THE BRITISH ANNEXATION OF THE TRANSVAAL: AN AMERICAN VIEW

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On April 12, 1977 Sir Theophilus Shepstone, in the name of Her Majesty's Government, annexed the South African Republic, commonly known as the Transvaal. The decision to seek British control over this independent Boer Republic had been made in the summer of 1876 by Lord Carnarvon, Secretary of State for The Colonies, with the advice of a group of South African Administrators, all of whom had previously made statements supporting the forced annexation of the republic. Carnarvon had become convinced that control over the Transvaal was desirable for his plans for South African confederation. He hoped that the weakness of that state would motivate its people to cede their government to the British, for it was his avowed belief that any independent entity must, of its own accord, decide to confederate. However, by giving a Queen's Commission to investigate conditions in the Transvaal to Shepstone, Secretary of Native Affairs for Natal and an advocate of forced annexation, he made that which occurred in April inevitable, despite the fact that most of the Dutch did not want the British to rule.

Both confederation and the annexation policy which grew from it were shifts from earlier British policy. The Sand River and Bloemfontein Conventions of 1852 and 1854 led to the establishment of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. These conventions granted the Dutch Republics independence. At first, both the republics were very weak and the Orange Free State was not averse to plans for coming back under British rule. In 1858, the President of the Orange Free State asked Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape Colony, if union with the colony was possible. Grey, anxious at such an opportunity, asked the approval of the Colonial Office of a plan for confederation which would have allowed the proposed union to direct its own domestic and foreign affairs, an arrangement in certain respects like the later Commonwealth of Nations. However, the Colonial Office, in a period of retrenchment, did not allow the plan to go through.

In the 1860's, however, British attenion was once again focussed on the Dutch Republics when valuable resources were discovered within their territories. It was once again to confederation that Englishmen turned, now that they were dissatisfied with the old policy of withdrawal and abandonment of South African territory. The 1868 annexation of Basutoland, linking Natal and the Cape Colony, and the 1871 annexation of diamond fields within the territories of both Republics were indications of just how far interest in South Africa had returned. Moreover, in 1871, there was an effort by the Secretary of

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1. Lyons, John, *British Objectives in the Transvaal* (1877-1884) (Amherst, 1962), p.13.

State for the Colonies, Lord Kimberley, to bring the Cape Colony into union with the republics. However, the Cape had little interest because it was on the verge of receiving responsible government status. Moreover, the Orange Free State President made it clear that no confederation policy could be considered until the diamond fields dispute had been settled.

Lord Carnarvon, who became Colonial Secretary in 1874, had played a key-role in writing the British North American Act of 1867, which brought confederation to the provinces of Canada. He was convinced of the necessity for confederation of the South African states and colonies because it was necessary to have a strong, loyal self-governing dominion behind the essential bastion at Simon's Bay.[2] He envisioned a confederation in which the colonists would assume greater responsibilities than before, although only in domestic affairs. England would have to retain control over foreign affairs, because they affected her interests. This policy promised control over the foreign policies of the Boers once they became part of the confederation.

Just as Carnarvon's policy was anticipatory of a possible foreign challenge to the British, it was also designed to avert an internal threat to her colonies constituted by the large non-white population in South Africa. In the early 1870's there had been a great deal of fear expressed by the white populations of the Natal and the Cape Colony that a native rebellion was brewing. The Langalibalele "revolt" of 1873, in which the activities of a Hlubi chief were blown out of proportion, was symtomatic of this anxiety. One of the sources of this fear was the arming of the natives which the English colonists frequently accused the Dutch population of abetting. In fact, accusations of this sort were a two-way street, for the Dutch rightfully accused Richard Southey, administrator of the Diamond Fields, of giving guns as payments to the natives who worked there. Carnarvon was aware of both Dutch and English fears and believed that Confederation would be worthwhile because it would mitigate the threat of a future South Africa wide uprising. In his first dispatch calling for a conference on Confederation, he wrote that there was a need for a common native policy which, among other things, would stop the flow of arms.[3] He called the natives "shrewd observers who can tell when the various European governments are weak and vulnerable."[4] As Clement Goodfellow has pointed out, Carnarvon believed that the prospect of white co-operation against the natives would lure the Republics into the arrangement. It was quite clear that he had little interest in the Natives other than that they should be suppressed.[5]

* Carnarvon to Barly, May 4, 1875.

