dissent. It was those that had stayed behind, rather than the ex-servicemen, who provided the new impetus in South African politics during the 1940's.

Further, whatever political consciousness developed amongst ex-servicemen during the war, it did not manifest itself in political action after the war. This is proved by the weakness of ex-servicemen's organisations which remained non-political and concentrated on social activities and aid to needy ex-servicemen.

The evident lack of involvement on the part of ex-servicemen in overt resistance seems to prove that war service as such, for the reasons already mentioned, was not sufficient either to jolt them into revolt or for them to encourage others to do so. However, it must be borne in mind that even those who possibly contemplated such action had to consider the formidable power of the state to crush any uprising.

It is therefore clear that the most dramatic role of the Second World War as a catalyst to stimulate political consciousness occurred outside the narrow confines of the army. Not the ex-servicemen, but individuals and organisations outside the military hi-jacked issues such as the rapid industrialisation process unleashed by the war and used them as a leverage to pressurise the government. Some of the soldiers' political consciousness only changed when they became victims of these processes and joined organisations such as the African National Congress which increasingly became a rallying point amongst the new black urban working class. The *status quo* was no longer accepted. In South Africa the class and racial battle intensified and still continues today.

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42. See for example the following on this strike: D. Hemson, 'Dock workers, labour circulation and class struggles in Durban, 1940-1959', *Journal of Southern African Studies* (4), (1977), pp. 88-124 and D. O'Meara, 'The 1946 African mineworkers strike and the political economy of South Africa', *Journal of Comparative Commonwealth Politics* 13(2), (1975), pp. 146-173.