

PART 1  
THE COURSE AND LOCAL  
RESPONSES

## CHAPTER 1

## THE GOLD MINES OF THE RAND

Without any warning, cases of what was later identified as Spanish 'flu suddenly began to appear among Black mineworkers on the central Rand about 18 September 1918.<sup>1</sup> Within a few days it had spread to mines all along the Reef, curtailing operations and filling existing mine-hospitals to such an extent that temporary hospitals had to be set up hastily to cope with the daily influx of new cases.<sup>2</sup> By 27 September over 14 000 cases had been reported,<sup>3</sup> including more than 100 White miners.<sup>4</sup> Anxiously mine medical officers submitted lung, throat, sputum and blood specimens from 'flu victims to the South African Institute for Medical Research (SAIMR) for analysis,<sup>5</sup> aware of the vulnerability of Black mineworkers to pneumonia and of the danger posed by the tightly packed conditions in the compound if the highly infectious disease were to become fatal. In an effort to restrict its progress, managers were asked to discourage their workers from visiting other mines.<sup>6</sup>

How the 'flu reached the Rand is a matter of conjecture. The earliest recorded cases in South Africa occurred in Durban on 9 September, when several Black stevedores were stricken with what seems to have been mild, first-wave Spanish 'flu.<sup>7</sup> Further cases of this sort soon followed among their fellow-workers.<sup>8</sup> Whether it was these men who infected a party of Natal mineworkers bound for the Rand or whether it was a batch of infected migrant workers from Mozambique who carried this wave to the Reef (as happened during the Asiatic influenza epidemic in 1957<sup>9</sup>) is unknown; however, it is probable that first-wave Spanish 'flu followed one of these two paths to the gold mines of the Transvaal rather than having been "brought by some person or persons from England by the last mail", as a contemporary report assumed.<sup>10</sup>

Initially, the 'flu was very mild in form, deaths being rare and recovery swift. In medical circles the visitation was "not seriously regarded"; it would only "produce temporary inconvenience without serious loss", reported Reuters, and, "in view of the fact that such a very large number of people have been affected, the fact that there has been only one death must be considered to be reassuring".<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, mine officials recognised that some precautions had to be taken, for the onset of the disease was sudden, often totally incapacitating the victim without warning. The Prevention of Accidents on Mines Committee recommended that workers directly responsible for the lives of others be urged to report "any unusual symptoms in regard to health" they experienced while on duty; in particular, it laid down that drivers "employed in raising and lowering persons

1. Union of South Africa: *Report of the Influenza Epidemic Commission*, UG 15-'19, para. 39.
2. IEC, vol. 1, file 2: Evidence of Dr. P. Donaldson, pp. 120-121, 125; Evidence of Dr. H. F. Loeser, p. 1.
3. *Daily Dispatch*, 28/9/1918, p. 7.
4. *De Volkstem*, 27/9/1918, p. 8.
5. IEC, vol. 1, file 2: Written Report by Dr. F. S. Lister, "The Influenza Epidemic on the Witwatersrand, Sept. 22nd to October 21st 1918. Bacteriological Notes", p. 2; *Medical Journal of South Africa*, October 1918, p. 284.
6. Chamber of Mines Archives: File "Influenza Epidemic of 1918 and 1919" (hereafter C of M 'Flu file), NRC Circular Letter no. 215, 24/9/1918.
7. Central Archives, Pretoria (hereafter CA): SAS 825, file P2/159, Memorandum for Sir William Hoy, 7/1/1919.
8. UG 15-'19, para. 38.
9. I owe this suggestion to Prof. J. H. S. Gear, former Director of the SAIMR.
10. *Daily Dispatch*, 25/9/1918, p. 5.
11. *Daily Dispatch*, 28/9/1918, p. 7.



should not start the engine on any trip unless they are feeling perfectly normal".<sup>12</sup>

This warning proved in vain. At 3.30am on 1 October, as he was hoisting a cage with 41 Black miners to the surface at the ERPM mine, Driver W. E. Hill was paralysed by a sudden attack of Spanish 'flu. As he sat before his controls, "powerless to act . . . a multitude of lights . . . exploding before his eyes",<sup>13</sup> the cage went on being raised until it hit the top of the head-gear and plummeted back to earth from a height of one hundred feet. It smashed onto the collar of the shaft, killing twenty of its occupants and injuring eight. The official inquiry into the accident did not find Hill to have been "criminally neglectful, but in view of the shock to his nervous system and owing also to the lack of knowledge of the possible after-effects of Spanish influenza on a person who has contracted the malady", it felt he should not resume his job for at least a month, and then only if the mine's medical inspector certified him fit to do so.<sup>14</sup>

Yet it was not only in this indirect manner that the Spanish 'flu claimed lives on the mines. From early in October fatal complications became increasingly frequent among 'flu sufferers and the death-toll began to mount: 211 deaths between 5 and 8 October,<sup>15</sup> 203 on 9 and 10 October<sup>16</sup> and 220 between 16 and 22 October.<sup>17</sup> By early in November when the epidemic had waned, 1 147 Black mineworkers on the Rand had fallen victim to the Spanish 'flu. In the preceding six weeks nearly 61 000 of the estimated 190 000 employed on the gold mines had been admitted to various mine hospitals with the disease.<sup>18</sup>

These deaths, the debility of the survivors, the return home – despite the Native Labour Bureau's efforts to dissuade them – of thousands whose contracts had expired and who wished to escape the 'flu<sup>19</sup> cut the number of Black mineworkers on the Rand sharply. To add to this shortage the inflow of new workers in the last ten weeks of the year was much depleted<sup>20</sup> by the epidemic's ravages in the recruiting areas and the understandable reluctance of many to risk travelling to a disease-filled Rand. "Of course very exaggerated ideas are to be found among the natives anent this disease," reported one labour recruiter from Port Shepstone on 21 October.<sup>21</sup>

12. C of M 'Flu file, NRC Circular Letter no. 215, 24/9/1918.

13. Quoted in R. Collier: *The Plague of the Spanish Lady*, p. 59.

14. *Rand Daily Mail*, 17/10/1918. For further information on this accident see Union of South Africa: *Annual Report of the Secretary for Mines and Industries and Government Mining Engineer for 1918*, UG 38-19, pp. 38, 43, 50; *Medical Journal of South Africa*, December 1918, p. 322; *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 4/10/1918, p. 7.

15. CA: GNLB 301, file 370/18/103, NRC Circular Letter no. 209, 14/11/1918.

16. *Ibid.*; and *The Star*, 11/10/1918.

17. C of M: NRC file "Spanish Influenza", Table headed "NRC Ltd – Spanish Influenza 15.10.18"; CA: GNLB 301, file 370/18/103, NRC Circular Letter no. 209, 14/11/1918.

18. *The Star*, 7/11/1918. Somewhat lower figures were given by the Chairman of the Native Recruiting Corporation to an NRC General Meeting (*NRC Ltd: Report of Board of Management for 1918-1919*, p. 6), but these covered the period only to 31/10/1918 (see CA: GNLB 301, file 370/18/103, NRC Circular Letter no. 209, 14/11/1918). A later Department of Public Health report stated that 2 017 Blacks died on mines on the Rand from influenza during the whole of 1918, but it is impossible to know how many of these were from Spanish influenza (Union of South Africa: *Annual Departmental Reports (Abridged)*, no. 1, 1920-1: *Department of Public Health*, UG 8-22, p. 135.)

19. *The Star*, 15/10/1918 (Circular issued by Director of Native Labour).

20. See Table 1A, p. 7.

21. C of M: NRC file "Spanish Influenza", NRC Recruiter Port Shepstone to NRC, 21/10/1918. See too letters in the same file from NRC Recruiter Indwe to NRC, 21/10/1918 and from Assistant Superintendent NRC Queenstown to NRC, 18/11/1918. Also see *NRC Ltd: Report of Board of Management for 1918-1919*, p. 6; *S A Mining Journal and Engineering Record*, 30/11/1918, p. 263, and 22/2/1919, p. 609; *Rand Daily Mail*, 24/12/1918.

To make the mines' labour problem even worse, late in November Spanish 'flu began to appear in a serious form among recruits arriving from Mozambique.<sup>22</sup> Under pressure from the Portuguese authorities who wished to prevent the disease spreading throughout their territory and fearful of a new wave reaching the Rand,<sup>23</sup> the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) decided to halt all recruiting in Mozambique early in December.<sup>24</sup> In return, the Portuguese authorities agreed that all Mozambican workers already in the Transvaal should remain there until recruiting was restarted. In this way it was hoped to offset the effect the suspension of recruiting would have on the Rand's labour supply.<sup>25</sup> These measures remained in force until mid-March 1919 when the original arrangement was restored,<sup>26</sup> only to be disrupted once again in May 1919 by a fresh outbreak of Spanish 'flu in some districts of Mozambique.<sup>27</sup>

As a result of these acute disruptions of the Black labour supply, by 31 December the number of Black workers on the gold mines (already 26% below requirements before the 'flu struck) had shrunk to 62% of the necessary complement.<sup>28</sup> The Black labour force "had been depleted to a greater extent than ever before in the history of the mines, having regard to the scope of operations", observed the President of the Chamber of Mines gloomily in his Annual Report for 1918.<sup>29</sup>

The consequent fall in output and profits was dramatic,<sup>30</sup> striking a sharp blow to an industry already in the midst of a crisis of profitability.<sup>31</sup> In November 1918 seventeen of the 48 mines on the Rand reported a net loss for the month.<sup>32</sup> The overall profit for November of £480 102 was described in the industry as "the poorest monthly profit since the Chamber of Mines recorded the financial results of working, the figure being nearly £300 000 below that of the strike month, July, 1913".<sup>33</sup> "The influenza has indeed played havoc with the profits and makes one very anxious about the future", admitted Sir Lionel Phillips, chairman of Central Mining, in a private letter to the President of the Chamber of Mines. "One thing after another appears to arise to prey upon the gold mines."<sup>34</sup>

The 'flu epidemic's adverse effect on one of the cornerstones of the mining industry's profitability, a ready supply of cheap Black labour, continued for several months,<sup>35</sup> exacerbating the problem of low grade mines in particular. At the already faltering Princess Estate Mine, for instance, the 'flu "reduced the number of natives available for work to such an extent that development operations were

22. C of M 'Flu file, WNLA Circular no. M27/18, 28/11/1918; "Note on Position that is Arising through Spanish Influenza" by Manager and Secretary WNLA, 5/12/1918.

