

ANOTHER SIDE TO WARFARE: CARING FOR WHITE DESTITUATES DURING THE ANGLO-BOER WAR (OCTOBER 1899-MAY 1900)

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Opsomming

Oorloë bring verskillende soorte lyding vir burgerlikes. Militêre optredes lei dikwels tot die verwoesting van gemeenskappe en laat burgerlikes nie alleen dakloos nie, maar ook behoeftig. Gewoonlik word baie klem op die lot van die soldate en, soverre dit die Anglo-Boereoorlog aanbetref, veral die lot van die vroue en kinders in krygsgevangenskappe, gelê. Dit het daartoe gelei dat die wyse hoe die oorlog ook tot groot ontbering vir gewone burgerlikes bygedra het en sommige van hulle in groot ellende gedompel het, in die historiografie van die Oorlog afgeskep is.

Die artikel beklemtoon die lot van daardie blanke burgerlikes van die Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek binne die breër raamwerk van "Oorlog en die Gemeenskap" studies. Die fokus val op die rol van die regering van die Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek om hulp en voorrade aan behoeftige burgerlikes te verleen vanaf Oktober 1899 tot Mei 1900. Aspekte soos die redes waarom die regering op sekere beleidsrigtings besluit het, die omvang van die probleem, die aard van voorrade wat die regering aan behoeftiges voorsoen het en probleme om dit te bekom, die problematiek rondom identifikasie van wie werklik behoeftig was sowel as ad hoc reëlings om by die veranderende oorlogomstandighede aan te pas, word ontleed.

'n Tweede fokuspunt is die behoeftes soos uitgespreek deur die behoeftiges en hul reaksies op die pogings tot hulpverlening deur die regering. 'n Duidelike onderskeid is gemaak tussen die behoeftes van stedelinge en plattelanders. Die effek hiervan word ondersoek. Hul voortdurende klagtes dat dat hulle nie voldoende voorrade ontvang nie, sowel as klagtes dat die stelsel waarvolgens voorrade voorsien is, misbruik is, word krities ondersoek.

Uiteindelik moes die regering 'n moeilike balans vind tussen die behoeftes van die veggende burgers en die behoeftige burgers. Hoewel eersgenoemde vanuit 'n oorlogsoogpunt gesien, hul eerste prioriteit was – en deurgaans gebly het – was stabiliteit op die tuisfront net so belangrik ten einde die moraal van die burgers op die oorlogfront hoog te hou. Die onverkrygbaarheid van voorrade teen Mei 1900 sou egter alle pogings tot balansering in die wiele ry.

Introduction

War contributes to many forms of miseries. One of these is the destruction of societies through military action which leaves many civilians destitute and homeless refugees. The widespread media coverage of the Kosovo tragedy again made us aware of these people's plight nowadays. However very little attention was paid to their fate by the media a hundred years ago during the Anglo-Boer War.

At the outbreak of war some burghers voluntarily joined the Republican forces whilst others were commandeered. Many quickly had to leave their women and children behind without money or any other provisions. Some families were thus plunged into destitution because of the war. Of course, there were also other families who had already been destitute even before their men joined the forces.

Scant attention had been given to this topic in the historiography on the Anglo-Boer War. In 1977 already, Burrigge Spies raised this matter as an important additional topic but regarded it as outside the scope of his major work.¹ To my knowledge no one else had since addressed this topic. The only academic work, which to some extent addresses the issue, is that by Diana Cammack. She refers in general to the changed social conditions in Johannesburg during the initial phase of the War and only very briefly to the fate of the destitute.²

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the fate of these white South African Republic (hereafter ZAR) civilians within the broad framework of "War and Society" studies. The focus will fall on the role of the ZAR government in providing them with aid from October 1899 to May 1900 when the British forces occupied Johannesburg and Pretoria. Issues such as the reasons why the government decided on this policy, the extent of destitution, the nature of the provisions, conditions under which rations were given, problems in obtaining provisions as well as revised policies based on the changing circumstances of the War, will receive attention. Furthermore, the needs and responses of the destitute families as well as their perpetual complaints of under-provision will be critically addressed as well as complaints about misuse of the system of provision.

It was a well-known fact that the Transvaal was dependent on imports for about a third of its needs. The government of the ZAR was aware that, at the outbreak of war, the provision of imported goods would be extremely difficult as imports from Natal and the Cape Colony would immediately be terminated. The attitude of the Portuguese authorities would determine the availability of imports through Delagoa Bay. Thus, before the outbreak of the War measures were taken to purchase both military and civilian supplies

¹ S.B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900-May 1902* (Cape Town and Pretoria, 1977), p. 10.

² D.R. Cammack, "Class, politics and war: A socio-economic study of the Uitlanders of the Witwatersrand, 1897-1902" (PhD, University of California, Irvine, 1983).

which might be needed during the war and to store these. For this purpose the Proviand Commissie [hereafter Provision Commission] was established and would play a crucial role in the provision of supplies to destitute people.

Reasons for and extent of destitution

One of the results of the horrors of war was that it led to the deaths of many soldiers killed in action, others being seriously wounded and the rest left destitute. For example, Commandant D.C. de Beer of the Bloemhof district only had 2 000 men left of the original 9 000 by March 1900.³ Likewise, burghers returning from the battle fields of Magersfontein and Paardeberg have lost all their possessions during these battles.⁴ This in turn caused many families whose providers were thus affected to become destitute. As the war progressed, and as supplies became scarcer this number quickly rose, causing a gradually worsening situation.

Not only did the war situation - the breadwinners leaving the farms - contribute to destitution, but also in some areas agricultural disasters made it impossible for people to make a living - and consequently made them destitute. In Christiana, for example, locusts destroyed the crops and no grain was planted in the area.⁵

Destitution also stared those not directly involved in the war in the face. Some became destitute as they were no longer drawing any salaries or had any other income.⁶ Government officials, like H.T.D. de Cock, minute keeper of the Executive Council, for example, approached the Head Committee of the Provision Commission for food. This was granted on the basis of an advance but De Cock, as was the case with many other officials, had to settle the expenses after the war.⁷

³ Transvaal Archives, Pretoria (hereafter TA), Leyds Archives 718 (C), D.C. de Beer to State President, 6/3/1900.

⁴ TA, Proviand Commissie [Provision Commission] (PC) 1, PC 4345/00, C.L. Neethling and L. Badenhorst to Provision Commission, 17/4/1900; and N.M. Prinsloo to Provision Commission, 19/4/1900.

⁵ TA, Hoofd Comitee Commissariaat [Head Committee Commissariat] (HCC) 3, HCC 634/00, J.C. Reyneke to Local Feeding Committee, 26/1/1900.

⁶ PC 12, PC 4674/00, C.J.P. Jooste and nineteen others to Provision Commission, 28/4/1900.

⁷ HCC 13, Requests of officials, 30/5/1900; and Leyds Archives 728 (E) Acting Mine Commissioner Barberton to State Secretary, 7/7/1900.

Moreover, because of the war, supplies in many of the rural town shops were already depleted. As early as November 1899, the magistrate of Zeerust became concerned that there were not enough supplies, even for people who could afford to buy it.⁸

It was not at all easy to determine who were really destitute. Although a family might have money, they might have become destitute because of lack of provisions. Field Cornet Du Plessis from Vanwyksrus pointed out that there were people in his area who owned land, wagons and even oxen but that they had nothing to live from and were poorly dressed because they could not sell or buy anything. However, the Provision Commission declared that people with land, wagons and oxen could not be classified as being destitute.⁹

By 18 October 1899 the Provision Commission issued magistrates with a questionnaire to determine the number of destitute families in their areas.¹⁰ From the reports the Provision Commission received, it was clear that there was already from very early on a crisis. Because of an inadequate food supply, the number of destitute people was already quite high.¹¹ However, the questionnaires sent out by the Provision Commission were either not completely filled in or not at all completed. The full picture of the extent of destitution in the rural areas for October 1899 would therefore never be known.

Destitution in urban areas could easier be measured.¹² Nevertheless, it was only by November 1899 that an overall picture of the number of destitute people on the Witwatersrand and Pretoria could be ascertained after the secretary of the Witwatersrand government commission, T. Ockerse, compiled an inventory. According to the Johannesburg inventory there were 3 538 destitute families - 5 992 people under twelve

⁸ TA, Archives of the State Secretary (SS) 8286, file R1683/99, J.H. de la Rey to State Secretary, 21/11/1899; State Secretary to Magistrate, 28/11/1899; SS 8288, file R1783/99, J.P. Snyman to State Secretary, 23/11/1899 with added side notes, 11/12/1899 and 20/12/1899 and Magistrate Zeerust to Head Committee, 28/11/1899, list from S. Hugo.