2. Goodfellow, Clement, *Great Britain and The South African Confederation*, (Capetown, 1966), p.70.
3. Carnarvon to Barkly, 5-4-75, Parliamentary Papers 1875, C.1244 ≠ 1.
4. Ibid.
5. Goodfellow, *Confederation*, p.68.

Though Carnarvon was quite anxious for an early union, there was no evidence in his first instructions to Barkly, Governor of the Cape Colony, that the independent Dutch Republics should be coerced forcibly into the fold. On the contrary, he emphasized that each state must enter the arrangement "spontaneously and uncontrolled."[6] Indeed, nine days later, Carnarvon met with Thomas Burgers, President of the Transvaal and remarked to him that "as long as the Dutch States did not get a better treatment at the hands of the British government there were entitled to keep aloof from a federation."[7]

Carnarvon had good reason to believe that early confederation, that is before 1875, would have been doomed to failure. In the middle of 1874, he had sent the British historian J. Anthony Froude to investigate the situation in South Africa, after he had written an article in Fraser's Magazine expounding on the virtues of confederation for that area. He visited the Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal and the Orange Free State and concluded the confederation would only prosper if the Republics were conciliated over the Diamond Fields and "the whites as a whole were permitted to take their own course in their policy toward Africans."[8]

In the spring of 1875, Carnarvon sent Froude back to South Africa only to find that his first dispatch on confederation had insulted the ministers of the newly responsible government of the Cape Colony. These men felt that any union was an infringement on their newly acquired autonomy. Unfortunately, Froude was a better historian than politician. Seeing that there was friction between the eastern and western portions of the Cape population, he appealed to the east with an offer for separate representation at any conference on confederation. This infuriated John Molteno, Prime Minister of the Cape and the legislative assembly, both of whom disregarded Froude and his efforts.

At the same time, the efforts of Sir Garnet Wolseley and Froude to set up a conference excluding the Cape Colony died, when the Orange Free State refused to participate. Wolseley, who was in Natal to supervise a revamping of that colony's governmental structure in anticipation of eventual federation, had believed that a conference at Pietermaritzburg (in Natal) could be relatively fruitful. Writing in his diary of June 24th, he forsaw that the only difficulties with a Dutch Republic-Natal union were that the Republics were sensitive about the "flag" and export duties.[9] A little more than a month later Brand, Orange Free State President, pulled out of the conference because the dispute over diamond fields had not been settled.[10]

Though frustrated, Froude did not advocate coercion of either the colonies or the republics. In September, he said "it was to be regretted

6. Ibid.
7. Uys, C. J., *In the Era of Shepstone* (Lovedale, 1933), p.20.
8. Goodfellow, p.59.
9. Wolseley, Sir Garnet, *The Natal Diaries of Sir Garnet Wolseley* edited by Adrian Preston (Capetown, 1971), p.175.
10. Goodfellow, *Confederation*, p.82.

that England should have granted the neighbouring states their independence. Still having done so, no English ministry would ever attempt to force or induce these states to join any confederation under the British flag. Their independence would be respected and if they entered the union, it would be entirely of their own seeking, without the least attempt at pressure."[11] Moreover, in his second resport to Carnarvon issued in January, he was full of praise for the Republics. He compared the Transvaal's native system with that of Natal: "In the Transvaal owing to the more mixed and ruder character of the population a looser system continued for several years after the establishment of independence and was checked at a comparatively recent period. But even against the Transvaal, no transaction has ever been alleged approaching in violence and severity to the measures adopted by the British government in Natal on the occasion of the so-called rebellion of Langalibale."[12]

Froude reiterated the need for a settlement with the Orange Free State over the Diamond Fields and emphasized that the Transvaal would not be satisfied until it was given a "fair hearing" on the Keate Award (1871). He wrote that the Transvaal was not suspicious of Carnarvon's motives for confederation because its Acting President Joubert* had declared himself willing to recommend to the Volksraad that a delegate be sent to any proposed conference. In general, he gave the impression that once the territorial disputes were settled, the feeling in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State which had supported reunion with the British until 1858, the date of the annexation of Basutoland, would re-emerge and a union with Natal could be worked out. He wrote: "there was scarcely a person of intelligence in the entire country who does not desire it (union); and an object recommended alike by the sentiment and interest can scarcely fail of eventual realization; suspicion will die out when Imperial policy is seen to be disintegrated.[13]

Yet, while Froude's report assumed that coercion of the Dutch Republics was not necessary to affect a union with the colonies, there were others who regarded the annexation of the Transvaal, with or without its consent, as necessary to British policy in South Africa. These men felt that Britain should control the Transvaal to facilitate Natal's economic and native policy. When Shepstone installed Cetywayo as a Zulu chief in 1873, he insured that there would be further conflict with the Transvaal, because the Zulus claimed the eastern part of the Transvaal as their rightful territory. On this occasion, Sir Benjamin Pine, Lieutenant-Governor of Natal, wrote of the "great advantage . . . almost the necessity of acquiring the territory (Zululand) in question.[14] When Wolseley assumed his temporary position in Natal a year later, he

* -Burgers was in London and then Amsterdam and Berlin.