23. *Ibid.*, "Note on Position that is Arising . . ." by Manager and Secretary WNLA, 5/12/1918 and enclosed copy of telegram from WNLA District Manager Lourenço Marques to WNLA, 4/12/1918.

24. *Ibid.*, WNLA Circular no. M 31/18, 10/12/1918.

25. CA: NA 192, file 596/473, Portuguese Curator to Director of Native Labour, 13/12/1918; and Native Affairs Department Circular Minute A 28/18, 14/12/1918. See too CA: GNLB 301, part file 370/18/103, Manager and Secretary WNLA to Acting Director of Native Labour, 4/1/1919.

26. C of M 'Flu file, WNLA Circular no. M2a/19, 7/3/1919; CA: GNLB 301, part file 370/18/103, Manager and Secretary WNLA to Acting Director of Native Labour, 6/3/1919.

27. *Transvaal Chamber of Mines: 30th Annual Report, 1919*, p. 543.

28. Standard Bank Archives: General Manager's Half Yearly Report, 31/12/1918, p. 45.

29. *Transvaal Chamber of Mines: 29th Annual Report, 1918*, p. 71.

30. See Tables 1B and 1C, p. 7.

31. F. A. Johnstone: *Class, Race and Gold*, pp. 93-104; D. Yudelman: *The Emergence of Modern South Africa*, pp. 134-141.

32. *S A Mining Review*, December 1918, p. 211.

33. *Ibid.*

34. M. Fraser and A. Jeeves (eds.): *All That Glittered - Selected Correspondence of Lionel Phillips*, p. 318.

35. See Table 1A, p. 7.

again impeded for several months".<sup>36</sup> Together with other problems, this was to prove disastrous to its continued operation within eighteen months.<sup>37</sup>

Some mines tried to speed up the introduction of jackhammers and machine-drills to reduce their labour needs, but this was a long-term solution, with political, economic and practical limits.<sup>38</sup> More common, especially once World War I had ended, was a louder, more insistent demand for recruiting to be again permitted north of latitude 22°S.<sup>39</sup> If this was not sanctioned, warned the industry's representatives, dire consequences would follow.<sup>40</sup> In a clear bid to force the Government's hand in this matter, in May 1919 the President of the Chamber of Mines addressed an open letter to F. S. Malan, Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Mines and Industries, in which he complained, inter alia, of the "constantly decreasing supply of native labourers. . . . So far as we can see," he went on, "nothing can now prevent a number of important mines, employing a large number of Europeans and upon whose operations the prosperity of a considerable sectoin [sic] of the Witwatersrand depends, from ceasing operations in the next few months. The situation is one of the utmost gravity, its most serious aspect being the unemployment and distress that are bound to follow."<sup>41</sup>

The following month the Government appointed a commission of inquiry to look into the overall position of the 21 low grade mines. However, its recommendation that Blacks from north of latitude 22°S be recruited<sup>42</sup> was not accepted, as the premium price for gold from July 1919 rendered the position of these mines less precarious, at least for the time being.<sup>43</sup> However, as the President of the Chamber of Mines recognised, the problem of the low grade mines had not been solved, "but merely postponed".<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, no opportunity had been lost by the mining industry to impress on Government, recruiter and labourer how satisfactory medical facilities and living conditions on the mines really were. The comparatively low mortality from Spanish flu was widely publicised, "eloquent testimony", declared the President of the Chamber of Mines, "to the medical officers of the mines, the compound managers, and the hospital staffs".<sup>45</sup> Indeed, in his presidential address the following year he regretted that labour recruiting had come to a standstill at the time, for it was

36. Union of South Africa: *Report of Committee of Inquiry into the Closing Down of the Princess Estate Mine*, UG 39-20, p. 4.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 10.

38. *Rand Daily Mail*, 27/11/1918; *S A Mining Journal and Engineering Record*, 1/2/1919, p. 500; *Transvaal Chamber of Mines - 29th Annual Report, 1918*, p. 44; *Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Coy. Ltd: Report of the Directors and Statement of Accounts for Year ended 30/6/1919*, p. 12. Only after White labour had been crushed in 1922 could this machinery be more rapidly introduced (F. A. Johnstone: *Class, Race and Gold*, pp. 142-143; R. H. Davies: *Capital, State and White Labour in South Africa 1900-1960*, pp. 157-158).

39. Until 1913 Blacks from north of latitude 22°S were recruited for the gold mines. However, so heavy was mortality among them, especially from pneumonia, that in that year the South African Government prohibited further recruiting in these areas. An attempt early in 1918 to have this ban lifted failed (F. A. Johnstone: *Class, Race and Gold*, p. 97; S. v. d. Horst: *Native Labour in South Africa*, p. 221).

40. See for instance, *S A Mining and Engineering Journal*, 5/7/1919, p. 537; *ibid.*, 19/7/1919, p. 576; *WNLA: Report of Board of Management for 1918*, Chairman's speech at meeting, 28/4/1919.

41. *S A Mining and Engineering Journal*, 24/5/1919, p. 351. See too D. Yudelman: *The Emergence of Modern South Africa*, p. 139.

42. Union of South Africa: *Interim Report of the Low Grade Mines Commission*, UG 45-19, para. 45.

43. Union of South Africa: *Report of the Low Grade Mines Commission*, UG 34-20, paras. 1, 2; F. A. Johnstone: *Class, Race and Gold*, pp. 95, 119. It was not until 1933 that the ban on labour from north of 22°S was partially lifted (S. v. d. Horst: *Native Labour in South Africa*, p. 222).

44. *Transvaal Chamber of Mines - 30th Annual Report, 1919*, p. 64.

45. *S A Mining Journal and Engineering Record*, 30/11/1918, p. 263. See too *NRC Ltd: Report of Board of Management for 1918-1919*, p. 6; and Cape Archives: 1/BUT 58, file 31, extract from speech by Wallers to Native Chiefs and Councillors, 26/3/1919.

impossible to prevent the 'flu spreading, "and the natives are better off on the mines than at their homes, and no more likely to contract the disease."<sup>46</sup>

How this rosy picture of conditions on the mines was communicated to the very source of the much-desired labour is well illustrated by an item in the *Matatiele Mail* in November 1918.<sup>47</sup> This report was no more than a precis of a Native Recruiting Corporation (NRC) circular<sup>48</sup> which had praised the "prompt measures taken to combat the epidemic" and the "thorough organization and equipment of native hospitals on the Mines"; it also pointed out that the 'flu epidemic had not made dreaded pneumonia any more common on the gold mines.

"The low percentage of deaths speaks well for the way the boys are treated by the mines belonging to the Native Recruiting Corporation," commented the *Matatiele Mail* approvingly.<sup>49</sup>

Yet it was not primarily these assurances which slowly increased the supply of labour during 1919. Far more important were the waning of the 'flu in the recruiting areas and the pressing shortage of food in areas such as the Transkei and Ciskei. In part, this stemmed from poor harvests as a result of a severe drought and late planting caused by the epidemic.<sup>50</sup> As early as January 1919 a well-informed authority on the Rand was forecasting that,

"owing to the poor crops in some of the Native Territories and losses suffered through the Epidemic, a considerable increase in the supply [of labour] may be anticipated in the near future."<sup>51</sup>

In spheres other than labour the epidemic left little permanent mark on the gold-mining industry. Comforted by the relatively low death-toll compared to Kimberley (where the far more virulent second wave of Spanish 'flu had decimated the workforce<sup>52</sup>), senior medical men in the Rand mining establishment seem to have concluded that in their compounds conditions were not in need of significant reform.<sup>53</sup>

Reconstructing the epidemic experience of the subjects of all this concern on the part of the mining industry, the Black mineworkers, is difficult, as sources are scanty. The close supervision exercised over them meant that few serious cases of 'flu went undetected and the recollections of 'flu survivors are dominated by memories of mine hospitals and hastily-converted dormitories filled with coughing men, running high fevers.<sup>54</sup> It appears that up to 14 October, the anti-'flu vaccine manufactured by the SAIMR was not generally employed,<sup>55</sup> probably because adequate supplies were not yet available. As for the efficacy of Lister's anti-

46. *Transvaal Chamber of Mines – 29th Annual Report, 1918*, p. 71.

47. *Matatiele Mail*, 28/11/1918.

48. CA: GNLB 301, file 370/18/103, NRC Circular no. 209, 14/11/1918.

49. *Matatiele Mail*, 28/11/1918.

50. See chapter 5, pp. 93–96.

51. Standard Bank Archives: General Manager's Half-Yearly Report, 31/12/1918, p. 46.

52. See Chapter 3, pp. 50, 53. Spanish 'flu mortality in the mining compounds of the Rand also seems to have been significantly lower than that in the gold mines of Southern Rhodesia and the copper mines of Katanga (I. Phimister: "The 'Spanish' Influenza Pandemic of 1918 and its Impact on the Southern Rhodesian Mining Industry" in *Central African Journal of Medicine*, XIX (July, 1973), p. 146; C. van Onselen: *Chibaro*, p. 55; C. Perrings: *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa*, pp. 40, 171).

53. See for instance, IEC, vol. 1, file 1: Evidence of Dr. W. Watkins-Pitchford, p. 39; IEC, vol. 1, file 2: Evidence of Dr. A. H. Watt, pp. 122–123.

