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THE CARNEGIE COMMISSION AND
THE BACKLASH AGAINST WELFARE
STATE-BUILDING IN SOUTH AFRICA,
1931-1937

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Abstract

By the late 1930s, South Africa had developed a welfare state that was remarkable in terms of both the range of risks against which it provided and its coverage of the poor – although only for poor white and coloured people. The Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into the Poor White Problem in South Africa is often credited with the major role of prompting this welfare state-building. This is, at most, only partly true. Firstly, key aspects of the welfare state, most notably old-age pensions, predated the Commission. Secondly, as I show in this paper, the Commission's recommendations with regard to most areas of social policy (except for education) were hostile to programmatic state-building and sought to return discretionary power to the church through indoor (and perhaps also outdoor) poor relief. Some members of the Commission might have employed 'modern' social science research methods, and some may have favoured the expansion of professional social work, but its reports generally gave expression to a backlash against the prior, nascent growth of South Africa's welfare state. In general, the Commission's recommendations entailed a reversal to the kind of 'scientific charity' that characterised the United States in the late nineteenth century, not the more professional social work of the United States in the 1920s and certainly not the social policies of the New Deal. The Commission gave rise to a period of struggle over the appropriate roles of church, state and professional social workers. Although the church-centric ambitions of most of the Carnegie commissioners were ultimately frustrated, their efforts contributed to the making of a somewhat bifurcated welfare state in which the expansion of welfare programmes was retarded.

1. Introduction

By the late 1930s, South Africa had created the basis of a remarkable welfare state. In 1938-39, almost £10 million – or about 20 percent of total public expenditure – was budgeted by the Union government for what the new Department of Social Welfare called ‘services of an essentially social welfare nature’. These included old-age pensions (£2.2 million), assistance to farmers (£2 million), employment creation programmes and ‘unemployment expenditure’ (a total of almost £3 million), child welfare (£0.4 million), invalidity and blind pensions (£0.3 million) – together with mental hospitals (£0.65 million) and public health (£0.55 million) (South Africa, 1940a: 10-11). These figures *exclude* war pensions, the state’s contributions to the railways and harbours and public service funds, and the expenditure of the provincial administrations, including education and poor relief. The Department of Social Welfare was also employing professional probation officers and funding professional social workers. It is understandable that the new Professor of Sociology at the University of the Witwatersrand, J.L. Gray, declared in his inaugural lecture in 1937 that ‘today the provision for [the] European population, if still behind New Zealand, is scarcely less complete than that of Great Britain’ (Gray, 1937: 270). Gray was exaggerating somewhat – in that South Africa had no social insurance programmes covering sickness or retirement comparable to those introduced in Britain in 1911 and 1925 respectively, and its system of unemployment insurance was much more limited than Britain’s (on Britain, see for example Thane, 1996) – but his bold statement reflected a fundamental and rapid growth of welfare policy in South Africa, at least as far as white (and to a lesser extent coloured) people were concerned, since Indian and African people were almost entirely excluded from it.

The growth of this welfare state was almost entirely neglected by both ‘liberal’ and ‘revisionist’ protagonists in the so-called ‘race-class debate’ about this period of South African history (for example, Davies, 1979; O’Meara, 1983; Yudelman, 1983), but has since begun to attract some attention. The standard story in these newer accounts focuses primarily on the non-government Carnegie Commission of Inquiry, which began work in 1929 and produced a set of five reports on *The Poor White Problem in South Africa* in 1932. Iliffe (1987: 116-21) avoids any explicit statement about causality, but he discusses the Carnegie Commission at length whilst barely mentioning any other factors. Tayler (1992) provides an excellent and detailed account of the appropriation of the Carnegie Inquiry by Afrikaner nationalists. Duncan (1993) notes that white liberals as well as Afrikaner nationalists used the Carnegie Reports to mobilise

(white) public opinion and push South Africa into taking its ‘first faltering steps towards a “welfare state”’. Fleisch (1995: 357) describes the commission as ‘a turning point for state involvement in white “social problems”’. Du Toit (1996) argues compellingly that Afrikaner women’s organisations in and after the Carnegie Inquiry played a key role in the development of familial welfare policies that provided for women and children. Most recently, Davie writes that the Carnegie Commission’s findings on poor whites ‘motivated Afrikaner nationalists to promote the “upliftment” of poor whites and prompted the South African government to fund the development of social welfare services’ (2005: 42). Davie, like a number of other scholars (Groenewald, 1987; Fleisch, 1995; Dubow, 2001; Posel, 2000), emphasises the innovative and ‘scientific’ character of the Carnegie Inquiry. Posel refers to the ‘new form of the state’ envisioned in the 1930s (2005: 65). Davenport barely mentions social policy in successive editions of his magisterial *South Africa: A Modern History*, but implies that the Carnegie Commission led to policy reform (see, for example, Davenport, 1987: 319; also Davenport and Saunders, 2000: 665).

The most obvious flaw in any explanation of welfare policy-making that starts with the Carnegie Commission is that the single most important welfare programme – non-contributory (and hence tax-financed) old-age pensions – was introduced *before* the Commission began its work.¹ Old-age pensions were introduced as of 1st January, 1929, under the 1928 Old Age Pensions Act. South African governments were concerned with poverty among white people long before the Carnegie Commission (see Bottomley, 1990; Berger, 1983; Seekings, 2006). The Pact Government, elected into office in 1924 at the end of a recession, was especially concerned. The Pact Government comprised a coalition of the Afrikaner republican National Party, with mostly rural support, and the socialist (but pro-British) Labour Party, with support concentrated in the white working-class towns of the Witwatersrand. The National and Labour parties accused the South African Party of being the party of ‘big interests’, and promised instead policies that would ensure that ordinary white people enjoyed a ‘civilised’ standard of living. In early 1926, the Minister of Finance (Nikolaas Havenga) appointed a multi-party Commission on Old Age Pensions and National Insurance, under the chairmanship of a veteran Nationalist MP, B.J. Pienaar. The Commission’s brief was ‘to examine and report upon:

¹ This historical inconvenience has not stopped scholars from making absurd statements, such as: ‘The introduction of the first old-age pension in 1928 followed the Carnegie Commission of Inquiry into the “poor white” problem’ (Triegaardt, 2005: 250).

(a) The payment of pensions by the State to necessitous aged and permanently incapacitated persons who are unable to maintain themselves and for whom no provision at present exists.

(b) A system of National Insurance as a means of making provision for the risks of sickness, accident, premature death, invalidity, old age, unemployment and maternity’.

In its first Report, completed in haste in early 1927, the Commission recommended that the state greatly expand its responsibility for the poor through means-tested, non-contributory old-age pensions and disability (or ‘invalidity’) grants. These were introduced for white and coloured men and women (with coloured pensioners receiving smaller pensions than white pensioners), under the Old Age Pensions Act of 1928 (see Seekings, 2006).

The Pact Government did not maintain its reformist momentum. In its second and third Reports, the Pienaar Commission proposed a system of social insurance to cover sickness and unemployment (South Africa, 1928, 1929). The government did not act on these recommendations, largely because the global Great Depression had dragged South Africa into recession. Havenga and the government were deeply conservative in terms of fiscal policy, and responded to the recession through a moderate intensification of its existing policies of employment creation and assistance to farmers instead of embarking on new and perhaps more costly reforms. Indeed, as we shall see below, the government actually cut back on its expenditure on the old-age pension programme.

Nonetheless, the Pact Government had wrought an enormous shift in the landscape of welfare provision in South Africa. Crucially, the relationship between church and state had been transformed. Prior to 1924, the church – meaning, especially, the Dutch Reformed Church – had played the major role in the relief of poverty among white people, especially in rural areas. The provincial governments gave substantial grants to charities, mostly linked to churches, and magistrates enlisted the assistance of the church in dispensing poor relief. The *Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk* (NGK, Dutch Reformed Church) ran orphanages, homes for the elderly, farm-settlements, and other institutions, and administered the limited system of child maintenance grants introduced in 1921. The poor were assisted by the Church primarily in kind, that is, in the form of food or blankets, and rarely in cash. The *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV, Afrikaans Christian Women’s Association) in the Cape Province and its counterparts in other provinces was

actively involved with the poor. The Pact Government, after 1924, introduced programmes based on the novel idea that the state had a major responsibility for uplifting poor white people (and re-establishing a clear racial hierarchy). It did this primarily through programmes that put cash in the pockets of the poor, either through 'civilised labour' policies that ensured employment for unskilled white (and coloured) men at inflated ('civilised') wages, or through pensions to poor white (and coloured) elderly people.