⁹ PC 33, Acting Field Cornet Du Plessis to Provision Commission, 17/1/1900 and answer, 17/1/1900.

¹⁰ SS 8247, file R65x/99, Provision Commission to Magistrates, 18/10/99.

¹¹ In the rural areas, for example, there were 500 destitute families in the Zeerust district, 400 in Schweizer Reneke, 200 in Wolmaransstad, 600 in Heidelberg, 600 in Piet Retief and a similar number in Nylstroom. (SS 8072, file R13751/99, answers from magistrates from these areas received by 2/10/1899).

¹² There were about 1 200 destitute people in Vrededorp, Waterval and Langlaagte. In Jeppe 204 families comprising 946 people received provisions for the first time on 6 October 1899. (SS 8293, file R1952/99, H. Visscher to Head Commission Rus en Orde, 9/10/1899). In Pretoria there were ten destitute women and thirty-three children whose husbands and fathers were on commando and another sixteen women and 78 children whose providers were unemployed. (SS 8253, file R273x/00, Sub Committee Jeppe – Government Commission, 14/10/1899).

years and 7 226 older than twelve years – a total of 13 218 people.¹³ Within a month the figures had already risen fast. At the end of December 1899 the extent of help given on the Witwatersrand was as follows: destitute families 3 483 - 6 547 people under twelve years and 8 943 older than twelve years. The Witwatersrand Government Commission therefore had to care for 15 490 people.¹⁴ In addition, the number of destitute British rose to 1 200 by January 1900. Eventually, these destitutes joined the flow of British residents who were expelled by March 1900. Thus, when the British forces arrived on the Rand, there were only a few destitutes left.¹⁵

The serious concern of E. Bijlsma in charge of provisions in die Mooiriviersoog ward of Potchefstroom perhaps best sums up the total situation in most areas: there was “schreienden nood van vele huisgezinnen. Vrouwen en kinderen loopten blottoets en hebben behoefte aan de noodigste kleedingstukken. De avonden worden bij velen in ‘n donker doorgebracht, terwijl water en brood voor velen alles is wat men heeft.”¹⁶

Nature of provisions

The Government and Provision Commission decided that they could only provide in very basic care. This would consist of bread and maize meal but initially no meat. The latter was a very controversial issue and fairly quickly it was already under re-consideration by the Executive Council.¹⁷ Neither would the state be responsible for the provision of clothing. This was seen as an area of charity.¹⁸ It is not quite clear on what grounds this decision was made, as the need in this area was also huge. The only reason might have been financial constraints.

1. Clothes and exceptions

However, as will become clear, in practice many exceptions to these regulations quite often made it impossible to stick to this policy and made it actually null and void. The exigencies of the extremely poor position of the destitute would more often than not force the government to make numerous *ad hoc* concessions in the end. For example, the

¹³ SS 8274, file R1246/99, Inventory T. Ockerse, 8/11/1899.

¹⁴ HCC 2, HCC 1712/99, T. Ockerse to Provision Commission, 20/12/1899; and SS 8319, file R2965x/99, Secretary Head Committee to State Secretary, 22/12/1899. These figures were more or less the same by February 1900 (SS 8375, file R5248x/00, Government Commission to Provision Committee, 13/2/1900).

¹⁵ Cammack, “Class, politics and war”, pp. 332-333.

¹⁶ HCC 3, HCC 399/00, E. Bijlsma to Head Committee Commissariat, 12/1/1900.

¹⁷ SS 8247, file R77x/99, Von Levetsow to State Secretary, 14/10/1899 and answer 17/10/1899; and PC 36, Residential Justice of the Peace to Provision Commission, 16/10/1899 and 17/10/1800.

¹⁸ SS 8072, file R13963/99, URB art. 881, 2/10/1899.

decision to leave the issuing of clothes to the welfare organisations was already revised in early December 1899. The Executive Council of the government decided, in the light of prevailing circumstances, that in urgent cases shoes and material would be provided to destitute members of burghers on commando to manufacture clothes.¹⁹ However, this seems to remain a problem throughout the period under discussion. In March 1900 the magistrate of Potchefstroom complained that there was a severe lack of clothing. He would be satisfied with "slechts wat vrouwen kleederen om de bedroefde vrouwen te helpen hier is het niet te krijgen want dan betaal ik het zelf."²⁰

2. Food and general ration scale

It also seems that there was no strict coherence to any ration scale. Each district could more or less determine its own rations. A clear distinction can be detected between urban and rural areas. For example, Reverend Postma determined the following weekly ration scale for the each family on the Witwatersrand: 1 pound coffee for three people, 1 pound rice per person, 1 pound sugar per person, 7 pound maize meal for each adult and 3½ pounds for each child under twelve years as well as one bag of coal for each family. Every second week each family would also receive three boxes of matches, one packet of candles and one pound salt.²¹

In Utrecht a family of seven received 2 bags of flour, 2 buckets maize, 4 pounds of coffee and an unspecified amount of salt, rice and beans. This was seen as sufficient for a month. For Vryheid the Provision Commission agreed to provide one pound of flour a day for adults and half of that for children. More or less at the same time the justice of the peace at Belfast suggested one pound of flour per person per day and that no distinction should be made between adults and children. The Provision Commission agreed to this as well although it was obviously not consistent with the other decision to provide children with half the ration.²²

Differing from the initial Government policy, the Reverend Postma emphasised the importance of meat as an essential ingredient of human food consumption. He offered that he would personally try to convince the State President of its necessity. The State President was, however, adamant that the priority was first to provide for the well-being of soldiers who had been called up for service. Their meat demands should first be met.²³

¹⁹ SS 8072, file R1605/99, URB art. 988, 4/12/1899.

²⁰ TA, Magistrate Archives (Potchefstroom), vol. 282, Magistrate to Head Committee Commissariat, 8/3/1900; and PC 36, Secretary Commission Rus en Orde to Provision Commission, 29/3/1900.

²¹ TA, Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes for 3/10/1899.

²² TA, Magistrate Archives (Utrecht), vol. 81, list of issued rations, 19/10/1899; and SS 8247, file R77x/99, Von Levetzow to State Secretary, 14/10/1899, and answer, 17/10/1899.

²³ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes 4/10/1899 - 6/10/1899.

One of the effects of this policy was that when flour became scarce the burghers on commando received priority and maize was issued instead to civilians.²⁴ Thus it is clear that, although the government was concerned about the welfare of the destitute, the necessity of waging the war successfully by firstly ensuring the health of its soldiers had priority.

This policy had rather severe consequences which created other needs. By February 1900 scurvy had developed amongst many destitute people on the Witwatersrand, especially in Fordsburg and Vrededorp. It was ascribed to the fact that most destitute families only received maize and salt. It was agreed that £7-10 shillings per week could be set aside to buy vegetables but issuing was limited to the inner city, Fordsburg and Vrededorp.²⁵ In this case, although the Provision Commission was initially not in favour of providing meat to the destitute on the Witwatersrand, approval was eventually given to donate sheep and goats, which was taken as booty, to the destitute on the Witwatersrand.²⁶ Although this was an exceptional concession because meat was nowhere else provided in the Republic, it is another example of how the Provision Commission sometimes had to make concession. Nevertheless, at the end of October 1899 the government provided maize meal and salt, and, depending on availability, also coal to the destitute on the Witwatersrand. It promised that improved provisions would later be considered, again depending on availability. By May 1900 the Witwatersrand government commission, despite previous policies, decided that meat should in any case be issued three times a week.²⁷

A similar concession was made in Christiana where the destitute was in such a miserable and piteous position that the magistrate, S.P.J. Daneel, felt obliged to help. The Provision Commission later approved his expenses of £2-5-1 to buy meat.²⁸

3. Medicine and doctors

In addition to food and clothing other needs of the destitute became important as the war dragged on. To a certain extent, and again in a fairly *ad hoc* way, provision for these needs were made. For example, two doctors were appointed in the Witwatersrand area

²⁴ PC 36, Magistrate Krugersdorp to Provision Commission, 26/5/1900 and answer, 26/5/1900.