54. Interviews with Mr. J. Mfunda and Mr. B. Mbeki.

55. *Transvaal Chamber of Mines – 29th Annual Report, 1918*, p. 96.

pneumococcal vaccine<sup>56</sup> against the pneumonic complications attendant upon the 'flu, the evidence is inconclusive.<sup>57</sup>

Many of those mineworkers who left the Rand to return home must have gone through grim experiences. Numerous deaths occurred on the road or in the veld as groups made their way homeward on foot. A farmer in the Graskop district reported that it was quite common "to come across natives all along the road just left to die". He had seen "gangs of natives fleeing in terror from a sick boy lying in the road". To him it seemed that, "if an ailing native is unable to proceed farther he is simply abandoned by his friends or brothers who may happen to have been accompanying him".<sup>58</sup>

Aboard the packed trains on which "there were frequent occurrences of natives being carried off . . . in a dying condition",<sup>59</sup> conditions in the Black coaches must have been horrific. On one such train the ticket-collector refused to enter these carriages "because there was so much illness there". When another passenger went in, he found "it was a ghastly mess".<sup>60</sup> An equally chilling picture is conjured up by *De Burger's* Pietersburg correspondent who wrote that corpses of Blacks "word langs die spoor van die treine gehaal tot bij Messina".<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, so bad did conditions on these trains become that in the middle of October the NRC arranged for hastily equipped hospital coaches to be attached to trains carrying large numbers of Blacks to or from the Rand. Supplied with basic medical requirements, each of these was manned by one White orderly and four Black attendants. Soup kitchens and a coffee-stall to dispense free sustenance to Black passengers were also set up at main stations en route.<sup>62</sup>

As for the Mozambican mineworkers forced to remain in the Transvaal by the "no recruiting, no repatriation" agreement between the South African and the Portuguese authorities,<sup>63</sup> they seem to have accepted their lot "with little demur",<sup>64</sup> despite the forebodings of South African officials.<sup>65</sup> The only public expression of impatience came from the 160 Mozambicans with phthisis in the WNLA Hospital who, as they "were all more or less in a very poor state of health owing to the

56. Dr. F. S. Lister, Chief Bacteriologist at the SAIMR, was developing a vaccine to counter the pneumonia which claimed the lives of so many Black mineworkers, especially those from north of latitude 22°S. (F. Wilson: *Labour in the South African Gold Mines 1911-1969*, p. 68).

57. *Transvaal Chamber of Mines - 29th Annual Report, 1918*, pp. 96-97; IEC, vol. 1, file 2: Evidence of Dr. H. A. Loeser, p. 1.

58. *The Star*, 8/11/1918 (Letter from D. H. Poole). For similar accounts, see *Transkeian Gazette*, 24/10/1918, Editorial; *Report of Transvaal Native Mission of the Presbyterian Church of South Africa for 1918*, p. 4.

59. IEC, vol. 1, file 1: Evidence of F. B. Rees, pp. 106-107.

60. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, no. 2: Evidence of W. H. Stuart, p. 4.

61. *De Burger*, 25/10/1918, p. 2. For similar accounts see CA: SAS 719, file G 119/5, telegrams from Station Master Naauwpoort to SAR, Johannesburg, 12/10/1918 and from Divisional Superintendent Port Elizabeth to SAR, Johannesburg, 19/10/1918; Cape Archives: 1/EDL 6/1/13, file 28/1B, telegram from Magistrate Elliotdale to Chief Magistrate Transkei, 14/10/1918; IEC, vol. 1, file 4: Evidence of J. B. Moffat, p. 1; SADF Archives: DC 1303, file 4003, Melle to Orenstein, 1/12/1918; *Territorial News*, 12/12/1918; *Transkeian Gazette*, 24/10/1918, Editorial.

62. *Transkeian Gazette*, 31/10/1918, Editorial; *The Star*, 22/10/1918 (Circular by Acting Director of Native Recruiting); C of M: NRC file "Spanish Influenza", Acting Chairman NRC to Dr. J. F. Young, 22/10/1918; *NRC Ltd. Report of Board of Management for 1918-1919*, p. 6; CA: GNLB 301, part file 370/18/103, Acting Director of Native Labour to Secretary for Native Affairs, 13/11/1918.

63. See p. 3 above.

64. CA: NA 192, file 596/473, Acting Director of Native Labour to Secretary for Native Affairs, 3/2/1919.

65. *Ibid.*, and telegram from Governor-General to Governor-General of Mozambique, 27/2/1919.

diseases contracted, . . . naturally wished to spend the last few days with their own kith and kin".<sup>66</sup>

When the embargo on repatriation was finally lifted early in March 1919, matters seem to have proceeded smoothly if slowly, under the strict supervision of Government and recruiting officials who had feared an uncontrolled rush by the 10 000 Mozambican workers concerned.<sup>67</sup>

In short, the chief significance of the 'flu epidemic for the Rand gold mines lay in the way that it aggravated the already serious shortage of Black workers. As such, it intensified the greater profitability crisis facing the mines, a crisis which was ultimately to lead to the Rand Revolt of 1922.

TABLE I  
EFFECT OF SPANISH 'FLU EPIDEMIC ON SUPPLY OF BLACK LABOUR, ON OUTPUT AND ON PROFITS OF RAND GOLD MINES, AUGUST 1918 - JULY 1919

## (A) LABOUR

		Total number of Black workers employed at gold-mining members of WNLA	Black workers recruited each month by WNLA and NRC
1918	Aug.	179 390	21 257
	Sept.	179 399	20 995
	Oct.	173 153	15 753
	Nov.	160 275	5 940
	Dec.	152 060	7 705
1919	Jan.	160 599	21 102
	Feb.	172 359	23 706
	March	175 620	21 857
	April	175 267	19 865
	May	173 376	16 505
	June	172 505	15 234
	July	173 613	18 319

## (B) OUTPUT

## (C) PROFITS

		Tons hoisted	Working profits (£)
1918	Aug.	2 351 292	676 146
	Sept.	2 215 980	600 330
	Oct.	2 214 943	531 774
	Nov.	2 053 759	480 102
	Dec.	1 987 403	507 860
1919	Jan.	2 117 293	547 793
	Feb.	1 981 606	498 204
	March	2 241 859	573 582
	April	2 189 059	573 143
	May	2 282 184	608 715
	June	2 174 488	592 361
	July	2 333 353	611 118

Source: Transvaal Chamber of Mines - Annual Reports, 1918 and 1919.

66. CA: GNLB 301, part file 370/18/103, W. Walker, Inspector Native Affairs Department, Johannesburg Central to Director of Native Labour, 3/3/1919.

67. C of M 'Flu file, WNLA Circular no. M 2a/19, 7/3/1919; CA: GNLB 301, part file 370/18/103, Acting Director of Native Labour to Inspectors and Pass Officers, 8/3/1919, and Acting Director of Native Labour to General Manager, SAR & H, 12/3/1919; NA 192, file 596/473, Acting Director Native Labour to Secretary of Native Affairs, 19/3/1919.

## CHAPTER 2

## CAPE TOWN

In the middle of September 1918, at the same time as cases of Spanish Influenza were first being noted in Durban and on the Rand, Cape Town was progressively being infected from another direction. As with most epidemics in the city's history, the introduction of Spanish 'flu was ship-borne. Indeed, some officials believed that as early as July 1918 vessels had begun to arrive in Cape Town with cases of the mild first-wave Spanish influenza then prevalent in Europe.<sup>1</sup> However, as influenza was not a notifiable disease and since the outbreaks were so benign, few had reported these cases.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until 13 September, when the *Jaroslav* arrived, that the Port Health Officer in Cape Town was informed of the presence of unusually infectious influenza on an incoming ship.<sup>3</sup> The *Jaroslav* was a troopship bringing some 1 300 South African Native Labour Corps (SANLC) troops home from Europe to be demobilized. Her Medical Officer reported that there had been 43 cases of influenza on board since she had called at Freetown, Sierra Leone;<sup>4</sup> thirteen of these were still laid up when she reached Cape Town.<sup>5</sup> However, he insisted that all the cases were very mild; he was convinced that it was ordinary influenza, save for its abrupt onset and short-lived course.<sup>6</sup> In fact, it is almost certain that these were early cases of the virulent second wave of Spanish 'flu which had originated in Freetown, Brest and Boston in August 1918.<sup>7</sup>

Unable to reconcile the Medical Officer's report with what he had already read about the seriousness of the Sierra Leone outbreak in the press, the Port Health Officer consulted the local Assistant MOH of the Department of Public Health, Dr. F. C. Willmot.<sup>8</sup> As there had been one death on board the *Jaroslav* on the night of her arrival, Willmot decided that those still suffering from influenza should be isolated in military hospitals ashore; the rest of the contingent were to be kept in quarantine at Rosebank Camp for two days until a post-mortem had been carried out on the dead man. During this time they were to undergo three thorough medical examinations before being allowed to leave.<sup>9</sup> When none developed 'flu (or any other) symptoms during this period, they were permitted to embark on

1. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. F. C. Willmot, pp. 1, 11; vol. 2, file 7, part 1: Written Evidence by Dr. Willmot, 29/11/1918, p. 1 and 15/1/1919, p. 1 and Annexure A; Evidence of Dr. P. J. W. Keet, p. 1; vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Lt. Col. A. Wright, p. 2; Union of South Africa: *Report of the Influenza Epidemic Commission*, UG 15-19, paras. 21, 24; *Cape Argus*, 5/11/1918, p. 7 (Letter from "Be Prepared"). See too ch. 7, p. 127.
2. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, pp. 1, 4; vol. 2, file 7, part 1: Evidence of Dr. Keet, pp. 2-3.
3. IEC, vol. 2, file 7, part 1: Evidence of Dr. Keet, p. 2.
4. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, p. 2; vol. 2, file 7, part 1: Written Evidence of Dr. Willmot, 29/11/1918, p. 2 and Annexure A. UG 15-19 gives a slightly lower figure in para. 31, but accepts the figure in the text in para. 21.
5. *Ibid.*
6. IEC, vol. 2, file 7, part 1: "Report on HMS Jaroslave [sic] handed in by Dr. P. W. J. Keet", p. 1.
7. A. W. Crosby: *Epidemic and Peace, 1918*, pp. 37-38; *Debates of the House of Assembly of the Union of South Africa as reported in the Cape Times*, vol. 4, p. 16, col. 2; *Rondebosch Boys' High School Magazine*, 4th Quarter 1918, pp. 15-16.
8. IEC, vol. 2, file 7, part 1: Written Evidence by Dr. Willmot, 29/11/1918, p. 2; Evidence of Dr. Keet, p. 2; Letter from Dr. J. P. Immelman to author, 29/5/1978.
9. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, p. 2; vol. 2, file 7, part 1: Written Evidence by Dr. Willmot, 29/11/1918, p. 2; vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Lt. Col. A. Wright, pp. 2-3; SADF Archives, Pretoria: DC 1303, file 4003, ADMS Hewat to DMS, 23/10/1918, enclosing Report by Major A. Dunley-Owen; WWI 1914-18 Diverse, Box-file 36, General War Diary, Diary of No. 1 General Hospital, Wynberg for September 1918.