The Pact Government's approach was primarily programmatic, based on government programmes that were strongly influenced by the programmes introduced by other 'civilised' countries. The Government, and Members of Parliament (MPs) of all parties, were aware that they were constructing a very 'modern' state, albeit with the racist objectives of racial segregation and hierarchy. This approach to 'poor whites' was based on a clear understanding of the causes of the 'poor white problem', as set out in official commissions of enquiry appointed by the Pact Government prior to the Carnegie Commission. In 1926, the Economic and Wages Commission provided a structural interpretation of the 'poor white problem'. Three of the commissioners attributed the problem to the 'failures of agriculture'. 'While in some cases the failure is probably due to personal defects of character or ability, in the main it is ... due to circumstances over which the victim has no control' (South Africa, 1926: 105). Specifically, the causes, according to the commissioners, were insecure land tenure and poor agriculture; the solutions therefore should include land tenure reform and agricultural training (*ibid*: 105-20). The other three commissioners emphasised instead the effects of cheap 'native' labour and advocated 'civilised labour' policies in town. Like their colleagues, however, they argued that the problem was not psychological; indeed, they emphasised how impressed they were by the industry and productivity of poor whites once they were given employment (*ibid*: 334-50). Similarly, the Pienaar Commission makes no mention of any psychological causes of poverty in its three reports. Some elderly white people were poor because their families were unable or unwilling to provide for them, and others were poor because they were physically disabled (South Africa, 1927). Others were poor because of normal circumstances such as trade cycles and mechanisation. The Commission noted that some 'poor whites' might be 'unemployable', but the implication was that this was a small group (South Africa, 1929: 27-28). After very detailed discussions of contemporary social assistance and social insurance programmes around the world, and influenced strongly by the International Labour Organisation, the Pienaar Commission recommended an entirely programmatic set of solutions (South Africa, 1927, 1928, 1929; see Seekings, 2006).

The implementation of these programmes also entailed unambiguous state-building. Under the Old Age Pensions Act,² the administration of applications for the new pensions would be delegated in each magisterial district to an ‘officer of the public service’ appointed by the Minister of Finance as a ‘district pension officer’. These district pension officers would make recommendations to a national Commissioner of Pensions, who would make the final determination of whether or not a pension should be granted and if so, how much (according to a schedule or payments included in the legislation). The legislation provided for some discretion. Thus the Minister of Finance and the Governor-General were empowered to suspend pension payments if, for example, ‘a pensioner has, by reason of his misconduct, ceased to deserve his pension’. But these discretionary powers were the prerogative of the state, and the legislation made no provision for the church or any other local body. This was the system already in place for war pensioners, that is, for veterans of the Anglo-Boer War and Great War. The new old-age pensions were means-tested, taking into account the income and assets of the applicant and his or her spouse. But the pension programme did not take into account wider familial circumstances. If an applicant’s child was in a position to maintain the applicant, then the Commissioner of Pensions might recover from the child part or all of the pensions paid out to the parent, but this would not preclude the initial payment of a pension. The programme thus reduced the roles of both church and family in the provision of welfare.

This was the context in which the Carnegie Commission conducted its investigations. Far from recommending an unambiguous project of welfare state-building, the Carnegie Commission gave voice to a clear and emphatic backlash against the existing programmatic, state-based responses to poverty among white South Africans.

2. The Carnegie Commission’s critique of the nascent welfare state

Like previous inquiries, the Carnegie Commission identified ‘poor whites’ as people who had been unable to adjust adequately to economic change in the countryside. This was attributed in part to poor education. But, the Commission emphasised, there were also ‘psychological traits’ or a ‘type of mentality’ that ‘retarded adjustment’. In its ‘Joint Findings and Recommendations’, the

² Act no. 22 of 1928.

Commission refers to a ‘narrowness of outlook’, a ‘lack of enterprise’, ‘a dread of the strange world outside the farm’, ‘poor business management’, ‘a lack of initiative and self-reliance among the younger generation’, and even a persistent ‘lack of industrious habits’ (although this was disappearing) and a ‘confused outlook on life’ (Carnegie Commission, 1932: para 22-25, 49). The Carnegie Commission’s analysis of the poor white problem was essentially psychological, in contrast to the structural analyses of the Economic and Wages Commission and Pienaar Committee. The redress of poverty would require eliminating vice and ignorance.³

Whilst they felt that there was ‘no justification for the view that all poor whites are pauperized or have sunk to a state of complete hopelessness’ (*ibid*: para 52),⁴ the Commissioners did find that

... a part of the poor white class is characterized by one or more of such qualities as improvidence and irresponsibility, untruthfulness and lack of a sense of duty, a feeling of inferiority and lack of self-respect, ignorance and credulity, a lack of industry and ambition, and unsettledness of mode of life. Some evince poor social heredity (especially of home training and discipline), are of poor intelligence or suffer from some physical infirmity, or have failings of character, such as tendencies to intemperance or crime. (*ibid*; para 53)

The ‘weak traits’ of the poor white were set out most starkly in the *Sociological Report*. Rev. J.R. Albertyn and his co-authors referred to improvidence (‘the care-free, happy-go-lucky disposition’), thriftlessness, dishonesty, the lack of any sense of duty, the lack of self-respect, irresponsibility, hostility to discipline and order, ignorance and credulity, indolence, laziness, untidiness, and dependence (Albertyn *et al.*, 1932: 21).

It has often been claimed that the Carnegie Commission found that ‘poor whites’ did not suffer from inferior intelligence (Fleisch, 1995: 358; Giliomee, 2003: 348; see also the references in Tayler, 1992: 46). This is not quite correct. The

³ It is therefore puzzling that the Carnegie Commission was assessed so favourably, fifty years later, by Wilson and Ramphele – who had no time for cultural or psychological explanations in their study of poverty under apartheid, that is, the second Carnegie inquiry (Wilson and Ramphele, 1989: x). Groenewald (1987) analyses the ‘methodology’ of the investigation in terms of social pathology theory, missing the roots of the Commission’s ideas in distinctly nineteenth century thought.

⁴ This may have been a retort to the arguments made by W.M. Macmillan, who described poor whites as ‘demoralised beyond redemption’ in his lectures on the Agrarian Problem.

Commission did find that ‘the great majority of poor whites are of normal intelligence’, countering arguments that the ‘poor white problem’ was due to congenital defects (with the implication that poor whites were irredeemable).⁵ But the Commission also found that ‘poor whites’ were ‘on average’ less intelligent than white people in general, and the proportion who were subnormal was higher. Poor white children performed poorly in tests. ‘The majority’ of poor white children were found to be ‘within the region of normality’ with regard to educability, that is, their ‘*potential* intelligence is higher than would appear at first sight from the results of intelligence tests’, and even the less intelligent were at least capable of routine work. The problem for most children (but not all) was the environment, not innate intelligence (Carnegie Commission, 1932: para 85-7). The solution was special classes, compulsory education up to the age of fifteen, and (especially) accommodating poor white children in school hostels where they were subjected to strict and purposive discipline. For the minority of less intelligent children, the solution was vocational education that prepared them for appropriate occupations, that is, occupations that did not require high intelligence. These conclusions were based on detailed arguments on intelligence made by Wilcocks in his *Psychological Report* (Wilcocks, 1932: chapter XII) and by Malherbe on intelligence and educability in his *Educational Report* (Malherbe, 1932: chapter VIII).

The solutions to the ‘poor white problem’, according to the Commission, were definitely not the ones attempted by the Pact Government. The poor needed to be ‘rehabilitated’ through developing new personal and psychological qualities, not simply providing them with opportunities; rehabilitation requires ‘a change in the person’ and not just a ‘change of circumstances’. ‘The poor ought to be trained in thrift, self-help, temperance, health, solidarity and racial self-respect’ (*ibid*: para. 101-3). ‘Rehabilitation’ had long been the discursive conceptual framework in which governments addressed poverty among white people, but the emphasis had generally been on the provision of income (or of opportunities to earn an income) (Berger, 1983). The Commission was opposed to protected employment (except perhaps as a partial and short-term solution) and emergency employment schemes. Poor whites needed to be ‘trained to become good and, as far as possible, skilled workers’ who were self-reliant rather than dependent on state or church (Carnegie Commission, 1932: para 68). The Commission was

⁵ Klausen’s study of the politics of birth control reveals the complexity of these issues. Was the Carnegie Commission reacting against the eugenicists, who had formed the Race Welfare Society in Johannesburg in 1930, arguing that ‘poor whites’ were mentally defective and should be sterilised or, if sufficiently responsible, taught to use contraceptives? Carnegie Commissioners Malherbe, Rothmann and Murray all supported birth control, but perhaps for environmental rather than eugenicist reasons (Klausen, 2004).

especially critical of state programmes which imposed a ‘fairly heavy burden on the country’s taxpayers’ but too often fostered dependency among ‘poor whites’.