²⁵ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes 14/2/1900.

²⁶ SS 8375, file R5250x/00, Secretary Head Committee Government Commission to Provision Commission, 14/2/1900, additional file remarks and correspondence; as well as Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes 22/2/1900.

²⁷ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes 28/5/1900.

²⁸ PC 5, PC 1452/00, S.P.J. Daneel to Provision Commission, 1/2/1900.

to look after the sick.²⁹ In December 1899 medical help was provided in Fordsburg in the way of a doctor, nurses, mid-wives and free medicine. The Provision Commission also decided in January 1900 to issue small amounts of money to destitute injured burghers who were treated at home so that they could maintain themselves.³⁰

This was, however, not an uncomplicated matter. In January the provision of free medical care to the destitute was again raised. The auditor-general refused to accept any doctor's accounts. This put the magistrate of Middelburg in a cleft stick. He had no choice but to disallow any medical care and expected serious problems because of this decision.³¹ Similarly the government refused to pay an account of £75 which doctor K.J. Dekema from the Waterberg district submitted. The policy was that the district surgeon should help the destitute free of charge in all the districts. The government would provide medicine.³²

4. Other provisions

The needs of the destitute were not only limited to food and clothing. It encompassed much more. Again on a fairly *ad hoc* basis the Provision Commission tried to help meeting these other needs as well. For example, the Provision Commission strongly recommended that the government support requests of destitute Fordsburgers for the payment of funeral fees.³³ Attempts were also made to provide seed-oats and seed-wheat to those destitute farmers who could not produce any sowing-seed in 1899. This attempt, however, failed, as the government had no provisions.³⁴ The state also sought to provide jobs for the poor by continuing the construction of the Main Reef Road. Small amounts of food and income could thus be provided.³⁵

5. Quality of rations

As will be discussed later as well, not all the destitute people were satisfied with the provisions. One of the complaints was the bad quality of food. Assistant Commandant General L.J. Meyer, for example, complained in April 1900 about the quality of the food

²⁹ *The Standard and Diggers News*, 9/10/1899.

³⁰ Leyds Archives 712, Field Cornet Fordsburg to General H.J. Schoeman, 5/12/1899; and PC 4, PC 901/00, Landdros Rustenburg to Government and answer, 10 January 1900.

³¹ Leyds Archives 714, Magistrate Middelburg to State Secretary [B], 13/1/1900 and Leyds Archives 681, vol. 2, URB art 17, 18/1/1900.

³² SS 8382, file R5493/00, Dr K.G. Dekema to State Secretary, 22/2/1900 with undated file notes.

³³ PC 21, G.J. Cillie to Government Commission, 20/10/1899.

³⁴ Leyds Archives 721 (B), Assistant General D.J.E. Erasmus to State Secretary, 9/4/1900; and PC 36, Field Cornet Duvenhage to Provision Commission, 23/4/1900 and Provision Commission to Duvenhage, 23/4/1900.

³⁵ Cammack, "Class, politics and war", p. 336.

and the appropriateness thereof for ill people. As a result of the rather coarse food the sick were obliged to eat, many deaths occurred.³⁶

Eventually, the basic needs of the destitute people were not necessarily the same as that which the government and the Provision Commission anticipated or were willing to provide: fuel to prepare food; medical aid: doctors, nurses, mid-wives, medicine; funeral services; linen, flannel, lining cloth, shirt material, socks, velvet, shoes and mourning clothes for widows of war.³⁷

Revised ration scale

The government sent a revised ration scale for destitute people to all magistrates on 7 November 1899.³⁸ Although there is no specific documentation on this, it seems as if one of the most important reasons for revising the scales was the unhappiness and continuing complaints about the existing rations and their absolute inadequacy in rural areas, but especially on the Witwatersrand. Here the urbanised population had no access to land or means of production to make a living on their own.³⁹ Another factor which definitely contributed to a revision was the unrest amongst burghers on commando because of rumours that women and children of destitute burghers were not receiving any food. Attached to the revised scales was a note to inform all generals and commandants of the details of these new scales in order to set their minds at ease. This action shows that, despite General Botha's declaration that all destitute dependants received provisions,

³⁶ SS 8406, file R6526x/00, Assistant Commandant General L.J. Meyer to State Secretary, 2/4/1900.

³⁷ Magistrate Archives (Potchefstroom), vol. 282, Magistrate to Head Committee, Commissariat, 8/3/1900 with attached correspondence; and PC 36, Secretary Commission Rust en Orde to Provision Commission, 29/3/1900.

³⁸ The scale was as follows:

1 tin of meat of 2 pounds for a large family per week; 1 tin of meat of 1 pound for a small family per week;
 1 pound of flour per day for an adult; Half a pound of flour per day for children under 12;
 1 pound of coffee per week for 3 adults; 1 pound of sugar per week for an adult; 1 pound of rice per week per person;
 1 bag of coal for a large family per week; 1 bag of coal for a small family every second week;
 3 boxes of matches per week; Half a pack of candles per family per week;
 1 pound salt per family per week;
 1 bar of blue soap per family per week;
 1 tin of condensed milk per week.

(SS 8072, CR 8275/99, Acting Commandant General to Assistant General P.A. Cronjé, mailed on 7/11/1899)

³⁹ See later discussion of letters and problems with provisions below.

there was indeed a definite reason for unease.⁴⁰ Yet another reason was the recognition by the authorities of the importance of the home front during a war situation. The dependants the burghers left behind could either provide a strong support for them on the battle front or could break down their morale. There was thus a strong awareness in government circles for the necessity and urgency of a substantial revision of the ration scale.

One of the most important changes to the ration scale was the inclusion of clothes and shoes. This was brought about by complaints by some of the magistrates such as the one in Christiana who requested that clothes should also be included in the rations because it was very pitiful to see how badly women whose husbands were on commando were dressed. This request was agreed to but only in cases of extreme destitution.⁴¹ In addition, the inclusion of linen and clothing material enabled women to manufacture their own clothing.⁴²

Whilst the new ration scales might eventually have been adequate, there were numerous problems in its execution. As will be discussed below, circumstances made it very difficult and sometimes even impossible for the Provision Commission to apply the improved ration scale in its entirety. Even those dependants of soldiers who had the money could not buy what they needed.⁴³ The most important question was whether the existing supplies would be sufficient to keep pace with the increased rations. Moreover, what complicated matters was the very diverse nature of the availability of supplies. In some areas there was enough but a shortage in other areas.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ SS 8072, CR 8275/99, Acting Commandant General L. Botha to Assistant General P.A. Cronjé, undated but sent on 7/11/1899.

⁴¹ PC 36, Acting Magistrate to Provision Commission, 28/12/1899.

⁴² PC 9, PC 3699/00, B. vd Berg to Magistrate Potchefstroom, 12/12/1899 and file note 11/4/1900.

⁴³ PC 37, Commandant General to Provision Commission, 14/12/1899 and Provision Commission to Commandant General, 14/12/1899.

⁴⁴ SS 8072, file R1268/99, Mining Commissioner Pietersburg to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1282/99, Magistrate Wolmaransstad to State Secretary, 9/11/1899; SS file R1258/99, Magistrate Carolina to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1260/99 Mine Commissioner Potchefstroom to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1219/99, Mine Commissioner Pelgrimsrust to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1207/99, Magistrate Rustenburg to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1209/99, Magistrate Lydenburg to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1211/99, Magistrate Potchefstroom to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1213/99, Magistrate Bethal to State Secretary, 7/11/1899; Leyds Archives 192, vol. 2, Magistrate Bethal to Government, 8/11/1899; SS 8072, file R1215/99, Mine Commissioner Ottoshoop to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1223/99, Sub Commission Commissariat to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1221/99, Sub Committee Volksrust to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1217/99, Acting Mine Commissioner Barberton to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS file R1267/99, Mine Commissioner Klerksdorp to State Secretary, 8/11/1899 and SS file R1265/99, Acting Mine Commissioner Krugersdorp to State Secretary,

By May 1900 it became evident that the necessary supplies gradually but surely decreased. The revised scale of November 1899 as a result of a lack of supplies only existed on paper.