trains for home on 16 and 17 September.<sup>10</sup> The following day influenza appeared among the camp staff at Rosebank,<sup>11</sup> in the ranks of the transport unit which had conveyed the troops there<sup>12</sup> and among the hospital staff at No. 7 Military Hospital, Woodstock where most of the *Jaroslav's* 'flu cases had been confined.<sup>13</sup>

When cases were also discovered on 19 September among SANLC and Cape Corps troops newly arrived at Rosebank from a second troopship, the *Veronej*, which had also called at Freetown, Willmot recognized "that this was more than ordinary influenza"<sup>14</sup> and instructed that *Jaroslav*-type measures be applied to these men viz. three thorough medical examinations in the 72 hours prior to departure. This was done and only troops with no sign of 'flu were permitted to entrain for the interior between 27 and 30 September,<sup>15</sup> leaving Willmot satisfied that adequate precautions had been taken to contain this unusually infectious (but quite mild) outbreak.<sup>16</sup> "He regarded it as serious only to the extent that he thought it would spread", he later explained to the Influenza Epidemic Commission. "He had nothing to indicate that the mortality would be high."<sup>17</sup> Moreover, his belief that Sierra Leoneans were especially prone to disease had made him feel that undue weight should not be given to accounts of the seriousness of the outbreak there.<sup>18</sup>

On 27 September he left for George to investigate a mysterious disease which had broken out there.<sup>19</sup> By the time he returned to Cape Town on 6 October,<sup>20</sup> Spanish 'flu and pneumonia deaths were exceeding 160 a day in the municipal area alone.<sup>21</sup>

How sure is it that infected troops from the *Jaroslav* and the *Veronej* did introduce this epidemic? When the circumstances of their landing became generally known in Cape Town early in October, the press needed little persuading that they were responsible. Their criticism of the Public Health Department was sharp: the *Cape Times* which, even before the 'flu broke in Cape Town had urged precautions lest the outbreak in Sierra Leone spread to the Union,<sup>22</sup> described the Department's officials as "gravely lacking in a sense of their duty to the public",<sup>23</sup>

10. IEC, vol. 2, file 7, part 1: Written Evidence by Dr. Willmot, 29/11/1918, p. 2; vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Major C. G. Davidson, p. 1.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Evening Post*, 28/8/1965, Weekend Magazine, p. 1 (Letter from Reverend C. F. Lewis).

13. UG 15-19, para. 31.

14. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, p. 4.

15. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, p. 2; vol. 2, file 7, part 1: Written Evidence by Dr. Willmot, 29/11/1918, pp. 2-3; vol. 2, file 8, part 1: Evidence of Major C. G. Davidson, pp. 1-3; UG 15-19, para. 35.

16. Including the preparation of autogenous vaccine from cases among the troops - see ch. 6, p. 104.

17. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, p. 14. In asserting this, Willmot made it clear that he had not regarded the pneumonia deaths among Nigerian troops on the *Shuja*, which had arrived from Mesopotamia via Durban on 15/9/1918, as stemming from influenza (His reasons for this appear in IEC, vol. 2, file 7, part 1: Written Evidence by Dr. Willmot, 29/11/1918, pp. 3-4). It is difficult to say whether he was correct in this conclusion, since Spanish 'flu did break out a week later among the rest of the *Shuja's* Nigerian troops, under close quarantine at Craig's Battery since being landed (IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Colonel Sir John Hewat, p. 1; UG 15-19, paras. 21 and 40). Willmot's statement also suggests that he was unaware of the deaths of 'flu cases landed from the *Jaroslav* and *Veronej*, or at least the import of these deaths (see p. 10). Certainly he made no mention of these in his evidence to the Influenza Epidemic Commission; perhaps the military authorities did not inform him of them.

18. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, pp. 3, 13.

19. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, p. 5.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Corporation of the City of Cape Town: Minute of Mayor for Year Ending 4/9/1919* (hereafter cited as CTMM 1918-1919), Appendix 8 (Report of MOH), Chart B.

22. *Cape Times*, 21/9/1918, Editorial.

23. *Cape Times*, 7/10/1918, Editorial.



while *De Burger* accused the Department of “grove [sic] nalatigheid”<sup>24</sup> and asked rancorously whether

“die siekte dan weer maar net een van die onheile . . . [is], waaraan Suid-Afrika moet lij as gevolg van die verderfelike politiek om ons inboorlinge na die vegterrein van Europa te stuur?”<sup>25</sup>

Newspapers and their readers elsewhere in the Union readily accepted this allocation of blame and joined in the criticism, especially once the ‘flu had spread to their own regions.<sup>26</sup> Even the Governor-General expressed the opinion (in private) that the Public Health Department was “extraordinarily stupid and wanting in foresight, pedantically allowing the Influenza to come in from the Transport (Native) where it had been raging.”<sup>27</sup> When Dr. Willmot tried to justify his actions by citing the existence of cases prior to the *Jaroslav's* arrival, the mildness of her cases and the unprecedented virulence which had developed in Cape Town,<sup>28</sup> he was assailed by press and laymen from all quarters. It was a “highly controversial and utterly unconvincing statement”, declared the *Cape Times*,<sup>29</sup> while the pro-Government *Ons Land* spoke of it as “voorbarig en als op heden ongepast”.<sup>30</sup> In the midst of the epidemic crisis few felt it necessary to look beyond the *Jaroslav* and *Veronej* troops as the obvious source of infection.

The evidence for such a conclusion is strong. It was not difficult for the disease to spread, for quarantine at the Rosebank Camp and the military hospitals was less than rigorous. This is what the rapid infection of the staffs at these institutions points to; moreover, it is known that at least some of the troops at Rosebank were allowed out of camp;<sup>31</sup> indeed, a local Black journalist, F. Z. S. Peregrino, wrote of their being “permitted to prowl in shoals about the Peninsula, notably in District Six.”<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, four or five of the cases landed from the *Jaroslav* died from influenza or pneumonia within a week of their admission to hospital; several from the *Veronej* also succumbed.<sup>33</sup> This suggests that the ‘flu brought by these ships was not merely a more infectious dose of first-wave Spanish ‘flu. It was developing a fatal character of its own, the distinctive feature of the deadly second wave of Spanish ‘flu.

Thirdly, the first recorded civilian cases occurred soon after the two ships’ arrival, among people closely connected with the harbour: a fisherman on 23 September<sup>34</sup> and stevedores in the Docks Location on 25 September.<sup>35</sup> (There was perhaps a case among them even earlier, on 21 September.)<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, Willmot’s insistence that influenza was present on several ships which preceded the *Jaroslav* and *Veronej* must be borne in mind. Yet, if this

24. *De Burger*, 14/10/1918, Editorial.

25. *De Burger*, 8/10/1918, p. 2.

26. See ch. 6, pp. 105–106.

27. Central Archives, Pretoria: A 1 (Smuts collection), vol. 203, Buxton to J. C. Smuts, 5/11/1918.

28. *Cape Times*, 15/10/1918, p. 6.

29. *Ibid.*, Editorial.

30. *Zuid Afrikaans vereenigd met Ons Land*, 17/10/1918, Editorial. See too *Cape Argus*, 15/10/1918, Editorial; *De Burger*, 16/10/1918, Editorial; *De Volksstem*, 25/10/1918, Editorial, and 1/11/1918, Editorial.

31. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of F. Z. S. Peregrino, p. 1; Evidence of Major C. G. Davidson (recalled), p. 1.

32. *Cape Argus*, 9/10/1918, p. 4 (Letter from F. Z. S. Peregrino).

33. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Colonel Sir John Hewat, p. 1; Cape Archives, Cape Town (hereafter CACT): 3CT, vol. 6/2/12/19, Deaths Registered Week Ended 20/9/1918, p. 32, Deaths Nos. 1325, 1332; Week Ended 27/9, p. 42, Deaths Nos. 1340, 1347, and p. 44, Deaths Nos. 1373–5; Week Ended 4/10, p. 1, Deaths Nos. 1385, 1386 and p. 2, Deaths Nos. 1397, 1398, 1401.

34. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Mrs. K. H. R. Stuart, p. 1.

35. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of H. Salmon, p. 1; *Industries*, November 1918, p. 577.

36. CACT: 3CT, vol. 6/2/12/19, Deaths Registered Week Ended 27/9/1918, p. 43, Death No. 1355.

was so, it was probably mild first-wave Spanish 'flu and does not seem to have caused a significant increase in influenza in Cape Town at the time, despite Willmot's suggestions to the contrary.<sup>37</sup> Even if it did, and Willmot was therefore technically correct in asserting that the *Jaroslav* and *Veronej* troops were not the first to bring Spanish 'flu to Cape Town, everything points to their being the ones who introduced the fatal second wave.