11. Speech to Porth Elizabeth Audience, September 10, 1875, see Parliamentary Papers 1875, C.1399 ≠ 3.
12. Froude to Carnarvon, 1-10-1876 Parliamentary Papers 1876 C.1399 ≠ 3.
13. Ibid.
14. Uys, *Shepstone,* p.88.

wrote: "I hear from Mr. Shepstone that Cetewayo, the king of the Zulus, is now ready for war and means to begin by fighting the native tribes on his frontier. I wish his attention could be directed to the Transvaal. It is a glorius opportunity for England, for we ought to try and force the Transvaal into our arms."[15]

In addition to limiting the native policy of Natal, the Transvaal was seen as a threat to the economic viability of that colony. If the Dutch could build a railroad to Delogoa Bay, Natal would lose a major source of revenue, customs duties. Wolseley stated the threat forcefully: "I should like to thwart Burgers in every possible way in his endeavors to get the money required for his railroad. If his railroad is built before ours, it will seriously injure Natal."[16] In fact, according to historian C. J. Uys, Wolseley would have proclaimed the Transvaal British territory as early as 1875, had the Acting President Piet Joubert not pretended to be an ardent disciple of the policy of confederation.[17]

As long as the Transvaal remained receptive to the confederation plans of Carnarvon and Froude, as seemed to be the case in 1875, there was no conflict within the British colonial administration between those like Froude who emphasized that the independence of the Transvaal must be respected and other like Wolseley, for whom the lack of confederation would dictate the necessity of the anneration of Burger's Republic. However, revelations of changes in the Transvaal's policy and the wanting fortunes of confederation had the effect of making the annexationist element's arguments virtually unquestionable, while downgrading the influence of Froude's reports. By the fall of 1876 some form of British control over the Transvaal seemed inevitable.

Throughout 1875, there had been suspicion that the Transvaal President, Burgers, was trying to arrange an agreement with the Portugese for the rights to export goods out of Delogoa Bay. In July of 1875, President MacMahon of France had announced that France recognized Portuguese claims to this region. Carnarvon tried to buy this area from the Portugese, but failed. In December, the Colonial Office learned that the Transvaal had successfully concluded a treaty with the Portugese respecting reciprocal trading priveleges. Thus, one of the main attractions of confederation for the Transvaal, reduced customs duties, ceased and the way was opened for the introduction of foreign influence into South Africa. Nevertheless, the effect of the treaty was limited by the fact that the Transvaal was too poor to export large quantities of any goods. Moreover, though Delogoa Bay opened up the possibility of a viable foreign policy, Germany, its most likely ally, was not interested. Apparently, when Burgers approached the elder Bülow in Berlin in the summer of 1875, he told him that Count Bismarck had no interest in pursuing any colonial policy.[18]

15. Wolseley, *Diaries,* p.175.
16. Ibid, p.207.
17. Uys, *Shepstone,* p.113.
18. Ibid, p.75.

However, the potential threat of the Transvaal's policy to British interests in South Africa was great. With substantial gold and diamond fields being mined, and new fields being discovered, the possibility that the Transvaal would eventually become economically viable to the point of complete independence and defiance of Britain and its colonies, seemed to the policymakers, to loom on the horizon. When the Colonial Office learned that Burgers had succeeded in getting a loan for his projected railroad to Delogoa Bay, these fears were accentuated, for the railroad would make transport for the gold and diamond fields possible. Still, the minutes of the Colonial Office make it clear that the undersecretaries in charge of South Africa, Donald Currie and Robert Herbert believed that the threat of the loan was limited by the fact that it would procure only 36 of the approximately 70 miles of tracks needed to link the Lydenburg Gold district with Delogoa Bay. Herbert write: "I should think the Delogoa Bay railroad a long way from being secured as yet, but we shall have to push on British construction in Natal."[19]