The Commission is convinced that much of the assistance is given in such a way as to have a demoralizing effect on poor whites and so increases the difficulty of their rehabilitation. It causes loss of independence and may imbue them with a sense of inferiority, impairs their industry, weakens their sense of personal responsibility, and helps to make them dishonest. (ibid: para 110, emphasis in the original)

Direct material assistance without an equivalent service in return on the part of the recipient should be reduced to a minimum. (ibid: para 110, emphasis in the original)

This critique of dependency was developed by Professor R.W. Wilcocks (from the University of Stellenbosch) in his *Psychological Report*. He challenged the very notion of rights that had been widely used by politicians and others when introducing old-age pensions (Seekings, 2006):

The recipients of charity come all the more easily to believe that they have a right to such assistance’ and these notions readily become commonplace. People come to believe ‘that the poor have a right to be assisted, that it is a duty of the “rich” towards the poor to give them this assistance, and hence also a duty of the “government” which “of course, is very rich.” ... A second element in the popular outlook ... is derived from the idea of equality... If assistance is given to certain poor people, others consider that ... they have a right to the same treatment. (Wilcocks, 1932: 95)

Wilcocks denounced cash payments, in part because sudden increases in income often led to ‘extravagance and thriftlessness’ (*ibid*: 171).

Even Ernst Gideon Malherbe – the supposedly progressive social scientist on the Commission – dedicated an entire chapter to ‘free education and the spirit of dependence’ in his *Educational Report*. On the basis of the testimony of witnesses, Malherbe concluded that ‘the worst signs of spineless dependence’ were manifest among the rural poor with respect to ‘free’ education (Malherbe, 1932: 259). Education was the chief means of challenging dependency, but free education bred dependency. Malherbe therefore recommended that serious consideration be given to requiring parents to contribute to the costs of their children’s schooling. He also wrote of the ‘spineless dependence on charity’ that resulted from temporary employment schemes (*ibid*: 99).

The systematic critique of state policy – and especially of the ‘excessive spirit of dependence’ that state policies foster – was taken furthest in the *Sociological Report*, written by Rev. Albertyn, together with two other dominees of the Dutch Reformed Church (Rev. Luckhoff and Rev. Cronje) and Mrs M.E. Rothmann of the ACVV.

The detrimental effects of the idea that State aid can take the place of personal effort and initiative are considerable. The sense of responsibility for supporting oneself, one’s parents or children, is immediately weakened, and very soon the poor man is tempted to shirk all responsibility. In this way all desire for honest labour is eventually lost, and he is tempted to resort to all kinds of deception and trickery. His disposition becomes one not only of unthankfulness but of continual dissatisfaction, because in his opinion too little consideration is shown him. In the worst cases he becomes a shameless parasite on society without any desire or power to support himself, and as such becomes the despair of the social reformer. (Albertyn *et al.*, 1932: 75-6)

Albertyn *et al.* noted that the state had assumed recently a range of new social responsibilities in South Africa, as in almost all civilized countries. This the Commissioners attributed largely to the pernicious influence of democratic politics, with political parties pandering to poor voters even when it compromises the ‘rehabilitation’ of the latter. ‘The spirit of dependence on the State’, they assessed, had ‘grown to such an extent that it may almost be called a national malady’ (*ibid*: 141).

The state’s old-age pension programme was singled out for criticism in several volumes of the Carnegie Commission’s Report. Wilcocks argued that ‘the method by which old age pensions have been paid out in the Union has sometimes had the result that the care of children for their parents has been even further reduced’ (Wilcocks, 1932: 96). Indeed, he charged, the ‘injudicious methods’ used for old-age pensions and other forms of charity encouraged dishonesty: ‘When, as in the case of old age pensions, a certain degree of need is officially prescribed before assistance is given, but when in practice each case is not always carefully examined to determine whether the required degree of need is actually present, and action taken accordingly, the temptation arises, when a pension is being applied for, to give an exaggerated account of the degree of poverty in order to be able to come under the provisions of the law’ (*ibid*: 97). Wilcocks did not deny that the state had some duties to its citizens, or that the elderly were often deserving, but he insisted that, in general, ‘in the long run

charity completely undermines the recipient's thriftiness, industry and enterprise; it takes from him the feeling of responsibility and independence, and thus renders him all the less able to get along without assistance' (*ibid*: 97-8).

Albertyn *et al.* also criticised old-age pensions for fostering a wider range of moral ills: 'In the allocation of old-age pensions, due care has not always been exercised. In many cases it would appear that little trouble was taken to ascertain whether the pension was sufficient [i.e. excessive] or had been well spent, or whether the pensioner was living a respectable life' (Albertyn *et al.*, 1932: 80). It was asserted that too many undeserving elderly people received pensions. The commissioners wrote of a case of an elderly couple who 'spend practically all of [their pension] on drink, have a great debauch and then remain in bed till the effects have passed off. In such cases surely it would be much better if the Church or some other approved body received the pension, and used it wisely on behalf of the pensioner' (*ibid*: 80). In other cases, the money is spent by callous children. In yet others, respectable people degenerated, corrupting their whole families, when they received the pension (*ibid*: 81). Old-age pensions were also said to erode self-respect.

Rather than provide cash support through general programmes like the old-age pension, each case should be investigated individually with the objective of promoting self-help. '*By such means more beneficial results are often attainable than by purely material charity*' (Carnegie Commission, 1932: para 115, emphasis in the original). Too high a proportion of funds was being spent on direct material relief (*ibid*: para 116), and the 'whole social legislation' should be revised (*ibid*: para 123). Again and again, the commissioners urged that the solution was not financial support, which merely led to further dependency, but rather ending 'social isolation' through individualised social work.

The recommended 'ways of rehabilitation' included, first and foremost, 'measures for the discouragement and breaking down of dependency'. There should be more stigma attached to state charity, suggested Albertyn *et al.*; and recipients of state charity should be disfranchised. State charity should be supervised strictly: 'Proofs of gratitude, good conduct, the right use of the relief, etc. must be demanded.' No one should get something for nothing: even the elderly and disabled should be obliged to do something in return. Compulsory labour colonies were needed for vagrants and loafers (Albertyn *et al.*, 1932: 107-9).

This approach meant redistributing responsibilities between the state and the church. Albertyn *et al.* suggested that the state should be concerned primarily with enabling the indigent to earn a respectable livelihood through economic measures, whilst the church ‘stresses social care, and would by means of moral and religious influences strive to rehabilitate the fallen’ (*ibid*: 68). Albertyn *et al.* were prepared to acknowledge that the state’s role was necessary, but they emphasised that it was not sufficient because ‘the problem of poor whiteism has moral as well as economic aspects’. The poor needed ‘to regain their lost character and self-reliance’ (*ibid*: 69), and the state paid no attention to the challenge of ‘social work’, that is, to ‘spiritual deterioration’. Church and state should be equal partners in the care of the poor. The church would administer institutions and dispense charity, paid for by the state. It would work with the state in designing educational programmes. It should even run rural welfare committees to administer state assistance. (*ibid*: 70-71). As the Commission put it in its Joint Findings and Recommendations:

It is recommended that local committees should be formed, consisting of suitable persons willing to serve this cause. The machinery of the church could here render valuable service. Such committees should enjoy the support of the state and should carry out their task in close co-operation with the public authorities. (Carnegie Commission, 1932: para 37)

Albertyn *et al.* elaborated on the role to be played by the Church, including committees to administer old-age pensions (‘exercising considerable discretionary powers’). The Church could run residential institutions for the elderly where due care could be paid to their moral welfare and where the poor were assisted in-kind rather than through the corrupting medium of cash. Albertyn *et al.* even referred approvingly to the workhouses established after 1834 in Britain, because the treatment was so harsh that the workhouse was the last resort! They added that, in South Africa as elsewhere, the state did far too much for the poor, making the ‘lot of the poor’ overly attractive and fostering dependence on the state (*ibid*, 1932: 141). They praised at length the Church’s farm-settlement at Kakamas: ‘The experience of Kakamas proves that the social work of the Church has been at least as important in the policy of reclaiming the poor white as the provision of the means of subsistence’ (*ibid*: 142).

The Commission’s recommendations on social policy were, in key respects, a deeply conservative reaction against the modernising impulses represented by the Pienaar Commission and the Old-Age Pension Act. As Albertyn *et al.* wrote bluntly, the state ‘should undertake as little purely charitable work as possible’

(1932: 141). ‘State paternalism’ and ‘material charity’ were seen as contributory causes to ‘poor whiteism’, not as solutions. Only the Church, exercising considerable discretionary powers, could ensure that the psychological or moral bases of poor whiteism were adequately addressed. Instead of running emergency employment schemes and paying old-age pensions indiscriminately, the state should provide financial support to the church to run institutions in which the poor would be rehabilitated, probably brutally, and should let the church administer non-institutional assistance.