How much blame for this can be attached to the Public Health Department and the UDF is another matter. The UDF was surely guilty of not enforcing the quarantine measures adequately, as instructed. As for the Public Health Department, given the non-notifiability of influenza and its initial mildness, it is to its credit that its officials detected the 'flu on the two troopships at all – if these had been ordinary passenger ships, it is unlikely that the influenza aboard would have been reported, let alone their passengers subjected to quarantine. However, having had their disquiet aroused, these officials did not follow up their presentiments, ignoring the deaths of cases sent to hospital and failing to brief even Cape Town's MOH, Dr. Jasper Anderson, as to what was going on. Anderson told the Influenza Epidemic Commission that nothing had been said to him about the *Jaroslav* and the *Veronej* or the quarantining of their troops. It was surely with some irony in his voice that he added, "If he had been notified of these ships arriving with a history of Influenza it would have been helpful to him."<sup>38</sup>

By 1918 four years of war had swollen the population of Cape Town and its environs substantially to over 270 000 people, about 40% of these Whites and 60% "Coloured" and Black. This figure showed an increase of some 90 000 since the census of 1911.<sup>39</sup> Several thousand of these would have been soldiers and sailors on wartime service, but existing accommodation still fell far short of the increased demand and many Capetonians were crammed into overcrowded and insanitary houses and tenements in areas like District Six, the Malay Quarter, Woodstock and Salt River. In June 1917 the MOH had reported that he had had to limit action against insanitary property 'owing to the present dearth of houses in the City.'<sup>40</sup>

The City Council was seriously worried by the situation: in 1916 it had instituted an enquiry to determine the extent of overcrowding<sup>41</sup> and had followed this up by setting up a Special Council Committee on Overcrowding.<sup>42</sup> In 1917 it had agreed to provide housing for some of its own employees at the new Maitland Garden Village in an effort to ease the situation,<sup>43</sup> while at the same time initiating action to demolish the worst slums around Wells Square in District Six.<sup>44</sup>

Nor was it alone in its anxiety about what might result from unchecked overcrowding and an insanitary environment which deteriorated by the month. Articles in the press and representations by concerned citizens and bodies testify to the disquiet at these conditions felt by many, both out of self-interest and social

37. IEC, vol. 2, file 7, part 1: Written Evidence by Dr. Willmot, 29/11/1918, p. 3 and Annexure B; CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/16/3/1/21, p. 619, "Report to the Mayor and Councillors on the Influenza Epidemic September, October, November 1918 by the Medical Officer of Health A. Jasper Anderson" (hereafter CT MOH's Report), p. 2.

38. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Dr. J. Anderson, p. 1. See too p. 5.

39. These figures cover both the Cape Town and Wynberg Magisterial Districts and make provision for several thousand soldiers and sailors in the Peninsula on wartime service too. They are derived from Union of South Africa, Office of Census and Statistics: *Statistics of Population 1917*, UG 37-1919, p. 4 and Union of South Africa: *Annual Report of Department of Justice for 1918*, UG 36-1919, pp. 36-37. Because the 1918 census covered Whites only, the figures for the other races are estimates.

40. CTMM 1916-1917, Appendix 8 (MOH Report), p. xxxvii.

41. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/4/7/1/18, p. 260; CTMM 1915-1916, Appendix 8 (MOH Report), p. xlii.

42. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/4/7/1/18, p. 471.

43. CTMM 1916-1917, p. 17; CTMM 1917-1918, pp. 12-17.

44. CTMM 1916-1917, p. 16.

concern.<sup>45</sup> Late in 1917 a number of these middle-class men and women founded the Citizens' Housing Council to work for a solution to the housing problem.<sup>46</sup> Many of them had no doubt heard Canon Lavis of St Paul's in Bree Street make an ominous prediction at a mass meeting on the overcrowding issue in September 1917, one that was echoed by several other informed observers during that year and the next.<sup>47</sup> He told his audience:

'There were two ways . . . by which the present state of affairs could be altered. One was an epidemic, and the other was to carry out a wise scheme of municipal housing.'<sup>48</sup>

In Cape Town's overcrowded conditions Spanish 'flu (perhaps assisted by a spell of changeable weather<sup>49</sup>) spread rapidly among the civilian population, especially in District Six and the Malay Quarter. Since it was not a notifiable disease, cases were not officially reported, but as early as 24 September rumours of its presence were circulating around the town.<sup>50</sup> By the beginning of the following week there was no doubting its prevalence; it 'may almost be said that every other household is affected', wrote the *Cape Argus* on 1 October.<sup>51</sup> As yet its form remained mild, however, laying up numbers of people but probably not claiming its first town victim until 30 September. This was John Smith, a twenty-year old "Coloured" brushmaker working for the UDF, but living at 18 Roger Street in District Six.<sup>52</sup>

Although businesses reported a number of their employees off sick,<sup>53</sup> few Capetonians regarded the 'flu with alarm, especially since the press carried re-assuring statements by doctors that there was no serious danger.<sup>54</sup> In comfortable circles people made light of this fashionable new ailment. "It was regarded as quite a joke", recalled a woman then at the University of Cape Town. "She's gone down with Spanish 'flu. What's the fuss about?" her friends asked when she contracted it.<sup>55</sup> At the Opera House, a cough in the audience provided the actor on stage with an excellent opportunity to ad-lib, "Ha, Spanish 'flu, I presume?" The remark brought the house down.<sup>56</sup>

Within days, such lightheartedness had vanished, giving way to a feeling of unease and concern at a situation which was steadily worsening. In the first five

45. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/4/2/7/1/3, p. 224; 3/CT, vol. 1/5/1/1/8, pp. 97, 149-150; 3/CT, vol. 1/4/7/1/1/7, pp. 77f., 110-111, 221; 3/CT, vol. 1/4/7/1/1/8, pp. 259-260, 284; IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of A. Ridout, p. 1; *New True Templar*, September 1918, p. 2; *The Architect and Builder*, 1/10/1917, pp. 59-61; *South African Review*, 26/1/1917, p. 22; 23/3/1917, p. 8.

46. Union of South Africa: *Report of the Housing Committee to Inquire into Matters Concerning Housing Accommodation in Urban Areas and the Amendment of the Unhealthy Areas Bill*, UG 4-20, para. 7.

47. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/4/2/7/1/3, p. 224; IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of A. Ridout, p. 1; *The Architect and Builder*, 1/10/1917, pp. 59-61; *New True Templar*, September 1918, p. 2; *South African Review*, 26/1/1917, p. 22; 23/3/1917, p. 8.

48. *Cape Times*, 10/9/1917, p. 7.

49. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, p. 11; *Cape Argus*, 3/10/1918, p. 7; 28/10/1918, p. 6; *The Star*, 11/10/1918; C. M. J. Aarts de Vries: *Ziekverpleging in Huis*, p. 67; *Tembuland News*, 8/11/1918.

50. *Cape Argus*, 24/9/1918, p. 5; 28/9/1918, p. 8; *Daily Dispatch*, 25/9/1918, p. 5.

51. *Cape Argus*, 1/10/1918, p. 5.

52. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 6/2/1/2/19. Deaths Registered Week Ended 4/10/1918, p. 2, Death No. 1404.

53. *Cape Times*, 1/10/1918, p. 5; 2/10/1918, p. 8; *Cape Argus*, 2/10/1918, p. 7.

54. *Cape Times*, 30/9/1918, p. 7; 1/10/1918, p. 5; *Cape Argus*, 2/10/1918, p. 7; 3/10/1918, Editorial and p. 7. The one note of warning came from a "well-known Cape Town doctor" in *Cape Times*, 2/10/1918, p. 8, who warned that if people carried on as usual after contracting the 'flu, "I guarantee one per cent of the cases will terminate fatally, not from influenza, but from pneumonia."

55. Interview with Mrs F. Clouts. For similar early responses see *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 18/10/1918, p. 945; *South African Postal and Telegraph Herald*, November 1918, p. 50; *South African Lady's Pictorial*, November 1918, p. 26; Witwatersrand University Library, Historical and Literary Papers Division: AB 186 (Archbishop W. M. Carter Letters), Carter to Lord Wenlock, 13/10/1918.

56. *Cape Argus*, 2/10/1965, Magazine Section, p. 11.

days of October not only had the supposedly harmless 'flu continued to spread apace, but it had begun to claim numerous lives too, especially among "Coloureds". Police reported finding dead and dying 'flu victims in the streets of District Six and the Malay Quarter<sup>57</sup> and whole families prostrate, with no-one to look after them.<sup>58</sup> On Saturday 5 October 78 deaths were recorded (64 "Coloured" and 14 White),<sup>59</sup> a total nearly eight times the usual daily figure of 10.<sup>60</sup>

Still in the dark as to the extent of the epidemic, Dr. Anderson initially believed that it could be contained by the traditional practice of isolation. He tried to concentrate cases at the City Infectious Diseases Hospital and Rentzkie's Farm Isolation Camp,<sup>61</sup> but these quickly proved inadequate and hospitals started to fill up rapidly. As newspapers began to carry advertisements for medicines to be used specifically against Spanish 'flu<sup>62</sup> and to provide advice on treatment,<sup>63</sup> pharmacists did a roaring trade in "remedies" such as quinine, aspirin and cinnamon tablets.<sup>64</sup> Soon they were authorized to remain open at all hours to serve the crowds queueing anxiously outside their doors.<sup>65</sup> Doctors and nurses were even more hard-pressed, war-service having reduced their number in the city appreciably.<sup>66</sup> On Sunday 6 October one doctor's secretary noted wearily in her diary: "Nothing but phones and doorbells going all day. Influenza Epidemic [sic] in full swing. Felt pretty beastly myself."<sup>67</sup> A city doctor remarked: "It is not safe for me to put my nose out of doors - I am mobbed wherever I go."<sup>68</sup>

Businesses, merely inconvenienced by the absence of employees at the beginning of the week, faced disruption or worse by its end. Several factories with large "Coloured" workforces were forced to close through lack of labour,<sup>69</sup> while numerous shops, banks and restaurants were left short-staffed.<sup>70</sup> For dairies and bakeries this meant the suspension of normal deliveries, a situation which helped to bring home to well-off Whites how serious matters had become.<sup>71</sup> Commuters found fewer trains and trams running,<sup>72</sup> while the Post Office, with 360 of its 950 employees off sick on 5 October also had to curtail its services.<sup>73</sup> Even the courts were affected, with several cases being adjourned for want of officials or witnesses,<sup>74</sup> while the Education Department decided to delay the re-opening of Peninsula schools for the fourth term until the situation had improved.<sup>75</sup> Length-

57. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Dr. J. Anderson, p. 2.