The Transvaal took two other actions in late 1875 and early 1876, with Carnarvon regarded as inimical to his hopes for confederation. In September, the Transvaal unilaterally annexed the Keate Award area. As we have seen, Froude hoped to use the rightful jurisdiction of the Boers over this area as an inducement to confederate. When Carnarvon learned of the annexation four months later, he wrote to Barkly, Governor of the Cape Colony, that "pending the negotiations for the confederation of South Africa, the British government could not recognize the addition of any territory."[20] In the spring of 1876, Burgers, now back from his European travels, directed his commandos to take control of an area, in the northwest part of the country, occupied by chief Sekukuni of the Bapedi tribe. Burgers claimed that this land had been ceded to the Boers by the father of Sekukuni in 1846. Sekukuni, with the help of missionaries, responded to the President denying that the land had been ceded, even though it had been unoccupied until a few years before. In fact, the area in dispute was not included in the territory of the Transvaal in an officially sponsored map published in 1868.[21] Only a map published in 1875, included this area within the Transvaal.[22] It is interesting to note that the area in dispute lay directly in the line of the proposed Delogoa Bay Railway.[23]

The expected war, which broke out when the kraal of Sekukuni's brother, Johannes, was attacked by Boer commandos in late June or early July, coincided with plans being made for a conference on confederation to be held in London. By this time, it was clear that the Transvaal would not participate.[24] However, prospects for union seemed

19. Colonial Office record Co 48/480 Dispatch ≠ 1579.
20. Carnarvon to Barly 1-25-76 Parliamentary Papers 1876. C.1748.
21. Barly to Carnarvon 11-18-76 Parliamentary Papers 1876. C.1748.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Falling out between Burgers and Carnarvon, for details see *Times*, spring issues.

to brighten when Carnarvon was able to negotiate with President Brand a compesation of £90 000 for the annexation of the Diamond Fields. Moreover, Molteno, received permission to go to London to discuss confederation.

The hopes were short-lived. After successfully negotiating the compensation, Brand packed his bags for the Orange Free State, remarking that he could not discuss confederation without the approval of his Volksraad (legislative body.) Adamant, he would not accept Carnarvon's arguments that the conference was to be purely deliberative in nature. Moreover, Molteno's instructions were so limiting that while he came to London, he did not attend the conference. With almost all of the key figures absent, the conference passed a few resolutions and adjourned until October.*

However, while the conference lacked significance in terms of confederation, it did reveal who Carnarvon's closest advisors were at this point. The failure of the £90 000 "bribe" to induce Brand to confederate cast an unappealing shadow on Froude's advice. Indeed, Wolseley, instead of Froude was chosen to be vice-chairman of the conference. While this may have been a matter of protocal, it is instructive, I think, to compare Carnarvon's description of Wolseley with that of Froude, both of which he made in an opening speech to the conference. Wolseley was described as a man whose ability "was great both in the civil and military affairs of South Africa," while Froude was the man "who perhaps more than any other man in England, knows the state of the Province of Griqualand West (Diamond Fields)."[25] This implied lack of respect for Froude's opinions on the Orange Free State and the Transvaal was to bode ill for the latter. As we have seen, Wolseley, would have annexed the Transvaal with no regard for its people's consent in 1875. He believe that the Republic was weak and vulnerable and that, ultimately, the English would have to take control of the area.[26] On the other hand, he believed that the Orange Free State was relatively strong, considerably more anti-British, and, in general, a far less suitable candidate for annexation.[27]

Some time after the conference it was decided that a show of British strength was necessary to facilitate the waning confederation policy.[28] There were three general reasons why the Transvaal was chosen to be the target for this demonstration. In ascending order of importance they were the potentiality of the dangers of the Transvaal's actions of 1875 and 1876, the attitude of Wolseley, and a series of reports from South Africa which played up the weakness of the Boer state. As has been shown, the actions of the Transvaal in regard to Delogoa Bay and

* The conference was not reopened in October.

25. Carnarvon to Conference, 8-3-76, Parliamentary Papers 1876. C.1631.
26. See Butler, Wiliam, *The Life of Sir George Pomeroy-Colley* (London, 1899), p.140.
27. Butler, William, *Colley*, p.140.
28. Lyons, *British Objectives*, p.11.

the railroad were threats, if as yet remote, to the eventual confederation of South Africa. Morever, it was thought by some that the Transvaal war would encourage a rebellion among the much feared Zulus, who were nominally allied with Sekukuni. Wolseley, whose attitudes have been made clear, no doubt, cast the Transvaal's actions in an even more unfavorable light. Finally, reports of weakness encouraged the belief that a British take-over was a realistic possibility.