The fact that a clerical perspective was integral to the Commission’s findings was unsurprising given the Dutch Reformed Church’s involvement in the Commission. It had played a major role in setting up the Commission, contributed some of its funding, provided three dominees as investigators, and appointed six of the fourteen members of the Commission’s Board of Control (Carnegie Commission, 1932: foreword). Rev. Albertyn had been in charge of poor relief for the NGK (Miller, 1993: 642). One of the American experts sent out by the Carnegie Commission – Kenyon Butterfield, the former president of the Massachusetts Agricultural College – is said to have dedicated his retirement after 1924 to working as an international missionary.⁶ One of Butterfield’s earlier books – *The Country Church and the Rural Problem* (1911) – set out most of the key themes of the Carnegie Commission’s Report: the problem of rural isolation, the need for education and, especially, the crucial importance of the church in the improvement of human character.⁷ But the hostility of the Commission to the Pact Government’s reforms was extraordinary. The Commission advocated a return to poor relief, both indoor (that is, institutional) and outdoor (through assistance to the poor in their own homes). There is also little sign that the Commission’s hostility to state programmes was based on their ‘scientific’ research. The commissioners’ pejorative assessment of ‘poor whites’ might have been based on their extensive observation and interviews across the country, but their hostility to state programmes could only have been an inference, informed by ideology and prejudice as much as, if not more than, research. In both the manner of these findings and the recommendations for reform, the Carnegie Commission was in considerable part anti-modern.⁸

⁶ See the website of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, which originated from the Agricultural College: www.umass.edu/pastchancellors/butterfield.html.

⁷ This raises the question of why the Carnegie Commission sent the retired Butterfield, rather than one of the younger and mostly female advocates of professional social work. Bell (2000) reports that the Carnegie Corporation sent a sociologist because of Albertyn’s lack of academic expertise, and they were asked not to send an English scholar (Beveridge had been approached but was unavailable). But Bell does not explain why they chose Butterfield in particular.

⁸ Scholars that emphasise the scientific, ‘fact-finding’ approach of the Commission (such as

The Commission's hostility to the state and support for the Church's leading role in addressing poverty among white people did not mean that they were entirely uncritical of the Church. The Commission called for a new approach to social work. In general, 'social work' was understood by the Commission as simply the pastoral work of the Church, but there are occasional references to professional social work. The Commission recommended that the church-run local committees that would administer assistance to the poor 'should be served by salaried and trained social workers' (para 37). These 'thoroughly trained social workers' would perform 'sound social diagnoses' of the needs of individual 'poor whites' (para 114). Albertyn *et al.* explained that a 'correct social diagnosis' was like a good medical diagnosis, which did not just look at 'the outward symptoms of disease' but also dealt with 'all its underlying causes' (1932: 119). The Commission was undoubtedly influenced by one of the American 'experts', Charles W. Coulter, who published several articles in the Department of Labour's *Social and Industrial Review* (see *ibid*: 117-8; Miller, 1993: 643).

Subsequent events suggest that it was Rothmann who advocated a more professional approach to social work, although her own report on 'The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family' (Rothmann, 1932) includes no specific recommendations and does not mention a need for trained social workers. But Rothmann clearly identifies a need for 'home and social training' if poor women in rural areas were to perform adequately the 'duties and functions' of a 'mother' in a 'normal, civilised home'.⁹ Of the other commissioners, Malherbe was in some respects a moderniser, but he does not appear to have shared Rothmann's enthusiasm for professional social work. He had studied statistical approaches to educational psychology in New York in the early 1920s, and advocated systematic research into social problems. But in his *Educational Report*, Malherbe went out of his way to praise the role played by the church in

Groenewald, 1987; Fleisch, 1995; Posel, 2000) tend to focus on Malherbe's research on education, and pay little attention to the relationship between 'facts' and recommendations in the Reports as a whole. The 'fact' most often cited – including by Malherbe himself – was the figure of 300,000 'poor whites' (Carnegie Commission, 1932: para 9): this was one of the most questionable findings made by Malherbe and the commission, based as it was on an extrapolation of estimates provided by school teachers as to the family incomes of school-children. Malherbe and many others had good reason to use the positivist discourse of 'facts' rather more than was warranted by their actual methodology.

⁹ Rothmann's report does not have references or a bibliography. It does not reveal whether she was familiar, by 1932, with work such as Richmond's *Social Diagnosis* or the 1921 Sheppard-Tower Act (that is, the Infancy and Maternity Act) which introduced mother's pensions in the United States. It is possible that she was influenced *after* completing her investigation by her colleague in the ACVV, Erika Theron, and Theron's mentor, Hendrik Verwoerd.

education – ‘almost every progressive measure in the State system (which is secular) owes its origin to the continually [sic] prodding by the Church’ (Malherbe, 1932: 48) – and he said nothing about the need for professional social workers (other than matrons in school hostels). In his subsequent *Handbook on Education and Social Work*, published in 1934, Malherbe seems to endorse the church’s leading role and does not argue strongly for professional social work.¹⁰

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Carnegie Commission’s engagement with newer ideas about professional social work, with its emphasis on casework, were poorly developed. The bibliography in the *Sociological Report* lists the classic American study by Mary Richmond, *Social Diagnosis* (originally published in 1917), but it is not mentioned in the text and there does not appear to be any detailed engagement with the concept of casework. The Carnegie Commission’s approach instead entailed a reinvention of the ‘scientific charity’ movement of the United States in the late nineteenth century. The Carnegie Commission – with the exception of Rothmann – echoed the writings of Josephine Shaw Lowell and others in its attacks on cash grants, idleness, burdening the taxpayer (that is, the working person), the claim to ‘rights’ by the poor, and state provision in general, as well as in its defence of indoor relief (including the poorhouse) and its advocacy of improved co-ordination of charity (see Ehrenreich, 1985: 61; Trattner, 1989: chapters 4 and 5; Katz, 1996: chapter 3).

3. Struggles over welfare policy and the establishment of an independent Department of Social Welfare

The Carnegie Commission’s report amounted to a declaration of war on the policies adopted by the Pact Government with the general support of all of the other parties in Parliament. It was perhaps unsurprising that Members of Parliament hardly ever referred to the Commission during parliamentary debates. Nonetheless, the Commission’s declaration shaped successive governments’ policies. Whilst the welfare state continued to grow, despite the Commission’s attack, it did so in a somewhat bifurcated way, combining the

¹⁰ Davie (2005: 72-3) points out that Malherbe was as keen on ethnographic observation as on quantitative research; his enthusiasm for detailed case-studies would have accorded with the emphasis on casework by advocates of professional social work.

programmatic elements denounced by the Commission with more moralistic rhetoric and policies, state-administered programmes with ones in which the church played important roles.

At first, the Church appeared ascendant. In August 1933, the Minister of Labour agreed that the NGK's existing local structures would serve as the basis for a new 'Church-State' system of poor relief committees (*plaaslike armesorg komitee*). The Church insisted on controlling the committees and appointing the secretaries, although the Minister of Labour had initially proposed appointing local inspectors of labour as secretaries. The state paid 80 percent of the administrative expenses. The functions and duties of these committees included collecting information, conducting 'intensive social work' and administering some government-funded schemes (including employment schemes) (South Africa, 1940a: 39-40; also Du Toit, 1996: 19). In September 1935, the government and church agreed to restructure the scheme. As of the following April, the committees were renamed 'social welfare committees', and the secretaries became full-time 'welfare officers' paid by the state. The state continued to pay 80 percent of the administrative expenses (in addition to the entire salary of each welfare officers), and the church retained the dominant role in the control of the committees. In 1938, the committees expanded their work to include the employment of social workers, heavily subsidised by the state (South Africa, 1940a: 40-42). It would appear that the Church had penetrated the state, gaining control of areas of social policy that had previously been outside of its control, as the Carnegie Commission had advocated.

Du Toit's careful research into the ACVV, however, reveals a more complex picture of conflict between conservative patriarchs in the NGK and modernising women in the ACVV. The NGK seems to have subscribed to the Victorian view that discipline and austerity were sufficient to save the poor, whilst the ACVV emphasised the importance of social workers who could provide appropriate training to poor women. The ACVV had shifted its emphasis from charitable work (*liefdadigheid*) to social work (*maatskaplike werk*). In July 1933, the ACVV and its sister organisations in other provinces met for a Federal Women's Congress in Bloemfontein, where they discussed detailed policies for tackling the 'poor white question'. In her opening speech, the president of the ACVV declared that the women's organisations wanted 'to act as co-workers of state and church'. The women's organisations were necessary partners because, in Du Toit's words, they were convinced that 'women's knowledge was essential to "scientifically" correct social welfare' (Du Toit, 1996: 14). The women's organisations proposed 'social welfare councils' (*maatskaplike rade*) in rural areas, dominated by women and state officials but with participants from the

church also. Health care would be a major concern of these councils, and the state would subsidise nurses as well as social workers (reflecting especially the problem of ‘birth conditions’, see Rothmann, 1932).