58. *Cape Times*, 8/10/1918, p. 5.

59. CTMM 1918-1919, Appendix 8, Chart B.

60. *Cape Times*, 8/10/1918, p. 5.

61. CT MOH's Report, p. 4.

62. For instance, *Cape Times*, 2/10/1918, p. 6.

63. For instance, *Cape Times*, 4/10/1918, p. 7; *Cape Argus*, 2/10/1918, pp. 6 and 7; *De Burger*, 4/10/1918.

64. *Cape Times*, 1/10/1918, p. 5; 4/10/1918, p. 7.

65. *Cape Times*, 7/10/1918, p. 5; 22/6/1968, Weekend Magazine; *Cape Argus*, 3/10/1918, p. 5; *Tembuland News*, 8/11/1918.

66. CT MOH's Report, p. 4; *Cape Times*, 7/10/1918, p. 5.

67. Witwatersrand University Library, Historical and Literary Papers Division: A959/A9 (A. M. Miller Diary for 1918), Entry for 6/10/1918. For similar accounts of the pressure on doctors, see letter from Dr. R. L. Forsyth to the author, 2/11/1978 and Collier Collection: Letter from Mrs. E. Louw, 14/5/1972.

68. Quoted in L. G. Green: *Grow Lovely, Growing Old*, p. 159.

69. *Cape Times*, 3/10/1918, p. 5; 4/10/1918, p. 7; 5/10/1918, p. 7; *Cape Argus*, 2/10/1918, p. 7; *Tembuland News*, 8/11/1918.

70. *Cape Times*, 3/10/1918, p. 5; 4/10/1918, p. 7; 5/10/1918, p. 7; *Cape Argus*, 2/10/1918, p. 7; 3/10/1918, Editorial and p. 7; *Tembuland News*, 8/11/1918.

71. *Cape Times*, 4/10/1918, p. 7; *The Star*, 11/10/1918; *Tembuland News*, 11/10/1918.

72. *Cape Times*, 7/10/1918, p. 5; *Cape Argus*, 7/10/1918, p. 5.

73. *Cape Times*, 4/10/1918, p. 7; 7/10/1918, p. 5; 19/10/1918, p. 5.

74. *Cape Argus*, 27/9/1918, p. 5; *Cape Times*, 5/10/1918, p. 7.

75. *Cape Times*, 7/10/1918, p. 3.

ening lists of events postponed or cancelled appeared in the press;<sup>76</sup> those that were held as scheduled were poorly attended. "It is doubtful if the Tivoli [Theatre] was ever so empty on a Saturday night", remarked one of the few in the audience on 5 October, "which shows how big a hold this new form of influenza has taken upon the social life of Cape Town."<sup>77</sup>

By the end of the first weekend in October, the Spanish influenza epidemic had taken a firm grip on Cape Town. Even Robben Island was not immune.<sup>78</sup> The unexpected speed and intensity of the attack had caught the city by surprise. "It was like a blind coming down", recalled one survivor vividly.<sup>79</sup> The city had been hit "by a scourge which came on, like a thief in the night, unexpected, unprepared for, . . . The thing came as a great shock", wrote one journalist.<sup>80</sup> On Monday 7 October, a public holiday, the *Cape Times*, its "Deaths" notices already nearly a full column long, made the epidemic the subject of its first leader, ahead of the war.<sup>81</sup> On that day too, *The Star's* Cape Town correspondent reported, "Capetown at the moment is a stricken city."<sup>82</sup>

At last recognizing this (and in the absence of a lead from Willmot and the Public Health Department), that morning the Mayor convened an emergency meeting of the City Council. The position was "one which required drastic remedies", he declared,<sup>83</sup> and if any councillor doubted this, he was rapidly convinced by accounts of the grim state of affairs prevailing. In District Six Councillor Dr. Abdurahman "knew cases where people had been lying for two days unattended and without even water to drink",<sup>84</sup> while Councillor A. J. MacCallum warned ominously:

"We are letting things slide. Dead bodies, from which life has been extinct for 4 or 5 hours, have been left lying on the pavement uncovered. That was to be seen from all parts of the city from Sea Point on."<sup>85</sup>

The Council agreed to set up a six-man Executive Committee under the Mayor to take full charge of measures against the epidemic, spending whatever it deemed necessary.<sup>86</sup> For the next four weeks this Committee sat almost continuously, trying to deploy Cape Town's considerable resources as efficiently as it could. Its first priority was to ensure that food and medicine reached those 'flu victims with no-one to help them, as they were as much in danger of starving as of succumbing to the epidemic itself.<sup>87</sup> The Committee therefore appointed District Committees in each of the city's fourteen wards; these opened relief depots in their areas to supply the sick free of charge. Within days over 40 such depots had been established, many of them subsequently spawning sub-depots and soup-kitchens of their own.<sup>88</sup> To operate this network, urgent appeals were made for voluntary helpers and house-to-house visitors,<sup>89</sup> while large supplies of simple, nourishing food were secured by the Committee, some of it donated by private citizens, local firms and

76. *Cape Times*, 2/10/1918, pp. 7 and 8; 4/10/1918, p. 7; 5/10/1918, p. 7; 7/10/1918, pp. 5 and 7.

77. *Cape Times*, 7/10/1918, p. 6.

78. *De Burger*, 17/10/1918, p. 2; 25/10/1918, p. 3; *Cape Times*, 23/10/1918, p. 6 (Letter from B. Torok).

79. Interview with Mrs. E. Wightman.

80. *Tembuland News*, 8/11/1918.

81. *Cape Times*, 7/10/1918, Editorial.

82. *The Star*, 11/10/1918.

83. CACT: 3CT, vol. 1/1/1/75, p. 46.

84. *Cape Argus*, 7/10/1918, p. 4.

85. *Cape Times*, 8/10/1918, p. 6.

86. CTMM 1918-1919, p. 18.

87. *Ibid.*, Appendix 8, p. xxii; Interview with Mr. A. H. Kain.

88. These depots are listed in CT MOH's Report, Table 3. For the sub-depots and soup kitchens see *Cape Times*, 11/10/1918, p. 5; 14/10/1918, p. 6.

89. For instance, *Cape Times*, 8/10/1918, p. 5; 10/10/1918, p. 5; 11/10/1918, pp. 2, 5, 6 and Editorial; 12/10/1918, p. 5.

hotels and Boland farmers.<sup>90</sup> Medicine came from a dispensary set up by Dr. Anderson, using stocks provided by a local manufacturing chemist. This enabled him to supply nearly 3 000 gallons of his special pink "flu mixture",<sup>91</sup> as well as thousands of doses of aspirin, epsom salts and other drugs.<sup>92</sup>

As further needs were perceived, special sub-committees were created: on 8 October one to expedite burials,<sup>93</sup> on 9 October one to see to transport needs<sup>94</sup> and, a few days later, one to supervise the cleansing of streets and backyards and the widespread distribution of disinfectant.<sup>95</sup> For infants whose parents were ill or had died, four special creches were opened under the aegis of the Child Life Protection Society. It was estimated that these eventually cared for 600–700 children.<sup>96</sup>

Attempts were made to extend purely medical assistance and to put it on an organized footing too. Despite help from retired medical practitioners and University staff and students,<sup>97</sup> the pressure on the city's few doctors had grown intense. In an effort to ease this, they met at the City Hall on 9 October at the request of Dr. Anderson and agreed to divide Cape Town into fourteen districts, five of these covering parts of District Six; to each of these, specific doctors would be allocated.<sup>98</sup> In this way it was hoped to concentrate their work in particular areas, ending time-consuming calls all over the Peninsula. Participation was voluntary, but as an inducement to collaborate fully in this scheme, the Executive Committee offered £7 per day to doctors who treated all patients in "their" district free of charge; doctors who did not participate fully but agreed to visit patients unable to pay fees were offered £3 per day.<sup>99</sup> Despite these offers, these efforts to direct the medical profession's services were not wholly successful, for several doctors did not keep strictly to the districts allotted to them. "The public have their own ideas about medical attendance", Dr. Anderson later explained. "They like to continue with their own doctors. Everybody was working at too high pressure. There was no time for consideration."<sup>100</sup> With volunteer nurses he had far less difficulty, however, and they confined their activities to the areas to which they were detailed.<sup>101</sup>

90. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 3/5/1/1/16, pp. 956, 957, 960, 969, 976, 984, 985, 989; 3/CT, vol. 3/5/1/1/17, pp. 19, 33, 43; 3/CT, vol. 3/1/1/183, p. 906; *Cape Argus*, 8/10/1918, p. 5; 10/10/1918, p. 5; *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, p. 5; 10/10/1918, p. 5; 11/10/1918, p. 6; 12/10/1918, p. 5; 16/10/1918, p. 5; 29/6/1968, *Weekend Magazine*, p. 10; Collier Collection: Letter from Mrs. I. Beater, 26/5/1972.

91. See CT MOH's Report, p. 6 for the composition of this mixture.

92. CT MOH's Report, p. 6.

93. CTMM 1918–1919, p. 19.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 20; CT MOH's Report, p. 9.

95. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/1/6/3/1/21, pp. 540, 542–543; *Cape Times*, 16/10/1918, p. 5; 18/10/1918, p. 5; 25/10/1918, p. 5.

96. CT MOH's Report, p. 9; *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, p. 5; 12/10/1918, p. 5; 16/10/1918, p. 5; 21/10/1918, p. 5; *Cape Argus*, 8/10/1918, p. 5; 15/10/1918, p. 5; 19/10/1918, p. 5; *South African Baptist*, November 1918, p. 12.