Since early July, Barkly had been sending reports, drawn largely from pro-annexationist papers in the Transvaal and the Cape Colony, to the effect that the Transvaal was nearing a state of anarchy as a result of its war with the Sekukuni's tribe.[29] The most notable features of his despatches were petitions from groups of English citizens living in the gold mining regions of the north which reported that the Transvaal government was unable to maintain order in the region and asked that the English government intervene to protect them. They alleged that the Boer government was bankrupt and had been pursuing the war with the Sekukuni's tribe for the purpose of exacting taxes from him to pay for the railroad loan. Moreover, the President was leading a commando of his own into the northern region, leaving Pretoria exposed to various forms of disorder which were likely to break out because most of the population opposed the war. In a letter dated July, 9, 1876, one English observer noted that it was common knowledge among the people that Burgers was emotionally unstable and was pursuing the Sekukuni war out of motives of his own glory. He also noted that there was a power struggle going on between former President Pretorius and Burgers, another possible explanation for the latter's aggressive policy.[30] All these reports pointed to a weak and unstable state. As Barkly pointed out in a despatch dated July 14 the "time may be approaching when Her Majesty's Government will be compelled to intervene and take a very decided line in regard to the proceedings of the South African Republic."[31]

Yet while these reports were largely speculative, "concrete" evidence of weakness came in September when Barkly sent a despatch and shortly thereafter a telegram that confirmed that President Burgers and his commando* had been "defeated" when they attempted to charge Sekukuni's kraal. He enclosed an article from the *Cape Daily Advertiser* which reported that after the defeat, in which nine Boers were killed, the remaining men went to the President and announced their determination to go home. The President was said to have asked them to shoot him so that he would not have to survive his disgrace. The report went on to say that the men of the commando were "pouring" into Pretoria.[31]

* Commando is a term used for a force of men.

29. Barkly to Carnarvon, 7-4-76, Parliamentary Papers 1876, C.1748.
30. Shepstone file, 9-9-76, C0-48-481.
31. Barkly to Carnarvon, 8-25-76, Parliamentary Papers 1876, C.1748 ≠ 72.

In his telegram, Barkly wrote: "The war into which he (Burgers) had plunged the Transvaal Republic and the native tribes connected with or adjacent to it, is of such a nature that those interests could not fail to be endangered whatever might be the result. And the Present Crisis has rendered it incumbent upon Her Majesty's Government to decide at once upon the course that would have to be taken under circumstances which might immediately arise.[32]

This was precisely the opportunity which Carnarvon and his advisors were hopeful would arise. The day after he received Barkly's telegram, he wrote to Disreali: "The juncture is really a serious one, for if there is a delay in acting or if matters take a wrong turn before instructions can reach him, we may have a great Kafir War in South Africa. *But I do not anticipate this** — And my hope is that by acting at once we may prevent war and acquire at a stroke the whole of the Transvaal Republic, after which the Orange Free State must soon follow and the whole policy in South Africa for which we have been labouring may be fully justified.[33]

Thus, we can see that the future of confederation and not the threat of a general war was primarily at the heart of his policy. Indeed, he reiterated this point to Queen Victoria in a letter of the next day.[34]

It was also evident that Carnarvon hoped that the weakness of the Transvaal would motivate its inhabitants to voluntarily cede the government to the British. There were new reports that both Dutch and British subjects of the Republic wanted interventiton. Based on this further evidence of dissatisfaction, Barkly wrote Carnarvon: "should I accept these requests for the cession of the Transvaal to British rule?"[35]

Yet, it was a testament both to Carnarvon and his confederation policy that Barkly's question was not answered in the affirmative. He realised, quite rightfully, that even though annexation might be beneficial it could also be detrimental if it created a disaffected party in the future union. Instead of relying on Barkly's second and third hand reports, Carnarvon asked Theopilus Shepstone, who was in London for the conference, to return to South Africa to investigate conditions in the Transvaal. "Twitters," as Disreali was fond of calling Carnarvon, explained his reasoning process this way: "matters . . . are extremely critical, but they are up to my last advices going as I desire; . . . I have received information that a meeting has already been called by a certain part of the people to ask for our intervention and to take over the Government of the country. Some even of the Dutch authorities appear to be consenting parties. It is on every ground of the highest

* The underlining is mine.