The ACVV was on a collision course with the NGK, which was holding its own meetings with the state over ‘Church-State co-operation’. In 1934, at the urging of the Afrikaans media, the NGK convened a *volkskongres* on the poor white question. NGK leaders were privately ambivalent about the congress. They were also opposed to allowing the Professor of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Stellenbosch – Hendrik Verwoerd – too prominent a role in the congress. Verwoerd, together with his student (and ACVV leader) Erica Theron, had established the Department of Sociology and Social Work at Stellenbosch in 1932 (with Verwoerd as its – and South Africa’s – first professor of sociology and social work); students worked with the ACVV for practical experience.¹¹ The NGK leaders thought that Verwoerd was trying ‘to separate social work far too much from religion’ (quoted in Du Toit, 1996: 20). Church leaders also wanted to subordinate the independent ACVV to the NGK.

The NGK leaders were right to be wary of Verwoerd, who at this time was ‘neither a strident Afrikaner nationalist nor a doctrinaire white supremacist’, but rather an energetic advocate of American sociology and casework-based social welfare (Miller, 1993: 637). In his speech at the *volkskongres*, Verwoerd challenged directly the view of his colleagues at Stellenbosch (and former Carnegie Commissioners), Grosskopf and Wilcocks (who was also Verwoerd’s mentor), that the state’s role should be reduced. According to Verwoerd, ‘the only organisation in the country with the power to address the problem properly was the state’ (quoted in Giliomee, 2003: 351). Giliomee summarises Verwoerd’s speech:

He pleaded for the re-organization of welfare work and the provision of greatly extended state assistance to the white poor. It was vital to get proper administrative structures in place and to achieve optimal co-ordination between private and public bodies. Social workers had to be trained to become professionals, with one stationed in every constituency of the country. He made many other proposals, among them for employment centres, a permanent unemployment fund, the establishment of public works, the provision of vocational guidance,

¹¹ By way of comparison, the first school of social work in the USA was founded in 1898, and all five major American cities had schools by 1910. The first journals dedicated to social work had already been started; the first professional journal started in 1920 (*Social Casework*) (see Trattner, 1989: chapter 11).

health services and housing, the establishment of social clubs for the unemployed and settlements for the poorly paid, the introduction of pensions for poor mothers, the imposition of minimum ratios of ‘civilized’ to ‘non-civilized’ work in industry, and efficacious regulation of ‘tenant and *bywoner* systems’ and improved employment opportunities for women. The establishment of a national department of welfare was singled out as of prime importance. There was virtually nothing that he left out. (Giliomee, 2003: 351)¹²

The congress was a triumph for Verwoerd and the ACVV. A resolution was passed unanimously calling on the government to make the fullest possible use of trained social workers (South Africa, 1940a: 23). A ‘Continuation Committee’ was established to take forward the work of the *volkskongres*. This was dominated by Verwoerd, who was appointed chairman when the first chairman resigned; Theron also served as secretary (Tayler, 1992: 52-61; Miller, 1993).

Through 1934 and 1935, the NGK fought with the ACVV and Verwoerd over whether the church or women and state should dominate the proposed local poor relief or welfare councils. The establishment in 1935 of a separate section for Social Welfare within the Department of Labour seemed to mark a victory for the NGK, in that the new Commissioner of Social Welfare was a prominent member of the church. The Commissioner soon announced the revised plan for ‘social welfare committees’ that incorporated aspects of the ACVV’s alternative, that is, provision for social work and expanded – if still limited – participation on the committees by state officials. In 1936, Verwoerd sent a memorandum to the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare that endorsed the model of local councils proposed by the ACVV. The ACVV met with the Commissioner, but were unsatisfied when he only offered the minimal concession of minority participation on still church-controlled committees. In 1937, the government established a new and separate Department of Social Welfare, appointing as secretary not the former Commissioner of Social Welfare but an official with a background in education, G.A.C. Kuschke (Du Toit, 1996: 21-34; Miller, 1993: 656). Although Kuschke did not accede to the ACVV’s demands completely, he did accept the need for a rapid expansion of professional social work. In 1938, provision was made for thirty social workers, employed by private agencies but subsidised by the Department of Social Welfare. The scheme was later

¹² Miller (1993), in her otherwise detailed analysis of Verwoerd’s academic career, does not discuss his attitude to the church, and limits her analysis of his attitude to the state to a summary of his view that social workers should be employed by local councils (that is, the ACVV position).

expanded to sixty social workers (South Africa, 1940a: 24-32).¹³ In 1938, faced with the poor performance of the church-controlled local committees, Kuschke transferred some of their responsibilities back to magistrates, and the following year he wound up the 'Church-State' scheme entirely (*ibid*: 42).

The church had the ambition but, without the women's organisations, lacked the capacity to take over responsibility for social policy. The women's organisations and Verwoerd not only promoted successfully a professional approach to social work but at the same time challenged successfully the church's attempt to assume authority. One unintended consequence of this was that the anticipated assault on social welfare programmes was never mounted effectively. Instead of deepening the critique of state spending, the heirs to the Carnegie Commission expended their energies in struggles over authority within civil society. From 1932, state social spending rose as existing programmes expanded and new programmes were introduced.

The first reform of the 1930s appeared to buck the trend toward increasing public expenditure and make the kind of concession proposed by the Carnegie Commission. Even before the Carnegie Commission published its reports, the state had begun to rein in the old-age pension programme. The 1931 Old Age Pensions Amendment Act¹⁴ gave state officials more discretionary power over pensions. The new sub-section 6 (1) stated simply that: 'The pension granted to any pensioner shall be of such amount as, having regard to the circumstances of the pensioner, the commissioner deems reasonable and sufficient'. The new sub-section 6 (2) stipulated that the amount awarded should take into account the ability of the pensioner's children to support them. By giving officials more discretion over the payment of pensions, the reform marked a move back in the direction of poor relief. It is almost as if the Government decided that it had been a mistake to introduce pensions almost as a right, and decided to expand the discretionary power of local officials so as to ensure that it was not abused. In addition, the Act provided for local pension committees which would investigate the circumstances of the applicants and advise the Commissioner of Pensions.

One reason for the reform was purely financial. Havenga's normal fiscal conservatism was exacerbated as the Great Depression took hold. Introducing the Bill, Havenga explained that spending had been higher than anticipated,

¹³ Comparison with the United States again reveals the infancy of social work in South Africa. In the USA, there were as many as 30,000 social workers by 1930 (Trattner, 1989: 296).

¹⁴ Act no. 34 of 1931.

because they had underestimated how many elderly people were living in poverty. The existing Act, he said, was unaffordable, but the reforms would save £300,000. A parliamentary committee had investigated and found that administration was generally good, but some pensioners did not need the pensions in that they had children who could afford to support them or had disguised their means.¹⁵ But the Bill was also clearly a response to a perceived backlash against the pension scheme, even prior to the publication of the Carnegie Commission's Reports. No MPs distanced themselves from the principle of old-age pensions. But Havenga himself, Prime Minister Hertzog and a third cabinet minister all referred to a shift in public opinion against old-age pensions, warning that there might be agitation to abolish them altogether. (The Carnegie Commission, in its backlash against public provision, seems to have been part of a more general moral panic). Nationalist Party MPs also began to voice for the first time angry criticisms of pensions for coloured people. The Bill was strongly opposed by the opposition parties because it turned the pension scheme into a poor relief scheme. They denounced the shift from setting pension benefits as 'a matter of right' to 'a matter of the discretion and goodwill of the Commissioner of Pensions' and described the proposed local committees as a 'very dangerous expedient'. The Bill was defended by one cabinet minister on the grounds that the original 1928 pension scheme had been 'a blend between poor relief and old age pensions'. The House of Assembly divided over the Bill, voting along party lines.¹⁶

The consequences of the reforms are clear, in terms of both the number of pensioners and the sums being paid out (see Figures 1 and 2). The new Act took effect from 1 June 1931. Between 1930 and 1932, total expenditure on old-age pensions dropped by 29 percent. The actual number of pensioners did not decline so dramatically (11 percent only), but many pensioners who had received the maximum pension hitherto subsequently only received a partial pension. Coloured pensioners felt official power most dramatically: the proportion of coloured pensioners receiving the full pension fell from 96 percent to 21 percent over three years. The proportion of white pensioners receiving the full pension fell from 90 percent to 65 percent over the same period.