Conditions under which rations would be issued

Officially the basic policy of the government was that provisions could only be issued to families whose bread-winners were on commando and then only to the most destitute amongst them. As late as August 1900 the government reiterated this principle.⁴⁵ The state secretary ordered the magistrates to act cautiously and scrupulously in the issuing of rations. They should only provide food to those who would otherwise die of hunger if the government did not help them. Clothing and shoes should only be given to those who would otherwise be naked. Inspections would be conducted, and if too many supplies were issued, trespassing local authorities would be forced to pay back the unauthorised issues.⁴⁶ It was also not permitted to issue English speakers with food as had happened at Jeppe.⁴⁷ The first priority of the state remained the provision of the commandos with sufficient supplies; otherwise it would be impossible to continue with the war.

In addition to this basic policy and despite the destitution of many women and children the authorities still saw it fit to lay down some additional provisions recipients had to adhere to before they received rations. In the present context, some of these conditions seem incomprehensible. For example, Reverend Postma was dissatisfied that women misbehaved and used foul language when food and clothing was issued in Fordsburg and Vrededorp. A decision was taken to inform these women in writing that they would not receive any food if they repeat this behaviour.⁴⁸ Clearly this indicates more a concern with "upper class" moral values than with the plight of hungry women and children in these working class areas.

Although this does not seem to have been expressed officially or were implemented officially, there was a strong feeling amongst the public in areas such as Vrededorp and Fordsburg that women whose husbands had deserted, should be deprived of rations. These people were also dissatisfied that supplies were given to people whose husbands

8/11/1899. See also discussion in next section on "Problems with provision and delivery of supplies."

⁴⁵ Leyds Archives 731(A), Government to Magistrate Pietersburg, 20/8/1900.

⁴⁶ Magistrate Archives (Potchefstroom), vol. 282, State Secretary to Magistrate, 19/1/1900.

⁴⁷ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, 17/1/1900.

⁴⁸ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes, 2/12/1899.

were not on commando or to those that were financially capable to look after themselves.⁴⁹ It is not clear what had to happen with these people who had the means but could not buy anything as the supplies were depleted.

Reaction to the rations

The Provision Commission and the government received numerous complaints that supplies were totally insufficient. At the end of October 1899, a number of wives of serving burghers in Pretoria sent a memorandum to the Executive Council, indicating that it was impossible to feed themselves and their children with the ration.⁵⁰ Very early already it became clear that there was a severe shortage of food amongst some families on the Witwatersrand - thus adding to the number of destitute people. This caused a great deal of dissatisfaction and disgruntlement amongst these people.⁵¹ In a petition to Field Cornet Cleaver in Jeppe, forty women declared that the provision of food was totally inadequate and even suggested that the women in British concentration camps were properly fed ("in elk val een volle maag hebben.")⁵² They had reason to complain as the local sub-committee could only provide them with maize meal and salt. This dissatisfaction and the need were especially extensive in the Boksburg area.⁵³

The reaction of the Field Cornet of Fordsburg seems indicative of the attitude of many destitute families on the Witwatersrand. When women came to his office asking for milk for their babies and he could not supply any, he was desperate. He was convinced that women and children could not only be given maize meal because they should be treated as respectable people. Clearly, in his eyes, giving them only maize meal did not amount to treating them respectably. What is furthermore interesting in his comment that people should be treated respectably is his further motivation: "want er zyn fatsoenlyke menschen ook onder die mannen die op commando zyn en hunne families op het goeuvt. [government] verlaten hebben."⁵⁴ This implied that even some women and children who were respectable (read middle class) also began to find themselves in dire straits because

⁴⁹ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes, 2/12/1899.

⁵⁰ SS 8268, file R890x/99, petition from M. du Toit and thirty-eight others, 31/10/1899 as well as side notes 3/11/1899 and 10/11/1899.

⁵¹ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, Minutes of Government Commission, 4/11/1899-6/11/1899; and Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes, 19/2/1900 and 22/2/1900.

⁵² SS 8253, file R275x/99, A.P.C. Coetzee to State Secretary, 16/10/1899 and Field Cornet Cleaver to State Secretary, 2/11/1899

⁵³ SS 8072, file R1183/99, Mine Commissioner Boksburg to State Secretary, 8/11/1899.

⁵⁴ SS 8251, Field Cornet Fordsburg to State Secretary [B], 12/10/1899.

their husbands were on commando and they did not have the means to look after themselves. The number of destitute families the government had to care for thus grew.

Serving burghers who returned home for a respite likewise demonstrated against insufficient provision of supplies for their destitute families. Burghers from Fordsburg demanded better food and clothing and bluntly declared that they would not return to their commandos if the situation did not improve.⁵⁵

Some of the complaints were not so much about not receiving any food as it related to the kind of food. An important complaint from the destitute people was that they could not live only on maize and flour but that they also needed coffee, sugar, candles and meat. It was especially the demand for meat which the Afrikaner was used to eating at least three times a day that led to dissatisfaction. Already at the end of October 1899 hundred women from Louis Trichardt sent a memorandum to the local magistrate declaring that they could not feed their children only on bread and maize. Meat was essential. In a supporting memorandum the local police officer identified with and supported these women's point of view. He indicated that the husbands of these women would not agree to commando service if meat was not provided.⁵⁶ It seems that there was constant dissatisfaction about the lack of meat supply in this region. In March 1900 the Head Commandant, B.J. Vorster, wrote that the public was dissatisfied because the sick destitute people received no meat: "deze opstand... al lang geleden aan gang doch ik heb hen altoos op de meest mogelijke wijze getroost doch nu zijn mijne woorden op want het wordt nu te erg."⁵⁷

A further complaint was that these provisions were handed out at other places. This notion of unfair treatment cropped up several times. People in the Soutpansberg area were very dissatisfied when rumours were spread during April 1900 that families in the Louis Trichardt area received 200 pounds meat while destitute people only received 1 pound flour for an adult per day for the past six months.⁵⁸ This dissatisfaction was therefore not only limited to the Witwatersrand or Pretoria. It also occurred throughout the ZAR.

⁵⁵ PC 36, Chairperson Government Commission to Provision Commission, 2/5/1900 and answer, 3/5/1900.

⁵⁶ SS 8273, file R1201x/99, Lieutenant of Police to Commissioner of Police, 7/11/1899; SS 8072, file R1207/99, Magistrate Rustenburg to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS 8072, file R1209/99, Magistrate Lydenburg to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS 8072, file R1211/99, Magistrate Potchefstroom to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; and SS 8072, file R1297/99, Magistrate Heidelberg to State Secretary, 8/11/1899.

⁵⁷ Leyds Archives 721 (A), Head Commandant to State Secretary, 6/4/1900.

⁵⁸ Leyds Archives 721 (A), Head Commandant to State Secretary, 6/4/1900. See also SS 8072, file R1207/99, Magistrate Rustenburg to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS 8072, file R1209/99, Magistrate Lydenburg to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS 8072, file R1211/99, Magistrate Potchefstroom to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; and SS 8072, file R1213/99, Magistrate Bethal to Government, 8/11/1899.

Dissatisfaction and letters to soldiers

Many dissatisfied women actually wrote to their fighting husbands, complaining of the insufficient provisions. On 10 November 1899 Commandant C.L. Engelbrecht of Piet Retief, for example, complained that the burghers under his command had received many complaints from their wives that they had not received any food. This consequently caused great dissatisfaction amongst these burghers.⁵⁹ The women realized that they had this powerful leverage to pressurise the Provision Commission and ultimately the government to improve their circumstances. They very well knew it might affect the morale of the burghers on commando. This indeed led to unrest and dissatisfaction amongst the soldiers and to a lowering of morale. This again contributed to tension between officers and burghers, adding another complication to the war effort.

An example of the dissatisfaction is clear from a letter I.B. Joubert received from his wife. The content was short but very significant: "Waarschuw ik u: Ik vergaan van honger. Maak er werk van of kom terug. Jongste dochter is slecht ziek."⁶⁰ Not only is there a clear threat in this letter but the burgher Joubert also had to worry about a sick child. This was definitely not conducive to morale.