* Carnarvon suffered from a rare nervous disease.

32. Ibid.
33. Carnarvon to Disraeli, 9-15-76 as reported in Hardinge, *The Life of Henry Howard Molyneux Herbert — Fourth Earl of Carnarvon*, 1831-1890 (Oxford, 1925), p.233.
34. Carnarvon to Victoria, 9-15-76 quoted by Uys, *Shepstone*, p.174.
35. Barkly to Carnarvon, 8-25-76, Parliamentary Papers 1876, C.1748 ≠ 72.

importance not to lose this opportunity and I propose to send out by the mail of Friday, Sir Theophilus Shepstone — the man who has the most intimate knowledge of South African affairs and the greatest influence over the Native and Dutch — with a secret despatch empowering him to take over the Transvaal government and country, and to become the first English Governor — if circumstances on his arrival render this in any way possible.[36]

He hoped that Shepstone would arrive in conditions of such anarchy that the majority of the population would eagerly grasp at his offer of British rule. If not, Shepstone was the man to convince them that this was desirable. When he gave him the official Queen's Commission to investigate conditions in the Transvaal, two weeks later, it included a provision that any British take-over should only be taken „if you are satisfied that the inhabitants thereof or a sufficient number of them in the legislature desire to become our subjects."[37] On October 2, he wrote to Shepstone: "it is certainly desirable to have the consent of the Volksraad to the cession of the state and it would be dangerous to take over the country against their desires except under circumstances so grave as to justify us on the grounds of unquestionable general safety. I hope that you may secure this, even if on your arrival you find that the vote is not what is desired. It may be possible to get a second and more satisfactory resolution."[38]

Despite claims to the contrary, the British attempted to perpetuate the Transvaal's weakness. Carnarvon went as far as to limiting existing British civilian support by "warning British subjects to abstain from taking part in the war in the Transvaal Republic, between the government and certain native tribes (Sekukuni)."[39] This contradicted instructions sent to colonial administrators in early 1876 to the effect that if resident British subjects were asked to fight in any conflicts in the Dutch Republics, they could not legitimately refuse this obligation.

However, this policy had little effect. Hopes of "justly acquiring" the Transvaal became more remote as conditions improved in the months between October and April. The "serious reverse" reported by Barkly to Carnarvon in September was followed by a series of successful Boer operations. By October, Burgers could write to Bulwer, Lieutenant-Governor of the Natal, that "in reference to the Sekukuni matter I am happy to say that there is every prospect of a successful suppression of the rebellion which will, I sincerely hope, tend to secure peace for the future and prevent the recurrence of . . . disturbances."[40] In February, Sekukuni came to terms with the Boers. By the treaty he agreed to recognize the boundary line originally desired by the Boer government, to pay 2 000 head of cattle to the Transvaal for war damages, and to

36. Carnarvon to Disreali, 9-20-76 quoted by Hardinge, *Carnarvon*, p. 232.
37. Carnarvon to Shepstone, 10-5-76 Parliamentary Papers 1877, Vol. LX, C.1776, $\neq$ 1.
38. Carnarvon to Shepstone 10-4-76 as quoted in Uys, *Shepstone*, p.263.
39. Carnarvon to Barkly, 9-23-76 Parliamentary Papers 1877, Vol. LX C.1748
40. Burgers to Bulwer, 9-13-76, Parliamentary Papers 1877, Vol. LX C.1748.

admit he was a subject of the Republic.[41] On February 16, a day after the treaty signing, Shepstone admitted that peace was "just made."[42]

Moreover, despite Shepstone's claims that the Zulu king, Cetewayo, would soon attack the Transvaal because he had no respect for the fighting ability of the Boers,[43] there was no evidence to this effect. In December, J. W. Shepstone, acting Secretary of Native Affairs for Natal, reported that Cetewayo was engaged in a dispute with a rival chief, Umbelini, and that there was no reason to believe that he was preparing to attack the Transvaal. After the settlement of the Sekukuni war, Bulwer wrote to Shepstone: "The settlement of (the Sekukuni peace) removes one of the difficulties which turned men's minds in the Transvaal to the necessity for stronger government. The Zulus also have subsided for the present, and that was another, and perhaps the greatest of the difficulties which were making their way into the hearts of the businessmen of the Transvaal and even of the Boer population.[44]