¹⁵ *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 26th March, 1931, col.4,307-13.

¹⁶ *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 26th May, col.4,307-45 and 27th May, col.4,367-88; also, col.4,491-4,516.

Figure 1: Numbers of pensioners, by race and maximum or partial pensions, 1931-1945

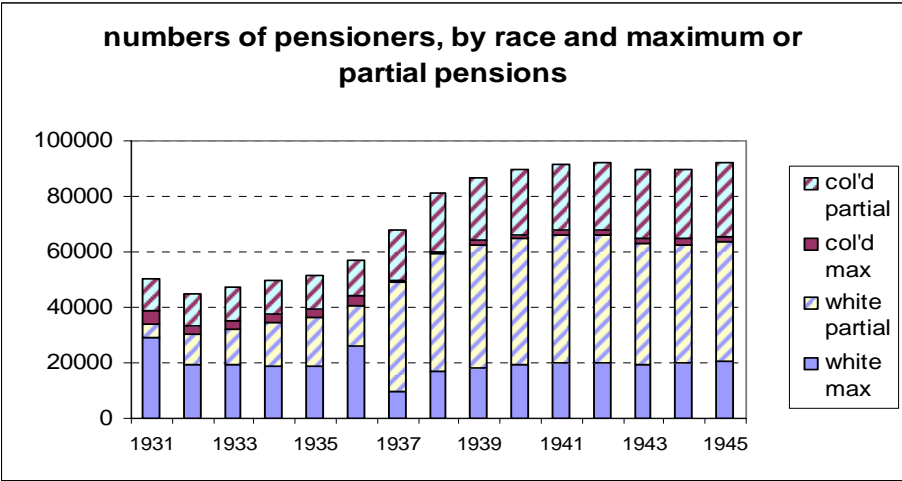
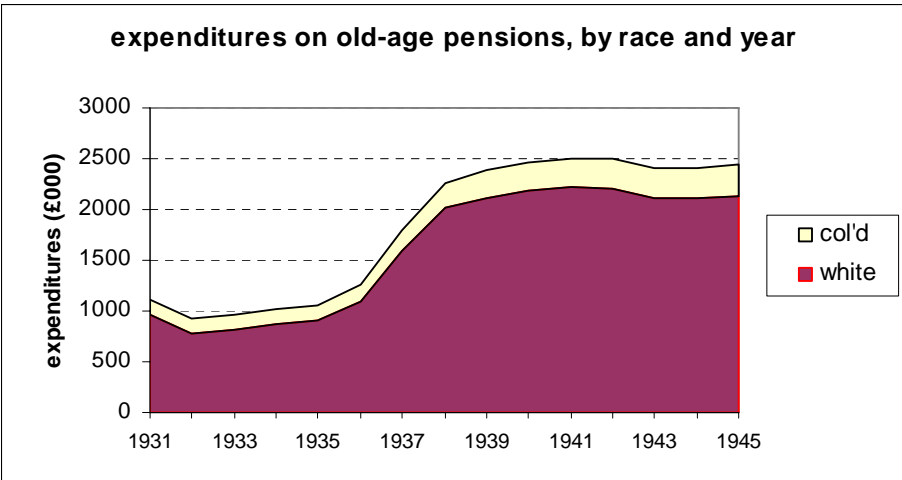


Figure 2: Expenditures on old-age pensions, by race and year, 1931-1945



The anti-modernist sentiments of the Carnegie Commission do not appear to have taken deep root in Parliament, however. As soon as public finances began to improve, MPs began to complain about the parsimony of the old-age pensions. They reported that many deserving constituents were assessed as being too well-off, or their children were deemed to be able to support them, with the result that they were not eligible for a full or perhaps even any pension. MPs pushed for more generous pensions, never invoking the critical discourse of the Carnegie Commission (and never mentioning the Commission).¹⁷ The

¹⁷ *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 8th June 1933, c543-4 (Fick and Rood); 27th February 1934,

elderly should have the ‘first claim’ on rising government revenues, said one MP; ‘we are lagging behind other countries in the world in this respect’, and South Africa’s so-called pensions were ‘merely poor relief’.¹⁸ MPs from D.F. Malan’s faction within the Nationalist Party, which became the *Gesuidwerde* (Purified) Nationalist Party (GNP) in 1934, were conspicuously silent on these issues, perhaps because of their closer ties to the NGK in the Cape Province and the anti-modernist position of the Carnegie Commission.

In 1934, the government relaxed some of its restrictions on elderly people with children. Eventually, in 1937, the age of eligibility for women was reduced to sixty, and benefits were increased to maxima of £42 per year for white and £21 for coloured pensioners. The limits on income allowed in the means test were also raised.¹⁹ The consequences are evident in Figures 1 and 2. In 1937 and 1938, both the total number of pensioners and total expenditure on pensions rose sharply. Between November 1936 and November 1939, the number of white pensioners rose by 55 percent, the number of coloured pensioners by 44 percent and total expenditure rose by 90 percent. The growth in total expenditure occurred despite the fact that the new maximum benefits and means-test schedule meant that the number of pensioners receiving the maximum actually dropped very sharply in 1937. Indian and African people continued to be excluded from the programme.

Furthermore, the government expanded its involvement in social policy through a range of new programmes. The Pienaar Committee in 1927 had recommended an invalidity grant programme alongside the old-age pension programme. This was finally realised in 1936-37, along lines that entailed some compromise between the modernist and clerical approaches to social welfare. The Blind Persons Act²⁰ was modelled very closely on the 1928 Old Age Pensions Act. When discussing the new legislation, MPs used the modernising discourses associated with the social assistance programmes and did not voice the criticisms made by the Carnegie Commission. According to S.P. Le Roux, the Nationalist MP for Oudtshoorn in the Cape:

It is generally accepted that it is the duty of the State to see that its citizens have the opportunity of making a living. Accordingly, it is the object of every Government to create fields of employment for its

c851, 853 (Verster and Naude); 27th March 1935 (Grobler, Naude, van Rensburg, Pretorius, Steytler).

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 27th March 1935, col.3,910 (Derbyshire).

¹⁹ Act no 34 of 1937.

²⁰ Act no.11 of 1936.

citizens. As it is the general duty of the Government to provide such opportunities, I think that it is doubly the duty of the Government to see that unfit persons shall be given means of existence. It is shameful that people have to beg on the streets... ²¹

Labour Party MPs complained that the pension benefits were inadequate, as they did at every opportunity. Like the old-age pensions, this programme was run by civil servants under the general authority of the Minister of Finance, but taking advice from local welfare committees.

In January 1937, an Invalidity Pension Scheme was permanently introduced (by administrative fiat, not by statute) for needy Europeans who were unable to work because they were disabled (except for the blind). These were also means-tested, taking into account the income of resident unmarried children (and, in exceptional cases, of non-resident children). Like the blind pensions, they were modelled on the old-age pensions except that coloured people were excluded. Disability was determined by a medical officer in the Department of Public Health following an examination by the district surgeon. But applications for invalidity pensions were administered by local welfare committees, reflecting an additional concession to the approach advocated by the Carnegie Commission and NGK (South Africa, 1940a: 98-105).

New policies in 1937 concerned with the protection of poor white children provide the key test of the influence of the Carnegie Commission's advocacy of church-run poor relief. The South African state's first major moves to intervene in the private sphere of the family reflected the influence not of the Carnegie Commission and the NGK, but rather of the ACVV, Verwoerd and more 'liberal' reformers. Their emphasis was entirely on professional social work, and the church was largely excluded from administration. The reforms were effectively drafted by an Inter-departmental Committee, chaired by the Chief Magistrate of Johannesburg, S. Maynard Page, and enacted as the 1937 Children's Act.²²

The Children's Act had two main elements, both intended to prevent children becoming 'socially maladjusted' or delinquent as a result of growing up in bad conditions at home. First, a battery of measures provided for the state to

²¹ *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 26th March, 1936, col.2,056.