It seems as if women frequently adopted this tactic. Dissatisfied destitute women in Pretoria, for example, threatened to write to their husbands in order to complain about the way they were treated. To calm the tension the secretary of the feeding commission, L.P.D. van Coller, suggested that women should receive meat from butcheries. At that stage the destitute only received meat once in two weeks. As there was no canned meat left, it was agreed to provide fresh meat.⁶¹

The husbands were extremely upset about these complaints and quickly responded to them. On 17 November 1899 a petition by 81 burghers under Commandant B.J. Viljoen was sent to the State President pleading with him to improve the provision of food. A rhetorical question was put: "kan ons vechten als het zoo gesteld is met onze vrouwen en kinderen? Wy zeggen neen. Het is hard voor ons om te lees dat zy op die manier gekastyd en gestraft wordt met meliemeel en sout." Another similar petition by 55 men remarked that they had not been able to make provision for their families for an extended period as they were commandeered in a hurry to join.⁶² Burghers from Hartsrivier, district Bloemhof, thus expressed this viewpoint: "Dat wij onze huisgezinnen als het ware reddeloos hadden

⁵⁹ Leyds Archives 710, C.L. Engelbrecht to Magistrate, 10/11/1899.

⁶⁰ Leyds Archives 710, Joubert to I.B. Joubert, 2/11/1899.

⁶¹ SS 8318, file R2896x/00, Secretary Feeding Commission Pretoria to Head Committee Commissariat, 25/11/1899 and attached correspondence up till 20/1/1900.

⁶² SS 8072, file R1892/99, Petition of M.J. van Dyk and others to State President, 17/11/1899; and SS 8072, file R2080/99, Field Comet R.C. Spruyt to State President, 24/11/1899.

moeten achter laten bij het aanvang des oorlog... er waren hoegenaamd geen sprake van zaaierijen en zijn er huis gezinnen die de behoefte zeer dringen[d] is.”⁶³

Women’s protest was not limited to letters. Some took matters in their own hands. Women in Johannesburg, for example, frustrated by continuing inadequate supplies and no cash broke into shops, looted and staged food riots.⁶⁴

Exploitation of the benefits

There is, however, also another dimension to these complaints. After the Justice of the Peace in Louis Trichardt had handed out 75 pounds of canvas he was, however, of the opinion that people were exploiting the goodwill of the government: “Elk een wil nu een nieuwe tent hebben maar het schynd de aanvraag was slechts geweest voor diegene welk geheel zonder beschutting waren. Ik gevoel my niet verantwoord zonder bepaalde opdracht meer linnen aan te koopen.”⁶⁵

Although it was logical that supplies were also not to be given to non-destitute families or families whose husbands were not fighting, the grassroots reality was that the issuing of supplies was not properly organised everywhere which contributed to this happening. In some wards of Krugersdorp and Pretoria supplies were issued without any distinction being made.⁶⁶ General Joubert was also of the opinion that a large number who did not really need the food received it whilst others were starving of hunger.⁶⁷ To the Provision Commission it was unacceptable that well-to-do people as well as non-destitute people and families whose husbands were not fighting also thought they had the right to receive help. They were told that, although their patriotism was not in doubt, they should not exploit the scarce resources. That would definitely not be in the interest of the war effort.⁶⁸

⁶³ HCC 3, HCC 634/00, J.C. Reyneke to Local Feeding Committee, 26/1/1900 and additional correspondence.

⁶⁴ Cammack, “Class, politics and war”, pp. 334-335.

⁶⁵ SS 8273, file R1201x/99, Lieutenant of Police to Commissioner of Police, 7/11/1899 and Commissioner of the Peace to Provision Commission, 8/11/1899.

⁶⁶ Magistrate Archives (Potchefstroom), vol. 282, Magistrate to Head Committee, Commissariat, 8/3/1900 with attached correspondence. Also see HCC 13, F.W. Kock to War Commissioner, 25/1/1900.

⁶⁷ Leyds Archives 710, Commandant General to Mine Commissioner, 2/11/1899 and TA, Engelbrecht Collection, vol. 12, Commandant General to Magistrate Ermelo, 6/11/1899.

⁶⁸ Magistrate Archives (Potchefstroom). vol. 282, Provision Commission to Magistrate, 12/1/1900; and Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes, 15/1/1900.

Consequently, some Field Cornets and magistrates - in their issuing of supplies - made a clear distinction between those families whose husbands were in the field and those who were not. A labelling of "the other" (in anthropological terms) as strangers was made towards those who were not directly involved in the war. Thus the Commandant of Klerksdorp labelled them as unpatriotic and accused these "strangers" as "kosverteeders" who "niets anders doen dan voedsel verteren die voor onze strijdende burghers kon gebezigt worden en het land uit te mergelen." According to him, these people should be forced to join the fighting burghers.⁶⁹

However, as seen, in the context of the war with supplies depleting, even the wealthy eventually stared destitution in the face. Where were they supposed to find food, etc. if the supplies were depleted? Why did the fact that they were not fighting, disqualify them? This attitude seems to point to a distorted morality.

Any orderly issuing of provisions in any case came to an end at the end of May 1900 after the fall of Pretoria because all people simply started to plunder and loot stores in Johannesburg and Pretoria.

Reaction of authorities and government to complaints

It seems as if there was a strong awareness and sympathetic approach in some of the higher echelons of power that the wives and children of destitute fighting soldiers should be looked after. Some of the leaders of the burghers whose wives complained were very supportive of their troops. As mentioned, they might not have been so concerned about the women and children themselves but was extremely conscious how badly news of destitution on the home front could affect the fighting capabilities of their troops.⁷⁰

General P.J. Joubert, for example, ordered the mine commissioner of Heidelberg and the magistrate at Ermelo to take pains to supply the wives of destitute fighting burghers with food and medical care.⁷¹ Likewise, when Assistant General F.A. Grobler noted a letter written to burgher Theunis Botha by his wife complaining that she had received no food from magistrate H.J. Kroep of Nylstroom after the locusts had destroyed her maize crop, he blamed Kroep: "Het is mij onmogelijk met ontevreden burgers hier te vechten en indien er geen verbetering komt moet Kroep heel eenvoudig opgecommandeerd worden en naar

⁶⁹ Leyds Archives 718 (A), Commandant Klerksdorp to Commandant General, 27/2/1900.

⁷⁰ See also earlier discussion, p. 145.

⁷¹ Leyds Archives 710, Commandant General to Mine Commissioner, 2/11/1899; and Engelbrecht Collection, vol. 12, Commandant General to Magistrate Ermelo, 6/11/1899.

hier gezonden worden zoo dat hij kan uitvinden hoe dat Engelsche bommen en maxim kogels smaken. Misschien zal dit hem tot zijne zinnen brengen." ⁷²

The government commissioner, J.D. Cilliers, who had to compile a list of food the left after tradesmen left Johannesburg, also followed a humanitarian approach. He supported the women's demands declaring that it would be impossible for them to live on maize meal alone. Many of them had babies who had to be fed on milk. ⁷³

The magistrate of Bethal recommended a pro-active response. If coffee, sugar, candles and soap could be provided, it might be a huge expense to the government, "maar als wy de families zooveel mogelyk helpen dan worden geen onnoodige klachten aan de mannen verzonden en onze burgers blyven vol moed en stryden voor onze duurgekochte onafhankelykheid." ⁷⁴

On the other hand a more critical and even cynical attitude is evident. Some magistrates were of the opinion that the complaints were not so much about the fact that they received NO food but that they actually complained about not receiving meat, coffee, sugar and other articles. ⁷⁵

Some of the complaints that were investigated were found to be simply unfounded. ⁷⁶ Furthermore, the magistrate of Pretoria, C.E. Schutte, could report on 10 November 1899 that destitute families in Pretoria had indeed received enough flour and that the government had also arranged to help them and care for them in other ways, such as

⁷² Leyds Archives 716, Assistant General F.A. Grobler to Assistant General J. du P. de Beer, 2/2/1900.

⁷³ PC 29, J.D. Celliers to A.D.W. Wolmarans, 13/10/1899.

⁷⁴ SS 8072, file R1213/99, Magistrate Bethal to State Secretary, 7/11/1899; and Leyds Archives 192, vol. 2, Magistrate Bethal to Government, 8/11/1899.

⁷⁵ SS 8072, file R1202x/99, Field Comet Standerton to Field Comet Klip River, 6/11/1899; SS 8072, file R1215/99, Mine Commissioner Ottoshoop to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS 8072, file R1223/99, Sub Commission Commissariat to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; SS 8072, file R1221/99, Sub Committee Volksrust to State Secretary, 8/11/1899; and SS 8072, file R1217/99, Acting Mine Commissioner Barberton to State Secretary, 8/11/1899.