Nor did the other weaknesses of the Transvaal appear to be particularly evident in the months between Shepstone's reception of the Cimmission and his annexation. The reports of political chaos, white rebellion, and disloyalty to Burgers which circulated during the summer, no longer described conditions in the Republic. One must be careful to make a distinction between opposition to Burgers's policies which was voiced in the Volksraad and rebellious conditions. According to Alfred Aylward, a British comandeer in the employ of the Boer government, the country was quiet and undisturbed. He reported no instances of major disobedience to the government, despite its £215 000 debt.*[45]

There was substantial dissatisfaction among the members of the Volksraad with Burger's policies. In December, there was an abortive attempt by one Judge Reitz, a confederationist, to oppose the President in an election. In January, the Volksraad adjourned pending news of a settlement with the Sekukuni. When Burgers reopened the session in February, his hand had been significally strengthened by the treaty. Thus, Burgers was able to hold off opposition to his policies. In any case, it was clear that no one in the Raad, including the confederationists, was in favour of voluntarily ceding the Republic to the British.

Clearly then, the weakness in the Transvaal which Carnarvon hoped would compel the population, by and large, to voluntarily cede the government to the British did not exist.[46] Shepstone adopted a two-pronged strategy in the face of this situation. When he first entered the country in January, he spent much time travelling amon gthe villages

* Aylward was later employed by Shepstone when he became Administrator.

41. Leyds, W. J., *The First Annexation of The Transvaal* (London, 1906), p.84.
42. Shepstone to Barkly, 2-16-77 as quoted by Uys, *Shepstone*, p.314.
43. Shepstone to Carnarvon, 3-6-77 Parliamentary Papers 1877 V. LX. C.1776 ≠ 87.
44. Bulwer to Shepstone, 2-14-77 quoted by Uys, *Shepstone*, pp.322-23.
45. Aylward, A. *The Transvaal Today* (London, 1878), p.297.
* The shares of stock for the loan had fallen drastically in value.
46. The country was severely in debt, although it is possible it would have recovered without outside assistance.

along the road from Newcastle to Pretoria, talking to people and assessing their feelings about the viability of the state. By directing his attention to people who were already predisposed toward annexation, such as merchants and English subjects, he was able to unite almost all the strongest anti-government forces around him. As Froude reported in 1874, there were sections of the Transvaal population, particularly those in the towns, who were anxious to become allied with the British because of the economic opportunities which would then become available.[47] In the light of this sentiment, it was not surprising that Shepstone received the signatures of about 2 500 electors on petitions for British "intervention."[48]

However, Shepstone realized that some attempt would have to be made to deal with the Volksraad. The strategy, he arrived at, was to discredit it by cooperating with Burgers in a scheme to revise the Transvaal constitution so that the executive council would have more power. While his private letters show that he never believed that any change in the government of the Republic could alter the "inherent weakness of the state," he hoped that the plan, which was in part motivated by Burgers's fears of Kruger, would be refused and the population would realize the unworthiness of their government. When the reform bill came up at the session of the Raad late in February, it was rejected. Writing to the Colonial office on March 6, he cited the government's inability to deal with its own weakness as a compelling reason for annexation. However, Burgers continued to press for the adoption of the reforms. On March 7, after it had adjourned for two weeks so that its members could talk to their constituents, the Raad passed the proposed reforms. "Public opinion"[49] had affirmed that the country should resolve its own weaknesses without the help of the British.

Shepstone's policy was bankrupt. Two days later, he was able to get Burgers to admit publicly that no new form of government could help the Transvaal, but the damage had been done. All that was left was military force. On March 28. after learning that the Third Buffs, a British battalion, was stationed at Newcastle and ready to intervene if necessary, he began to prepare his proclamation of annexation.[50] Fourteen days later, amidst protests from Burgers and the Raad, he announced the annexation to the public in Pretoria.