²² Given the detail in the ensuing Bill, it seems that the Committee must have been familiar with the 1921 American legislation, and was thus both way ahead of and in stark contrast with the Carnegie Commission.

intervene where children were being neglected and to ‘rehabilitate’ those who were already delinquent (see South Africa, 1940a; Paton, 1964: 274-5). Secondly, poor families would receive increased financial assistance. The overall emphasis of the Act was on ensuring a satisfactory home life. Although the Act provided for reformatories and ‘places of safety’ for delinquent children, the main emphasis was on ‘probation’, of children ‘in need of care’, delinquent children, and parents. This entailed an expansion of professional probation officers, employed by the Department of Social Welfare:

The supreme aim of probation is to conserve for the nation the socially desirable qualities of those persons whose normal development is in danger of being retarded or frustrated through physical or mental defects, social maladjustments or unwholesome environmental stimuli. Its method is that of family and individual case work. Every problem-child is approached individually as a unique human being, with weaknesses and potentialities peculiarly his own. The task of probation is by scientific social analysis to discover in each case the retarding and favourable factors in the child’s make-up and to bring influences to bear which will help him to overcome his anti-social tendencies and to make a socially valuable adjustment in the community. It involves co-operation with medical and psychological clinics in dealing with his physical or mental defects, with the school in gaining his educational adjustment, with the employer in obtaining suitable vocational placement, with his family and his community in providing him with a healthy social background. It demands, therefore, the marshalling of all social forces on a wide base, including preventive services, early discovery of social maladjustments and intensive supervision and guidance of individual cases. (South Africa, 1940a: 53)

Rather than cutting back on grants, the Act expanded its existing grants paid per child and added new grants (which became known as ‘mother’s pensions’ in South Africa as in America) for white and coloured mothers (or foster-mothers). The 1937 Act set down for the first time clear criteria for eligibility, beginning to transform the grants from poor relief to a social programme. Magistrates, ‘knowing local conditions and family circumstances’, had some discretion on the size of the grants. Local state officials were required to work closely with registered child welfare organisations (such as the ACVV) and not with church-controlled committees. The functions of these child welfare organisations included bringing to the attention of state officials ‘cases of destitute children “in need of care”, making investigations, preparing reports and

recommendations, obtaining particulars of the home conditions and environment of families and carrying out general supervision of cases committed to their care, as well as assuming responsibility for disbursement of grants paid through them to cases under their supervision' (South Africa, 1940a: 60).

The introduction of new grants did not mean that the Department of Social Welfare rejected entirely the criticisms of these expressed by the Carnegie Commission. Kuschke echoed some of these criticisms in his first departmental report. In introducing subsidies for crèches for working mothers in July 1938, he wrote, the Department sought to encourage poor mothers who 'show a desire to maintain their independence of spirit by providing for their children through their own efforts'; in the absence of crèches, the families 'would probably become ... dependent upon government grants' (South Africa, 1940a: 81). Kuschke contrasted his departmental policy of rehabilitation with 'a system of doles', that bred dependency and allowed bad habits and attitudes to fester. 'Social welfare is not to be attained by the free disbursements of the means of sustaining life but by the awakening of thought and the progress of ideas and by arresting the disintegration of health and character of rich and poor alike' (*ibid*: 8). He even expressed some guarded criticism of old-age, blind and invalidity pensions, which were administered 'at long range from Pretoria' and not by professionals with a 'thorough knowledge' of each case, able to ensure 'appropriate' interventions that might require 'strictness' or even 'severity' (*ibid*: 11-12). 'If a family is receiving doles it does not require', he stated, 'the effect upon its morale can be most detrimental' (*ibid*: 31). Too many poor people expected assistance from the state, and easily became dependent on it; as the state expands its programmes of assistance, so 'the people's spirit of dependency grows'. 'It is of the essence of social welfare that the State should not be looked upon as a stranded whale from which the blubber can be cut with impunity' (*ibid*: 13). Kuschke agreed with the Carnegie Commissioners who identified 'this spirit of dependence' as one of 'the root causes of poor-whitism'. Kuschke had his own mantra: 'Emancipation from dependence spells rehabilitation' (*ibid*: 12).

But, by the late 1930s, Kuschke and the Department of Social Welfare had become convinced that the ACVV and Verwoerdian proposals were better than those of the Carnegie Commission and NGK. The state should co-operate not so much with the church as with more specialist welfare organisations that embraced professional social work. The state would subsidise professional social workers employed by organisations like the ACVV and would employ probation officers to work with such organisations in keeping a close eye on poor white families. Subsidised social centres would enable better co-ordination

between welfare organisations. Organisations would have to keep careful records. This was not so much a case of the church penetrating the state, as the state extending its own reach through working with organisations in civil society that were registered and bureaucratised.

The Department of Social Welfare was the vehicle for some, mostly short-lived concessions to the church. This was evident to J.L. Gray, who pointed to the resilience of what he thought was a Calvinist tradition. ‘The Puritan exaltation of work’, he wrote, ‘has survived even the idleness induced by cheap native labour’ (Gray, 1937: 278). The Carnegie Report, he wrote, had combined enlightened argument with a continuing emphasis on ‘the virtues of self-help in the language of Samuel Smiles’, and the new Department of Social Welfare seemed to be concerned with the perpetuation of the discredited English Poor Law tradition (*ibid*: 278-80). The very existence of an independent Department of Social Welfare was a concession, but not so much to the church as to the ACVV and Verwoerd. The function of the new Department was ‘to rehabilitate the socially unadjusted or poorly adjusted individual or family’ (quoted in South Africa, 1940a: 8), but it was to do this through professional social work not religious discipline.

The Department of Social Welfare was responsible, however, for only a small part of the growing welfare state. When the government clarified its role in 1938, it insisted that the Department concern itself with rehabilitation in co-ordination with other government departments engaged in ‘constructive social planning’ (quoted in South Africa, 1940a: 8). The new Department of Social Welfare assumed responsibility for activities that entailed the rehabilitation of individuals and families so that the unemployed or unemployable – mostly men – could become productive workers (and breadwinners). Even some aspects of this project were the responsibility of other departments, for example the Department of Education ran industrial schools and reformatories. The Department of Social Welfare did not assume responsibility for the old-age or blind pensions, which continued to be dealt with by the Commissioner of Pensions and the Ministry of Finance. Nor did it deal with unemployment insurance, introduced on a limited basis under the 1937 Unemployment Benefit Act. The Department, in its first Report, listed all of the Union Government’s expenditures on ‘services of an essentially social welfare nature’, including expenditures on public works programmes and other projects that provided the poor with income. Just 7 percent of the total listed expenditures were included in the Department’s own budget (South Africa, 1940a: 10-11). Policies to alleviate poverty among white (and perhaps coloured) people were the concern of many government departments, and even the more narrow field of ‘social

policy' covered the work of several departments. The Department of Social Welfare was broadly responsible for 'social work', whilst other departments were responsible for putting money into the pockets of the poor.

The government's preferred combination of *both* public provision *and* rehabilitative social work had been set out in passing by the 1936-37 Inter-Departmental Committee on Poor Relief and Charitable Organisations (South Africa, 1937). Kuschke himself might have voiced criticisms over public spending, but neither the government nor many other key officials shared his views. And, by the end of the 1930s, the experiment in church-run local committees had been abandoned. In 1940, on the recommendation of an Inter-departmental Committee, the local invalidity committees were reconstituted so as to shift power from the representatives of churches and charities to local state officials (South Africa, 1940b).

4. The Politics of a Bifurcated Welfare State

The church-based critique of the nascent welfare state had some impact in the early 1930s, but state spending on non-educational social policies rose steadily. One part of this growing welfare state entailed the expansion of professional social work, as advocated by the ACVV, Verwoerd and others, and implemented primarily through the Department of Social Welfare. The major part of the growing welfare state was the continued expansion of expensive programmes, including not only pensions to the elderly, the disabled or blind, and families with poor children, but also unemployment insurance, assistance to farmers and a battery of public works programmes. These were the dependency-building programmes that the Carnegie Commission had denounced. If they could not be credited to the Carnegie Commission, what were the causes of this continuing welfare-state building? The answer lies in the combination of the Great Depression, a dramatic improvement in public finances after 1933, and the change in government in 1933-34. The Great Depression exposed the inadequacies of existing policies. New tax revenues from gold-mining, made possible by the rising price of gold following the collapse of the gold standard, strengthened the finances of central government and permitted new programmatic and discretionary expenditures. The change of government in 1933-34 brought into office key ministers with a deeper commitment to programmatic reform.