⁷⁶ SS 8273, file R1175x/99, G.C.A. Jonas to State Secretary, 3/11/1899 with file note; PC 36, Commandant General to Magistrate Pretoria, 10/11/1899; PC 37, Assistant General Erasmus to A.D.W. Wolmarans, 14/11/1899; and Leyds Archives 745 (C), Magistrate Pretoria to Assistant General Erasmus, 24/11/1899.

starting a sick bay. Everything was being done to satisfy them.⁷⁷ This was also the reaction of other officials to these complaints.⁷⁸

The special magistrate of Boksburg investigated a complaint by a soldier that his wife, B.J. Bester of Vlakfontein, was very ill. He found her "in de beste gezondheid die men kan wenschen en toen ik de vrouw de telegram toont, was zy verbaasd zoo iets te zien en maakte nog de aanmerking, dat zy niet gedacht had, dat haar man zoo een excuus zou maken verlof te verkrijgen."⁷⁹ Likewise, the Field Cornet of Kliprivier was outright disgusted: "dus schryven die vrouwen die grofste leugens aan hun mannen gevoel my verontwaardigd over zulke onschuldige laster en leugens."⁸⁰

Based on these investigations and results, these complaints were consequently rejected by the authorities. The commission in the Witwatersrand was even of the opinion that many people were simply ungrateful. According to the commission, some were now even in a better position than what they had been previously.⁸¹

Consequently, the government was not always very sympathetic regarding these complaints. General Grobler telegraphed to the State President that the destitute people in Utrecht had some maize and meat but there was no coffee, flour or salt. The State President's response was that his own position was not better and that they should consequently acquiesce in their situation: "Wij bakken hier ook mielies met koorndeel met een weinig suiker erbij en het beantwoord goed."⁸²

According to General Louis Botha, however, some women also exploited the situation. Some women who received food nevertheless wrote to their husbands that they had not received any in order to force their husbands to return from the war front. He confirmed that an investigation by Field Cornets and magistrates proved that all dependants of

⁷⁷ TA, Kommandant Generaal [Commandant General] (KG) 334, Magistrate Pretoria to Commandant General, 10/11/1899.

⁷⁸ Leyds Archives 710, Assistant Field Cornet to Field Cornet Douthwaite, 11/11/1899; and SS 8273, file R1237x/99, J.J. Steenberg and others to A.D.W. Wolmarans, 4/11/1899.

⁷⁹ Leyds Archives 712, Special Magistrate to Assistant Commandant General, 9/12/1899.

⁸⁰ SS 8273, file R1202x/99, Field Cornet Standerton to Field Cornet Klip Rivier, 6/11/1899 with attached correspondence of 8/11/1899.

⁸¹ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes, 9/5/1900 and 10/5/1900.

⁸² Leyds Archives 728 (D), General Grobler to Assistant General L.J. Meyer, 4/7/1900; and Leyds Archives 728 (E), State President to Magistrate Piet Retief, 6/7/1900.

destitute members of commando indeed received food.⁸³ This was also the experience of the magistrate of Wolmaransstad: "Het gedurig klagen komt... slechts van die vrouwen die hun mans uit het commando terug en by het huis wenssen te hebben."⁸⁴

An investigation was launched into complaints Fordsburg women lodged with their husbands. They complained that, despite members of their families being sick, they had only received flour and maize. The report prompted a similar response by President Kruger: "Ik geloof dat zy net maar klagen om hun mannen terug te krygen." He added that the serving men should be told that they would not be able to look better after their families than the government did.⁸⁵ By April 1900 the President's point of view had not changed. On a request by Head Commandant B. J. Vorster for meat, he responded: "Waar moet ek geld vandaan halen om voor elk een vleesch te geven door't geheele land. U weet er is geen inkomste."⁸⁶

The Provision Commission, keeping in mind that food would be scarce during the war and that the length of the war could, of course, not be determined, was not to revise its policy. It was especially strict on the provision of meat. It reiterated that this could under no circumstances be provided, as there was not enough slaughter stock on the land and that it was in any case only destined for the soldiers on commando. Even if there would have been enough slaughter stock the government simply did not have enough money to fight the war and to look after all the destitute families.⁸⁷ The government's priority was first to care for and feed the 30 000 soldiers on commando properly. Thus it could not be expected of the government to do more than providing the destitute families left behind with only the bare essentials to prevent them dying of hunger. The best they could do was to provide maize meal for the destitute. Reacting to a request by the magistrate of Nylstroom to slaughter two cows a month for the destitute people arriving in the local camp, the Provision Commission was adamant and turned down the request. They were determined to adhere strictly to their policy of not providing any meat, reiterating that the government could only feed people who could not do it themselves.⁸⁸

⁸³ SS 8072, CR 8275/99, Acting Commandant General to Assistant General P.A. Cronjé, undated but sent on 7/11/1899.

⁸⁴ SS 8072, file R1282/99, Magistrate Wolmaransstad to State Secretary, 9/11/1899. See also SS 8072, file R1265/99, Magistrate to State Secretary, 8/11/1899.

⁸⁵ SS 8295, file R2067/99, State President to Commandant B.J. Viljoen, 28/11/1899; and Leyds Archives 746 (B), State President to Commandant B.J. Viljoen, 20/11/1899.

⁸⁶ Leyds Archives 721 (A), State President to Head Commandant, 6/4/1900.

⁸⁷ PC 36, Telegrams of Commandants to Provision Commission, 28/10/1899 and answer 30/10/1899.

⁸⁸ PC 36, Magistrate Nylstroom to State Secretary, 3/10/1899 and further telegrams 4/10/1899 and 19/10/1899.

There were therefore two points of view. On the one hand there was satisfaction amongst some magistrates, mine commissioners and others involved with the issuing of supplies, with the existing measures of only providing the destitute people with maize and flour. They believed there was a hidden agenda in some of the complaints: either an attempt by the women to receive more rations or to force their husbands to return home. On the other hand there was indeed a recognition that destitute women and children could not only live from maize and did their best to even circumvent the instructions of the Provision Commission. They were strongly under the impression that the morale of the burghers must not in any way be compromised because of anxiety about real or alleged bad conditions regarding the feeding of their destitute women or children on the home front.

It was a difficult balancing act for the government to keep the war front and the home front satisfied. It was essential to maintain supplies to the fighting burghers whilst the state also had to provide food for the destitute families of these burghers. If this were not done it would badly affect their morale. And the ball that had to be balanced was the provision of food - of which the supply became increasingly limited.

Problems with provision and delivery of supplies

1. Lack of supplies

The reality of a shortage of food, caused by the exigencies of war, became a reality much sooner than anticipated. A large proportion of the population went hungry for the supply and prices of food became extremely problematic.⁸⁹ By the middle of November 1899 many foodstuffs could already not be obtained locally. In addition, it had become almost impossible to obtain sufficient slaughter stock for the soldiers on commando whilst the supply of sugar and tinned meat which was in the government stores in Pretoria were almost depleted.⁹⁰

Dissatisfaction amongst the destitute was therefore not only limited to the scales of rations, the fact that there was not enough food or the quality of the food but also with the delivery - or rather the lack thereof. One can understand this, as the revised scales created hope but were useless as they could not be implemented - which was clearly the case on the Witwatersrand by December 1899.⁹¹ The Head Committee of the Commissariat in Pretoria also did not have all the supplies as requested by December 1899, such as coffee

⁸⁹ Cammack, "Class, politics and war", p. 326.

⁹⁰ SS 8318, file R2896x/00, Secretary Feeding Committee Pretoria to Head Committee Commissariat, 25/11/1899 and attached correspondence.

⁹¹ SS 8295, file R2067/99, notes on file, 14/12/1899.

and sugar. The small provision of coffee and sugar that was there was reserved for members of the commando.⁹²

Moreover, the fact that no fuel was provided with which they could prepare the food made the issuing of food futile. This was a common problem. Consequently, the government commission on the Witwatersrand was inundated by complaints.⁹³ Gifts of coal from collieries as well as the commandeering of coal from idle mines to a certain extent brought relieve.⁹⁴

By March 1900 no sugar or milk could be provided to the destitute any longer and it seemed unlikely that it would be issued in future as supplies were depleted. Neither was there a supply of soap available.⁹⁵

Since the beginning of April 1900 the need for clothes, shoes and blankets increased almost daily. The Commissariat could only partially fulfil the repeated requests. Appeals were made to buy additional clothes - especially with the coming winter in mind. The Head Committee of the Commissariat saw this as a government matter and referred it to them. Supplies, which they could have obtained from abandoned shops, were already depleted.⁹⁶

As far as the urban areas were concerned by the end of November 1899 the destitute in Fordsburg had only received flour and some salt. Neither could any milk be given to sick children. The provision of food was temporarily relieved on the Witwatersrand during March 1900 when provisions were found in the mines. This was issued to the destitute in Johannesburg, Jeppe, Vrededorp, Fordsburg and Wanderers.⁹⁷

By May 1900 the clothing store at the Wanderers area had to close as all supplies had been handed out. No clothing had arrived from Pretoria during the previous four months.