The question of what lay behind Shepstone's activities must certainly arise. I think this can be devided into two questions, why did he hesitate to annex the Transvaal when he first entered the country (in January), because it was weak and powerless to resist British force and why did he then annex at the point when public opinion was turning and his policy was least justified. The answer to the first question lies

47. Uys, *Shepstone*, p.239.
48. Shepstone to Carnarvon, 3-6-77 Parliamentary Papers 1877 V. LX. C.1776 ≠ 87.
49. Aylward remarks that the term "public opinion" is tricky, although it was clear that most Dutch opposed British intervention. Many liked Shepstone personally.
50. Uys, *Shepstone*, 329.

in two places, Carnarvon's initial instructions, both public and private, and the advice he received from Bulwer while he was waiting to enter the Transvaal, in November and December. Carnarvon's instructions, as we have seen were based on the belief that the state's weakness would convince the people to cede their government to the British. It was only in such a situation, if ever, that a "just annexation" would be possible. But how much weakness and how much consent was necessary to achive this nebulous object? Shepstone didn't know and therefore he felt he had to wait to see if he could discredit the existing government so that he could convince most of the population of the need for the British.

Bulwer reinforced Shepstone's consciousness of the need to get Dutch support for the mission he was to perform| When Shepstone was in Natal, he urged him not to annex without the consent of the Dutch population.[51] He made it clear that only on condition of a triumphant welcome should such a step be taken. Later in March, Bulwer urged him to annex "only if he could get a concurrent resolution of support from Burgers, the Raad, or some outward and visible expression of the public opinion of the country".[52] Little did he know his pleadings were to be in vain.

For the second question, there are again two answers. First of all, Shepstone seemed to believe that he could justify an annexation to Carnarvon, not only because the "inherent weakness of the state made it a threat to itself and the British colonies" but also by showing that there was a secret conspiracy of extremist Dutch who prevented the others from asking for British intervention. He wrote to Barkly that during February a group of 400 farmers had rode to Pretoria and removed the question of confederation with Britain from the agenda for the Volksraad session. He used these farmers as "evidence" of a "secret conspiracy" which was responsible for coercing the Raad and Burgers into protesting against his proclamation of annexation.

Shepstone was right about his own ability to rationalize. It was not until January of 1878 that any one seriously disputed his contentions. For Carnarvon who had little information beyond that which was forwarded to him by Shepstone and that which appeared in the London newspapers, whose collective correspondent was strongly pro-annexationist, the former's efforts and explanations seemed perfectly acceptable. Two months after the annexation had been accomplished he wrote to Shepstone that "Her Majesty's Government received with much satisfaction the favourable reception given to you on the occasion of your annexation of the territory (Transvaal)."[55]

51. Ibid, 297.
52. Ibid, 374.
53. Shepstone to Carnarvon, 3-6-77 Parliamentary Papers 1877 V. LX C.1776 ≠ 87.
54. Paul Kruger in London in 1878 with 6,500 signatures on a petition opposing annexation. See C.2120, 1878.
55. Carnarvon to T. Shepstone 6-7-77, Parliamentary Papers 1877 V. LX C.1883.

The second reason that Shepstone ultimately annexed the territory was that he believed what he was doing was right. David Welsh has written that Shepstone was "ever anxious to extend the borders of Natal."[56] He was very much involved in an abortive plan to annex Zululand at the time that he made Cetywayo king. Moreover, he believed his system of native administration was superior to the Boers. He wrote to Barkly that in parts of the Transvaal the natives have assumed control and the Boers pay tribute to them. This he cited as another example of the "inherent weakness" of the Republic. Yet, he failed to mention that such a system had existed in the Transvaal since its independence and no major rebellion had occurred.

Furthermore, Shepstone believed that Dutch political institutions were intrinsically chaotic. He did not believe that the Volksraad was a viable form of government. In his last dispatch to Barkly before annexation, he wrote that only a "strong government" could manage the nation, with the implication that he alone could be the strong government.[58] If I can engage in a slight generalization, Shepstone's attitudes were ultimately those of the average English colonist in South Africa who had little respec for the Boer's ability to manage their own affairs and those of the natives within their territory. Indeed, as De Kiewiet has pointed out, this was the "stuff" of other British South African annexations.

Thus the annexation of the Transvaal can only be viewed as the converging of a number of forces. As we have seen, Carnarvon, for all his concern with popular consent, pushed for the control of the Republic. Moreover, there was pressure for annexation from Barkly, Shepstone, and Wolseley. A policy was arrived at, which even though it was not technically* "just" was acceptable to all those who helped create it. After all, in 1877 nobody was to know that the annexation would help produce the war of 1881, instead of the confederation which Carnarvon desired.

* By the instructions Carnarvon gave to Shepstone.
56. Welsh, David, *The Roots of Segregation* (Capetown, 1971), p.215.
57. Chepstone to Barkly, 3-27-77, Parliamentary Papers 1877 V. LX C.1776 $\neq$ 90.
58. Ibid.