The Great Depression – and concurrent drought on the Platteland – undermined confidence in the sufficiency of the policies of the Pact Government. Hertzog was quoted as declaring, during the 1929 election campaign, that his government had ‘absolutely solved’ the ‘poor white problem’ through its ‘civilised labour’ policies. Unskilled white workers were employed at high wages, replacing black workers, especially on the state-owned railways (where white unskilled workers rose from 10 to 40 percent of the workforce). Hertzog denied saying that there were no unemployed white people, but insisted that the unemployment rate was much lower than in other countries.²³ The Depression changed the situation, producing ‘abnormal unemployment’ (as the official *Union Yearbook* later put it). The number of white men employed on subsidised schemes, mostly road and railway construction projects run by provincial or local government, rose dramatically: from just 5,000 in January 1932 to 11,500 in July, 16,000 in January 1933 and more than 25,000 by July. In 1934, the new Government set about reorganising its public works programmes by establishing schemes of a more permanent nature. These included afforestation programmes, massive irrigation schemes, programmes to stop soil erosion and a scheme to clear noxious vegetation.²⁴ Under these circumstances, even Malanite Nationalist Party MPs demanded ‘security’ for the poor man and worker.²⁵

The Secretary for Social Welfare, Kuschke, later noted that calls for an independent Department of Social Welfare had been made by the Carnegie Commission, the 1934 *Volkskongres* and at a 1936 National Conference on Social Work. But he then added that:

Notwithstanding the Carnegie Commission’s undoubted influence on public opinion I incline to the view that but for the big depression of 1929 the Department of Social Welfare would not have been born. To me the department is a product of the depression... The engulfment of large numbers of industrious and thrifty Union citizens, especially farmers, by the backwash of the world depression badly jarred the then current and complacent conception that the attainment of success was entirely an individual matter and failure a form of personal dishonour. (South Africa, 1940a: 3)

Official government documents began to refer to the ‘abnormal’ circumstances of the Depression, and the consequent need for new programmatic responses

²³ *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 14th August 1929, col.892.

²⁴ *Union Yearbook* volume 19 (1938); see also *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 15th February 1935, col.1,647.

²⁵ *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 22nd January 1935, col.417.

(South Africa, 1937, 1938). In South Africa, as in America²⁶, the growth of poverty among respectable, hard-working family men undermined explanations in terms of moral character. In South Africa, it prompted additional anxiety about national decline and the security of white supremacy (Klausen, 2004: 23).

The Depression, perversely, had an unanticipated and positive effect on public finances. Havenga was very committed to 'sound finance' and kept public expenditure under a tight rein. Fiscal concerns were later cited as the reason why the Pact Government had not implemented more of the Pienaar Commission's recommendations. According to Dr Nikolaas van der Merwe, the Malanite National Party MP for Winberg and a former member of the Pienaar Commission:

There was only one reason why the Government did not proceed further, and that was that the old age pensions cost the country over £1,000,000, and the Government hesitated to incur still more expense. ... [I]t was merely a matter of finance... All the necessary calculations were made, and I think that the Minister of Finance will admit that the chief reason why the sickness and unemployment insurance could not be introduced, was a financial one. The old age pensions put such a big burden on the country that the Government could go no further.²⁷

Havenga's fiscal conservatism was most evident during the crisis over the gold standard during 1931-2. The gold standard underpinned fixed exchange rates, based on fixed-priced gold. Suffering under the Depression, the British and thirty-one other governments left the gold standard in September 1931 in order to allow their currencies to depreciate against the dollar. Havenga delayed doing likewise, until he was compelled to do so in December 1932. Ironically, abandoning the gold standard was to result in a massive improvement in public finances: faced with a rapidly rising gold price, the government introduced a new Excess Profits Tax on the goldmines. Tax revenues rose by £10 million between 1932-33 and 1933-34. The government was able to repay much of its foreign debt, and to increase public spending – by 15 percent in just one year and then by a further 31 percent by 1938. As one MP put it, the Treasury was 'overflowing'.²⁸

²⁶ The Depression was the cause of the transformation of the American welfare state through the New Deal, between 1933 and 1937 (Trattner, 1989; Katz, 1996).

²⁷ *Hansard*, House of Assembly, 18th April 1935, col.5,225.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 26th March 1936, col.2,057 (Le Roux) and 2,058 (Alexander); see also 18th April 1935,

Political realignment also strengthened the state-building reformers in Parliament. Almost immediately after introducing old-age pensions, the Pact Government lapsed into paralysis on social policy reforms. This seems to have had political as well as fiscal causes. The Labour Party, having split in 1928, performed disastrously in the 1929 elections and lost most of their influence in the Pact Government. The Nationalist Party was riven by division, with some MPs sharing the opinions of the NGK and Carnegie Commission on the need to roll back the welfare state. MPs from the opposition parties uniformly and strongly opposed the 1931 Old-Age Pensions Bill. In March 1933, in the immediate aftermath of the crisis over the gold standard, the South African Party joined the National Party in a coalition government. The following year the two parties ‘fused’ into a new United Party – with a dissenting minority of National Party MPs, led by Dr D.F. Malan, reformed themselves as the GNP. The formation of the Fusion Government brought J.H. Hofmeyr into the cabinet, with responsibilities initially including education and public health, and later including also labour and social welfare. This was not a liberal administration, but Hofmeyr was to prove a decisive appointment, playing a role in most of the reforms that expanded the welfare state after 1933. A concurrent development that strengthened reform was the enfranchisement of (white) women in 1930 and the subsequent election, in 1933, of the first woman MP. By 1937 there were three women MPs in the House of Assembly, and two more were elected in 1938.²⁹ Moving into opposition also pushed the Malanite GNP into campaigning more energetically over the ‘poor white question’, especially after Verwoerd shifted from academia to politics (at the end of 1936). The Carnegie Commission’s ‘finding’ that there had been at least 300,000 ‘poor whites’ in 1930 became a symbol of enduring Afrikaner oppression, used prominently in emergent Afrikaner nationalist mobilisation (O’Meara, 1983; Tayler, 1992; Giliomee, 2003).

Conclusion

Both the character and the impact of the Carnegie Commission need to be reassessed. The conventional interpretations – that the Commission’s use of surveys and statistical analysis marked it as a foundation stone for ‘modern’ statecraft (Posel, 2000; see also Fleisch, 1995) and that it argued that white poverty was a ‘social problem’ rather than one of ‘moral failure’ (e.g. Fleisch, 1995) – are flawed. The Commission saw white poverty as *both* a ‘social

col.5,225 (van der Merwe); also Yudelman (1983: 252).

²⁹ South Africa, *Parliamentary Register, 1910-1961* (Cape Town: House of Assembly, 1970).

problem' *and* a problem of 'moral failure', and its recommended solution was a reversion to 'constructive charity' and the fostering of self-help, led by the church, *not* the expansion of a modernising welfare-state or the expansion of mutual aid (through social insurance). On the crucial question of *what* to do, the Commission represented a backlash against the prior expansion of the welfare state in South Africa.

The Commission did not stop the growth of the welfare state, nor did it succeed even in reorienting social policy around the 'poor white' rather than the unemployed or the elderly. The Depression, a rapid improvement in public finance and a change of government all served to encourage the expansion of state provision. Building on the Carnegie Commission's findings, however, the ACVV and academics led by Verwoerd were able to promote a professional social work component within the nascent welfare state; even the ACVV and Verwoerd, however, had important differences of opinion with the Carnegie Commission, and their hostility to church-based committees between 1933 and 1937 probably prevented this key Commission proposal from being implemented successfully.

By the end of the 1930s, therefore, South Africa's emerging welfare state had several different components. Only one of these was based in the Department of Social Welfare (before and after this was constituted as a separate department). It was this component of the welfare state that was influenced by the demands for professional social work made weakly by the Carnegie Commission but more forcefully by the ACVV and Verwoerd, including at the 1934 *volkskongres*. This side of the welfare state combined modernist techniques of professional social work with the discretion previously inherent in magisterial poor relief and church-run charity. As Kuschke made clear, this side of the welfare state accorded with at least some of the criticisms made by the Commission and church of the state's big spending programmes. But this side of the welfare state was small, accounting for a very small proportion of total expenditure on welfare, and social work was in its infancy. The second side of the welfare state comprised those big spending programmes, that is, the old-age pensions, the pensions for blind or disabled people, and to a lesser extent the new 'mother's pensions', as well as the programmes of financial assistance to farmers and an array of employment creation programmes. These programmes were entirely or partially outside of the control of the Department of Social Welfare. The third side of the South African welfare state – social insurance, of benefit primarily to skilled urban workers – remained small, stunted perhaps by the dominance of the first two sides.

All three sides of the welfare state were racialised (although the third much less overtly). The first two sides had both been established out of the concern among white elites with the 'poor white problem' (a concern that predated the Carnegie Commission). This concern was not rooted in the militancy of 'poor whites', but rather in the combination of their voting strength and their importance to other white classes as allies in the defence of 'civilisation', that is, white supremacy. The racial exclusiveness of the nascent welfare state was to be eroded in the early and mid-1940s, affecting all three sides of the welfare state. As Posel (2005) has argued, the identification of what might be called a 'poor black problem' in urban areas in the late 1930s fuelled an expansion of the first side of the welfare state to African people in the 1940s. But the major expansion of the welfare state with regard to African people was to involve the second side, especially through the extension of old-age pensions in 1944 (see Seekings, 2000, 2005), and also the third side, through the reform of unemployment insurance in 1946. The recommendations of the Carnegie Commission thus faded still further into myth.

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