⁹² PC 37, Commandant General to Provision Commission, 14/12/1899 and Provision Commission to Commandant General, 14/12/1899.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, Magistrate's report, 27/11/1899; and SS 8072, file R1265/99, Acting Mine Commissioner Krugersdorp to State Secretary, 8/11/1899.

⁹⁴ Cammack, "Class, politics and war", p. 335.

⁹⁵ HCC 3, HCC 1382/00 with notes on file by J. Duiven, 1/3/1900.

⁹⁶ SS 8420, file R7120/00, Government Commission to State Secretary, 9/4/1900 and 10/4/1900 with additional correspondence and Head Committee Commissariat to Provision Commission, 23/4/1900; and PC 36, Chairperson Government Commission to Provision Commission, 2/5/1900 and answer, 3/5/1900.

⁹⁷ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes 8/3/1900, 19/3/1900, 23/3/1900 and 27/3/1900.

Neither was any flour available.⁹⁸ Many of the requests could therefore not be executed, as there was simply no supplies available.⁹⁹

Some of the rural areas experienced the same problem. The magistrate in the Waterberg district complained that he had repeatedly approached the government to provide supplies but that he had no response.¹⁰⁰ To add insult to injury, by December 1899, it was impossible to obtain maize in Piet Retief as hail destroyed the crops. As in other places such as Volksrust there were also no provisions in the shops. Even those who had the means to buy provisions were unable to do so, as there were no supplies available. Everything had to be sent from Pretoria where, as seen, supplies were depleted.¹⁰¹

The situation worsened by March 1900. When the Provision Commission declared that there was no meat available in the Potchefstroom district, a disappointed magistrate could only note: "Kennis genomen hoe ek echter de arme te vrede moet krijgen is een raadzels."¹⁰² From the complaints received from Heidelberg, Louis Trichardt, Bethal, Pietersburg, Piet Retief and Potgietersrus, Utrecht, Vryheid and Kaapse Hoop during May 1900, it is clear that the provision of supplies constantly grew worse.¹⁰³

The Provision Commission was therefore in a catch 22 situation. It had to deal with a lack of food which could just not be found and therefore not provided - although the ration scales made provision for it. Ironically, whilst there was a scarcity on the one hand there was also an oversupply on the other. However, this also led to problems. The dangers

⁹⁸ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes 9/5/1900 and 10/5/1900.

⁹⁹ HCC 3, List of J.J. Botha, member of Commission, January 1900. See also Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes, 9/5/1900 and 10/5/1900.

¹⁰⁰ SS 8072, file R1265/99, Magistrate Nylstroom to State Secretary, 8/11/1899.

¹⁰¹ SS 8072, file R2165/99, Magistrate Piet Retief to State Secretary, 2/2/1899; SS 8072, file R2320/99, Magistrate Piet Retief to State Secretary, 6/2/1899; SS 8072, file R3032/99, Magistrate Utrecht to State Secretary (B), 26/12/1899; SS 8072, file R1286/99, Sub Committee Utrecht to State Secretary (B), 9/11/1899.

¹⁰² SS 8420, file R7124x/00, P.R. Viljoen to Provision Commission, 12/4/1900. Notes on file, 30/4/1900.

¹⁰³ PC 12, PC 4674/00, C.J.P. Jooste and nineteen others to Provision Commission, 28/4/1900; PC 28, Lager Commandant Louis Trichardt to Provision Commission, 5/5/1900; Magistrates Archives (Pietersburg), vol. 188, Secretary Sub Committee Pietersburg to Head Committee Commissariat, 7/5/1900; PC 28, Magistrate Bethal to Provision Commission, 9/5/1900; Leyds Archives 725 (B), Magistrate Pietersburg to Kopojes, 19/5/1900; PC 36, Magistrate Piet Retief to Provision Commission, 21/5/1900; HCC 28, Inventory, Potgietersrus, May 1900; PC 36, Sub Committee to Provision Commission, 23/5/1900 and answer, 23/5/1900; Leyds Archives 728 (D), General Grobler to Assistant General L.J. Meyer, 4/7/1900; and Leyds Archives 728 (G) Commissariat to Head Committee Commissariat, 13/7/1900.

of long-term storage became clear at Germiston when the stored maize decayed because of grain-weevil.¹⁰⁴

2. Problems with imports

Imports from Delagoa Bay which was an open harbour and which could therefore more readily provide supplies, were terminated by the middle of November 1899. The British Imperial policy was to regard any British subject undertaking trade with the ZAR as a traitor.¹⁰⁵ Back in the ZAR, the British Command made no bones about these intentions. Lord Roberts remarked: "... all supplies intended for the Boers should be prohibited from being dispatched by rail towards the Transvaal. If this would be done for a few weeks only, it would aid materially to bring the war to conclusion."¹⁰⁶ Consequently, the British Consul General, Captain F. Crowe seriously obstructed the importation of urgent provisions. He purchased as many goods as he could to prevent them reaching the Boers.¹⁰⁷

This tactic was successful. The British forces complicated matters to such an extent that only small quantities could be obtained - even after costly payments for all the supplies had been made.¹⁰⁸ Fortunately, through the firm Wilcken and Ackermann, it was possible for the Transvaal government to bypass this difficulty to a certain extent.¹⁰⁹

3. Maladministration and lack of control

Another complication was that the various feeding commissions did not execute the determined ration scale accurately and sparingly. Acknowledging that in the context of any war delivery and ensuring that the really destitute received provisions was no easy task, this nevertheless became a serious problem. Expensive clothes (called church clothes) were handed out and food was provided to people who were able to survive without any help.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Magistrate Archives (Johannesburg), vol. 576, minutes 17/1/1900 and 21/1/1900.

¹⁰⁵ Cammack, "Class, politics and war", p. 328.

¹⁰⁶ TA, FK Series, Milner Papers, (FK) 1906, Lord Roberts to High Commissioner and War Office, undated, probably August 1900.

¹⁰⁷ W.J. Leyds: *Derde Verzameling (Correspondentie, 1900)*, part 1, number 224, pp. 244-245, Consul General Pott to Leyds, 17/6/1900; and Leyds Archives 730 (B), Consul General to State Secretary, 7/8/1900.

¹⁰⁸ PC 37, Commandant General to Provision Commission, 14/12/1899 and Provision Commission to Commandant General, 14/12/1899. Also see Cammack, "Class, politics and war", p. 329.

¹⁰⁹ Leyds Archives 732 (D), Ackermann to Wilcken, 7/9/1900.

¹¹⁰ Magistrate Archives (Potchefstroom), vol. 282, State Secretary to Magistrate, 19/1/1900.

A further example of maladministration is clear from the following: whilst the destitute at Krugersdorp and Potchefstroom regularly received their provisions this was not the case in Moiriviersoog, near Potchefstroom. They only received bread and maize. Clearly there were different standards. Consequently, destitute people left wards where the ration scale was applied strictly to other wards where it was not the case.¹¹¹

Furthermore, there was no proper security. The result was that supplies were stolen overnight and that trucks arrived with empty cases. Supplies also disappeared from the sheds. Apparently the thieves were burghers on their way to the front. The commander of the storage space at Elandslaagte, T.J. Krogh, thus expressed his indignation: "julle menschen die nu eerst inkomen hebben geen hart of consideratie voor julle eigen bloed en aanverwanten, want hier wordt alles weggestolen terwyl anderen naakt loopen en hongerig zyn."¹¹²

According to the War Commissioner at Glencoe the culprits were burghers who remained behind at the railway stations.¹¹³ This was confirmed by the Commandant General who pointed out that burghers and even officers removed cattle, furniture such as pianos, tents and bicycles from Dundee and Newcastle to their own homes. The blame for a lack of supplies could thus not be placed on the commissariat.¹¹⁴ Government instructions that these goods should be seized were of no avail. General Joubert reported: "De roof en plunder zucht is zoo sterk dat men niet weet wat om meer te doen en te zeggen wat ik reeds zoo dikwyls heb gedaan."¹¹⁵

Maladministration, no proper control over supplies and a lack of thriftiness thus led to terrible waste. To the Provision Commission this situation, rather than the difficulty of obtaining provisions from Delagoa Bay, was one of the most important reasons why supplies became depleted.

¹¹¹ Magistrate Archives (Potchefstroom), vol. 282, State Secretary to Magistrate, 19/1/1900; and HCC 3, HCC 399/00, E. Bijlsma to Head Committee Commissariat, 12/1/1900.

¹¹² SS 8288, file R1764/99, T.J. Krogh to State Secretary, 14/11/1899. Also see Magistrate Archives (Potchefstroom) vol. 282, Provision Commission to Magistrate Potchefstroom, 12/1/1900.

¹¹³ PC 37, War Commissioner to Provision Commission, 8/11/1899.

¹¹⁴ SS 8288, file R1764/99, 13/11/1899; and PC 37, War Commissioner to Provision Commission, 8/11/1899.

¹¹⁵ SS 8288, file R1764/99, Commandant General to State Secretary, 23/12/1899.

4. Price hikes because of the war

Shortly after the war broke out, there was a price hike of 30%-35% of maize meal, rice, candles and milk and people were already calling it "hongersnoodprijzen."¹¹⁶ Cammack blames the ZAR government for worsening the situation. Firstly it built up its own provisions. Consequently the supplies to civilians were lessened and prices thus rose. The government was also not able to convince merchants that their stores would be safe. Fearing looting and commandeering, they were reluctant to order more goods or build up a reserve.¹¹⁷ This was an indication how severe the problem of supplying the destitute could become because of the war and how many more people could become destitute.

The Executive Council decided that something had to be done about this situation and magistrates were asked to see to it that prices return to their normal level - except if it could be indicated that the purchase price had risen since the outbreak of the war. However, this request was of no avail. Officials whose salaries were halved by the sudden rise in prices and citizens continued complaining against high meat prices. They indicated that butchers and shopkeepers exploited the war situation to make a fast buck.¹¹⁸

By January 1900 prices of goods still in stores rose drastically. The price of sugar rose from 25 shillings per 100 pound to 100 shillings per 100 pound and that of coffee from 6 pennies per pound to 2 shillings per pound. Four months later the price of goods have risen even more. For example, maize which used to cost 20 shillings and 6 pennies in Boksburg cost almost £2.¹¹⁹ Destitute people just could not pay these amounts.

5. The situation after May 1900

The provision of supplies to the destitute changed dramatically after the invasion of Pretoria in May 1900. This would entail even greater hardship for them. The government decided that, if time allows, all supplies should be issued to destitute families before the British could lay hands on it. There was no alternative. A lack of transport facilities prevented them from moving the supplies to a safe area. The State Secretary approved this arrangement. However, he demanded that only the immediate needs of the destitute should be provided for. His argument was that, if the destitute received too much, the British soldiers might steal everything from them. From a military point of view what

¹¹⁶ SS 8246, file R14x/99, Under Secretary to State Secretary, 12/10/1899, 18/10/1899.

¹¹⁷ Cammack, "Class, politics and war", pp. 326-327.

¹¹⁸ SS 8246, file R14x/99, Under Secretary to State Secretary, 12/10/1899, 18/10/1899.

¹¹⁹ SS 8344, file R3939x/00, S.J. van der Merwe and others to State Secretary, 4/1/1900; and PC 36, Acting Magistrate to Provision Commission, 17/5/1900.

remained should be burnt or destroyed.¹²⁰ The fact that the destitute would soon be short of supplies again was apparently not a consideration. Thus, military exigencies again dictated.

Nevertheless, despite all the additional problems after the government had left Pretoria, they were still concerned about caring for the destitute families. It was agreed on 9 July 1900 that the State Secretary, War Commissioner J.P. Coetzer and Military Commissioner W.H. Neethling would be entrusted with this task. Their task would be to provide in the essential needs of the very destitute families and to give preference to families of burghers who were performing commando service.¹²¹ The government also approved that goods from shops, of which the owners had fled to the enemy, could be sold and given to the destitute.¹²² All was indeed fair in love and war.

Another problem in buying supplies arose after the Transvaal government reached Machadodorp by June 1900 and had to obtain supplies in the as yet unoccupied areas of the Transvaal. The bank managers refused to accept government cheques.¹²³ Likewise private people, shop owners and traders refused to accept government notes as payment for livestock and other provisions required by the government. Clearly this was a case of loss of trust in the government as well as a sure sign of a problem of legitimacy for the government. The government interpreted this as an indication of hostility against the state. It decided to instruct that, if need be, force should be used to obtain money from the banks for purchases or payment of salaries. Similarly, supplies would simply be commandeered from shopkeepers and others. Receipts would be issued.¹²⁴ Another decision was that, if shopkeepers still refused to accept government notes as payment for goods, their shops would be closed and the license fees not be paid back.¹²⁵ However, by July 1900 there was no improvement in the attempts to obtain provisions. Bank managers and

¹²⁰ Leyds Archives 727 (A), Breedt to State Secretary, 16/6/1900 and reply, 14/6/1900; and Leyds Archives, 729 (D), Head Commissioner P.J. Schutte to Magistrate Heidelberg, 25/7/1900 and State Secretary to Magistrates Carolina and Bethal, 25/7/1900.

¹²¹ Leyds Archives 681, vol.2, URB art. 106, 9/7/1900.

¹²² Leyds Archives 729 (G), Acting Commissioner of Police to Feeding Commission Barberton, 2/8/1900 and answer, 2/8/1900.

¹²³ Leyds Archives 726 (D), Acting Magistrate Standerton to State Secretary, 6/6/1900; and Leyds Archives 726 (G), Magistrate Vryheid to State Secretary, 12/6/1900.

¹²⁴ Leyds Archives 726 (D), State President to Magistrate Ermelo and Special Commissioner Swaziland, 6/6/1900; and TA, *Buitengewone Staatscourant ZAR*, part 20, number 1123, URB art. 91, 13/6/1900.

¹²⁵ *Buitengewone Staatscourant ZAR*, part 20, number 1126, URB art. 100, 27/6/1900.

shopkeepers persisted in their non-acceptance of government notes.¹²⁶ The upshot for the destitute was that supplies became even more difficult to find.

Conclusion

The government of the ZAR quickly realized the truth of the dictum that war is literally a minefield of unpredictability. Amongst the many unforeseen circumstances, it could not anticipate how complex their initial decision to provide for the destitute would become.

The government's priority was to secure the health of the burghers on commando. Only then would they be able to wage the war successfully. On the other hand, the authorities were as aware of the importance of stability on the home front to maintain moral amongst the burghers on the war front. This explains the concern of the government about the welfare of the destitute. However, this balancing act became almost unmanageable when, sooner than expected, supplies started to run out. In addition the extent of destitution was also bigger than expected. Nevertheless, as seen from Kruger's remarks, the provision of supplies to the fighting burghers remained priority.

This immediately raises the question whether they succeeded in the balancing act. From the complaints about provisions ranging from the lack in quantity to specific needs of the destitute - to which the government did not attach the same importance and was therefore not prepared to supply - it seems as if it was not always the case. Although there might have been hidden agendas amongst some of the complaints and some indeed seem to have been suspect, they also undeniably tell a story of desperation. The government could not ignore this – both from a humane and military point of view. As mentioned, the morale of the burghers could not in any way be compromised because of anxiety about real or alleged bad conditions of their families on the home front.

This necessity soon led to an urgent revision and improvement of the ration scales as well as an increasingly *ad hoc* policy in terms of concessions and allocations prompted by unforeseen problems acquiring supplies and managing their distribution. As a result the revised scales only existed on paper.

All this left the government and the Provision Commission in an unenviable position which became even more difficult after the invasion of Johannesburg and Pretoria. However, even under these very tough circumstances, efforts were still made to care for the destitute, indicating a strong commitment to stability on the war and home front.

¹²⁶ Leyds Archives 728 (A), State President to Magistrate Piet Retief, 1/7/1900; Leyds Archives 750 (B), Magistrate Piet Retief to State President, 4/7/1900.