97. CTMM 1918–1919, p. 21 and Appendix 8, p. xxiii; CT MOH's Report, p. 5; *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, p. 5; *The Friend*, 10/10/1918, p. 5; *The Lancet*, 10/4/1976, p. 798; J. H. Louw: *In the Shadow of Table Mountain: A History of the Under-Secretary for Education for 1918, Part II*, UG 8–20, p. 7; Collier Collection: Letter from Dr. R. van Geuns, 2/6/1972; Interview with Dr. M. E. McKerron.

98. CTMM 1918–1919, p. 21, and Appendix 8, p. xxiii; CT MOH's Report, pp. 6–7; *Cape Times*, 10/10/1918, p. 5; 11/10/1918, p. 5; 14/10/1918, p. 6; 16/10/1918, p. 6.

99. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/1/1/75, p. 204; 3/CT, vol. 3/1/1/183, p. 627; IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, pp. 9–10; *Cape Times*, 28/11/1918, p. 8.

100. Union of South Africa: *Report of the Select Committee on the Public Health Bill, SC 3–19*, p. 187. For a different explanation by Willmot, see IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Willmot, p. 9.

101. CTMM 1918–1919, Appendix 8, p. xxiii.

To help pharmacists meet the very heavy demands on them, the 9 October meeting of doctors also agreed on three standard prescriptions<sup>102</sup> which could be made up in large quantities and dispensed quickly. Prior to this, pharmacists had complained that their load had been much increased "by the fact that no two doctors' prescriptions for the prevailing epidemic are ever alike."<sup>103</sup> But, warned both Anderson and Willmot, medicine could only be fully effective if accompanied by adherence to simple, but vital rules, and, in notices to the public during that week, they stressed the importance of a liquids only diet, a well-ventilated sick-room and not getting up too soon.<sup>104</sup> "Fully 90 per cent of the deaths are due to a disregard of this [latter] advice", announced Anderson gravely.<sup>105</sup> As for inoculation with the anti-flu vaccine developed locally, both men were enthusiastic and warmly recommended its use.<sup>106</sup> Once sufficient quantities of vaccine became available during the following week, numerous inoculation depots were set up throughout the Peninsula.<sup>107</sup>

The other medical problem which had manifested itself as the hold of the 'flu had tightened was the inability of the city's hospitals to cope with the flood of patients. Even before the epidemic, hospital accommodation in the Peninsula had been quite insufficient;<sup>108</sup> now, not only were hospitals being inundated with cases of highly infectious Spanish 'flu, but many of their staff were succumbing to it themselves. The City Hospital was "absolutely at a loss for assistance," the Town Clerk wrote on 10 October<sup>109</sup> and shortly thereafter the Peninsula Maternity Home was forced to close for lack of staff.<sup>110</sup> Nor were the Peninsula's three military hospitals able to offer much relief, for their staff had proved equally susceptible. "I have simply hourly to rob Peter to pay Paul by sending staff to assist where most required no matter to which Hospital they belong", reported the UDF's local Assistant Director of Medical Services on 11 October.<sup>111</sup> Three days later he replied to a request for nurses from his superior, Colonel Orenstein, then in Kimberley:

"I cannot possibly spare any nurses from here at present. Half my nursing staff in bed & over 150 cases on danger list. Those on duty completely overworked & unstrung . . . You cannot realise the overworked state we are in."<sup>112</sup>

As a first step to deal with these critical problems, the Executive Committee directed volunteer nurses to the hospitals with the direst shortages; then, military help was enlisted to extend accommodation at existing hospitals by means of tents;<sup>113</sup> finally, when even these measures did not suffice, six temporary hospitals were opened, using volunteers and equipment borrowed from the UDF and private citizens. The largest of these were at Newlands House, the Salvation Army Home in Bree Street, Ellerslie High School in Sea Point and the De Villiers Street School in District Six. Together with the camp at Rentzkie's Farm, the six temporary

102. CT MOH's Report, p. 6; *Cape Times*, 10/10/1918, p. 5; *Cape Argus*, 10/10/1918, p. 5.

103. *Cape Times*, 10/10/1918, p. 5.

104. *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, p. 2; 10/10/1918, p. 4; *Cape Argus*, 8/10/1918, p. 4.

105. *Cape Argus*, 14/10/1918, p. 5.

106. See ch. 6, pp. 113-114; CT MOH's Report, p. 5; IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Dr. Anderson, pp. 2-3; CTMM 1918-1919, Appendix 8, p. xxv.

107. *Cape Times*, 15/10/1918, p. 6; 16/10/1918, p. 2; 19/10/1918, p. 6; 21/10/1918, p. 5; 22/10/1918, p. 5; 23/10/1918, p. 5; 28/10/1918, p. 4.

108. CT MOH's Report, p. 4; *De Burger*, 26/9/1918, p. 4; 29/11/1918, p. 2.

109. CACT: 3CT, vol. 3/1/1/183, p. 572. At the Somerset Hospital 71% of the staff contracted Spanish 'flu (CACT: HBC, vol. 64, Minutes of Management Committee Meeting, 28/10/1918).

110. CT MOH's Report, p. 4.

111. SADF Archives: DC 1303, file 4501, vol. 1, Hewat to Orenstein, 11/10/1918.

112. SADF Archives: DC 1304, file DC 4501, vol. 4, telegram from Asmed, Cape Town, to Orenstein, Kimberley, 14/10/1918.

113. CT MOH's Report, p. 7; CTMM 1918-1919, p. 21 and Appendix 8, p. xxiii.

hospitals admitted close on 800 'flu cases.<sup>114</sup> In addition, Wynberg Municipality and the Cape Divisional Council opened four temporary hospitals of their own.<sup>115</sup>

Generally, the Cape Divisional Council, Wynberg and Simonstown had followed Cape Town's lead in setting up relief organizations of their own, though on a smaller scale.<sup>116</sup> This left the locations at Ndabeni and the Docks unprovided for in local authorities' relief work, for they fell under the Native Affairs Department and the South African Railways and Harbours respectively. Conditions at these locations were appalling once the epidemic began, its hold at both having been strengthened by acute overcrowding and the high proportion of young adults among their residents.<sup>117</sup> By 9 October, 120 of the 3 561 people crammed into Ndabeni had died of 'flu or its complications<sup>118</sup> and corpses were being wrapped in blankets and tossed onto waggons, "like packing bricks", a resident recalled with a shiver.<sup>119</sup> The location doctor was laid up and one nurse struggled to tend the large number of cases too sick to help even themselves. On that day Cape Town's Executive Committee realized that something had to be done to help and it arranged for a party of volunteers to go out and render what assistance they could. A doctor was secured, the sick were fed and within a few days mortality began to fall, but another 134 died before the end of October.<sup>120</sup>

At the even more cramped Docks Location both the Medical Officer and the Superintendent fell ill early on, leaving no-one on the spot to arrange help. The death-toll mounted rapidly, with no sign of any action to check it. Seventy-four of the 1 400 residents had died by the time that local Railways and Harbours officials appealed to The Castle for help.<sup>121</sup> A senior military doctor visited the location and decided that it must be evacuated at once. So bad were living conditions there, he said, that "he would not keep his dogs in such a place, and it *deserved* a pestilence."<sup>122</sup> A tent hospital for the sick was immediately erected at Green Point Track and nearby a tent camp for the rest of the residents was set up. Military officers were placed in control of both; meanwhile, the empty location was cleaned and disinfected from top to bottom. Twenty-two more cases died in the tent hospital after the transfer there.<sup>123</sup>

Overall, however, within a week of the City Council's emergency meeting on 7 October, a comprehensive organization had been improvised to meet the crisis caused by the Spanish 'flu epidemic. Flexible and lacking neither human nor material resources, it was able to respond to new difficulties with relative speed. Once the Council had woken up to the gravity of the situation, Cape Town proved by and large able to shift for itself. This organization of effort was important for morale too, helping to limit "the then growing panic and distress which was existent

114. CT MOH's Report, pp. 7-8; CTMM 1918-1919, p. 21 and Appendix 8, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

115. CACT: 4CT, vol. 1/1/21, p. 3; *Cape Times*, 16/10/1918, p. 5; 17/10/1918, p. 6; 21/10/1918, p. 5.

116. CACT: 4CT, vol. 1/1/21, pp. 506-510; 3/WBG, vol. 6, p. 320; vol. 279, pp. 140-141; 3/SMT, file 4/1/22; Report by Mayor, 13/11/1918; *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, p. 5; 14/10/1918, p. 6; 17/10/1918, p. 6; 23/10/1918, p. 5.

117. On the particular susceptibility of young adults to Spanish 'flu, see ch. 9, pp. 166, 170, 174.

118. Union of South Africa: *Report of the Department of Native Affairs 1913-1918*, UG 7-19, p. 17; *Cowley Evangelist*, January 1919, p. 17.

119. Interview with Mrs. L. Mawu.

120. UG 7-19, p. 18; Union of South Africa: *Official Year Book of the Union*, no. 3-1919, p. 220; *Cowley Evangelist*, January 1919, p. 17; *New True Templar*, November 1918, pp. 2, 3-4, 7; *Cape Times*, 10/10/1918, p. 5; Interviews with Mrs. L. Mawu, Reverend E. E. Mahabane and Mr. A. Mahlahla.

121. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of H. Salmon, p. 1; *Cape Times*, 18/10/1918, p. 6.

122. *Cowley Evangelist*, January 1919, p. 18.

123. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of H. Salmon and A. F. Girdwood; Evidence of Lt. Col. A. Wright, pp. 4, 5; *Cape Times*, 16/10/1918, p. 6; 30/10/1918, Editorial.



throughout the City."<sup>124</sup> Also, as Dr. Anderson pointed out, it acted to "re-assure the patients that something was being done for them."<sup>125</sup>

The response to the Executive Committee's appeals for help had been good, from individuals, businesses and organizations alike. "[W]e were deluged with volunteers, . . ." reported Anderson afterwards. "It was most remarkable and praiseworthy how all classes of the community came forward to assist".<sup>126</sup> Only Cape Town's Jews<sup>127</sup> and Muslims<sup>128</sup> appear to have organized help along communal lines and even this was not exclusive; for the rest, all voluntary assistance was channelled into the Municipality's effort, suggesting that most Capetonians saw this as offering the only practical way to deal with so vast and serious a threat. To this end they overcame any reservations they might have felt about the efficiency or disinterestedness of its actions. For instance, the Cape Federation of Labour Unions offered the Executive Committee the unqualified co-operation of all local trade unions in the campaign against the 'flu,<sup>129</sup> while the Dominican Sisters, a teaching order normally confined to their convent, set up sub-depots on the Cape Flats to distribute supplies received from the main depots in the southern suburbs.<sup>130</sup> "The entire life of the City is disorganised and the individual must be subordinated to the general good", declared one local journal earnestly.<sup>131</sup>

Assistance across the usual barriers of race, class and religion appears to have become common in Cape Town during "Black October", though prejudice and self-interest were not always overcome.<sup>132</sup> Noting how unusual it was to find such a diverse range of fellow-workers in the city, the *Cape Times* observed:

"It is remarkable how such a calamity has helped to level all ranks of society. Working hand in hand we find members of Parliament, highly placed officials, merchants, City Councillors, and other men of standing carrying on the good work with others of humbler status."<sup>133</sup>

The Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town put his finger on precisely how uncommon such behaviour was when he pointed out how it overrode

"one of the most difficult prejudices to fight against . . . the thought that, while so far as we are concerned all is or may be well, it is of little concern of ours to think of others."<sup>134</sup>

It is impossible to be certain how much this assistance was prompted by feelings of duty, sympathy, humanity or self-interest. They would all have been present in volunteers' actions, singly or jointly. Even if shortened working-hours or the

124. *Cape Times*, 1/11/1918, p. 8.

125. CT MOH's Report, p. 6.

126. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

127. *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, p. 7; 11/10/1918, pp. 3, 6; 12/10/1918, p. 4; 15/10/1918, p. 6; 16/10/1918, p. 3; J. Stodel: *The Audience is Waiting*, p. 21; Interview with Miss S. Honikman.

128. *Cape Times*, 17/10/1918, p. 6; 4/12/1918, p. 9; *Cape Argus*, 12/10/1918, p. 5; 29/11/1918, p. 7; Interview with Mr. J. Granger.

129. *Cape Times*, 15/10/1918, p. 6; *Cape Argus*, 15/10/1918, p. 6.

130. *Cape Times*, 22/10/1918, p. 6; *Cape Argus*, 17/10/1918, p. 5; *Catholic Magazine for South Africa*, November 1918, p. 523; March 1919, p. 144; Interviews with Sisters R. Mangan and Dympla.

131. *The South African Lady's Pictorial and Home Journal*, November 1918, p. 2.

132. Examples of such feelings in action included a reluctance among some White women to nurse Blacks and "Coloureds" (CACT: HBC, vol. 85, Minutes of meeting 19/11/1918, p. 2; *New True Templar*, November 1918, p. 9) and a hardheartedness among some landlords over delays in the payment of rent (CACT: 3/WBG, vol. 279, p. 133).

133. *Cape Times*, 14/10/1918, p. 5. For a similar contemporary opinion see Collier Collection: Report by W. Davies on Influenza at Ellerslie School. On the other hand, see *The South African Lady's Pictorial and Home Journal*, November 1918, p. 4, for criticism of well-meaning but incompetent women being placed in positions of authority. "No matter what her social position or pretensions [sic] may be, her place is a subordinate one", it declared.

134. *Cape Times*, 7/2/1919, p. 10.

closure of businesses and schools made volunteering easier, it was not a decision to be taken lightly. Given the extreme infectiousness of the 'flu, volunteering entailed a very real risk to life, even though, as Dr. Anderson pointed out, the label "influenza" did not cause "the terrors that such a name as plague would have done."<sup>135</sup> Few adults in Cape Town could have been unaware of the gravity of the situation; all would have faced a disrupted routine and most would have known someone who had 'flu, even if they had not contracted it themselves. This made it almost impossible to ignore an epidemic which itself appeared to pay little attention to social status. In this situation, some would have concluded, other feelings apart, that their best chance of survival lay in helping to check the epidemic as rapidly as possible. To all this speculation about motives must be added the prevailing wartime climate of "doing one's bit", a powerful impetus for action by those anxious to show that they too could make sacrifices and endure suffering in a greater cause. Finally, there were those whose grief at the death of a friend or relative inspired them to throw themselves into the campaign against the 'flu with almost reckless abandon. A young clerk, hearing of the death of one of his dearest and closest friends, "a big well-built chap, of my own age, 20," was so deeply shocked that he felt, "it did not matter to me now in the least if I got the flu and died too. In fact I even hoped I would!" He put in extra-long hours registering deaths at the Woodstock Police Station, but "... despite the constant stream of coughing and deeply saddened, tearful people standing before and around me in that small room and stricken area, I did not even sneeze."<sup>136</sup>

Notwithstanding the speed and extent of Cape Town's campaign against the epidemic once the Executive Committee had been set up on 7 October, mortality continued to increase sharply all week. Between 8 and 13 October deaths from Spanish 'flu and its complications within Cape Town's municipal boundaries alone rose to more than 300 per day and on two of these days, 10 October and 11 October, they reached 442 and 401 respectively. The week's total was a horrifying 2 404. It was, remarked the *Cape Argus* grimly, the "blackest week in the history of Cape Town".<sup>137</sup> Not until 19 October did the daily toll drop below three figures and it was 24 October before it fell below 50.<sup>138</sup>

Though these figures were not public knowledge at the time – it is doubtful whether the authorities were able to put them together until after the epidemic – what Capetonians saw around them and what they read in the press about the number of burials at Maitland were quite enough to cause the greatest anxiety, fear and even panic. The *Cape Argus* wrote of a pervasive "sense of calamity engendered by the terrible mortality",<sup>139</sup> while years later a 'flu survivor remembered how in Fresnaye, "All the house blinds were kept down on hearing of a death in the neighbourhood, and bewildered children were awe-inspired by elders talking in subdued tones in an atmosphere of gloom."<sup>140</sup> Rumours proliferated about who had died<sup>141</sup> – a local MLA was astonished to receive a telephone call from the editor of the *Cape Times* wanting to know what time his (the MLA's) funeral would

135. CT MOH's Report, pp. 4–5.

136. Letter in author's possession from A. van Oordt to Dr. J. F. Midgley, 23/1/1982.

137. *Cape Argus*, 14/10/1918, Editorial.

138. All figures in this paragraph are from CTMM 1918–1919, Appendix 8, Chart B. Not included are deaths in Wynberg, Simonstown and the Cape Divisional Council areas as daily figures for these areas are not available.

139. *Cape Argus*, 12/10/1918, Editorial.

140. Collier Collection: Letter from Mrs. M. B. Holmes (née Forman), 25/6/1972. Other survivors also have vivid memories of panic and stunned bewilderment – see, for instance, interviews with Dr. B. Clain, Dr. B. Mackenzie, Mrs. R. Shifrin and Mrs. E. Wightman.

141. *De Burger*, 23/10/1918, p. 3.

be!<sup>142</sup> Nor was serious alarm confined to laymen. Dr. Willmot is reported to have given a chilling answer when asked by a close friend whether Cape Town was going to be wiped out. "He replied", recalled the man years later, "I will tell you what I would not tell any other man in the Union, for the first time in my life I am panicky, and believe we are."<sup>143</sup> In this climate it is not surprising that the South African Mutual placed the following advertisement in the press:

"Don't Hesitate! Insure your Life at Once."<sup>144</sup>

Throughout the Peninsula routine activity came to a virtual standstill or was sustained only by extraordinary effort. Few trains or trams ran.<sup>145</sup> Post-offices were closed or kept short hours. Letters and telegrams were not delivered unless Boy Scouts or local volunteers did so.<sup>146</sup> Sanitary services were kept going by casual labour and Municipal employees from other departments.<sup>147</sup> Electricity continued to be generated only through the efforts of a handful of men still on their feet at the power-station, who worked 16–24 hour shifts.<sup>148</sup> Temporary civilian constables filled gaps in the police force.<sup>149</sup> All but the most urgent court-cases were postponed.<sup>150</sup> Newspapers struggled to produce their daily editions<sup>151</sup> – an attenuated *De Burger* pointed out,

"As ons ondersteuners al die omstandighede sal in aanmerking neem waaronder ons nou werk, sal een ieder met ons nog dankbaar wees dat ons dagblad nog iedere môre uitgekóm het."<sup>152</sup>

Commerce and industry tried to soldier on with skeleton staffs. Department stores, offices and banks limited their hours of opening in accordance with a request from the Chamber of Commerce,<sup>153</sup> "but this has not occasioned any serious inconvenience to the public", reported the General Manager of the Standard Bank, "as ordinary business came almost to a standstill . . ."<sup>154</sup> The Shop Hours Ordinance was suspended to allow grocers to sell provisions at any hour,<sup>155</sup> but many lacked the staff to keep even ordinary hours. In outlying areas a number of grocery shops were closed for several days, causing great distress among those who usually relied on them for food.<sup>156</sup> Cape Town's own supply of fresh food was maintained only through the Executive Committee's special arrangements,<sup>157</sup> the activities of scratch crews at the abattoirs<sup>158</sup> and the

142. E. Alexander: *Morris Alexander*, pp. 77–78.

143. Collier Collection: Report by W. Davies on Influenza at Ellerslie School.

144. *Cape Times*, 10/10/1918, p. 4.

145. *Cape Times*, 8/10/1918, p. 7; 9/10/1918, p. 6; *Cape Argus*, 7/10/1918, p. 5.

146. Union of South Africa: *Report of the Postmaster-General for 1918*, UG 27–19, pp. 20–21; *Cape Times*, 10/10/1918, p. 5; 12/10/1918, p. 5; 17/10/1918, p. 5; 19/10/1918, p. 5; *South African Postal and Telegraph Herald*, November 1918, pp. 50, 55.

147. CTMM 1918–1919, Appendix 2, pp. iii, xxvi; *Cape Times*, 7/10/1918, p. 5; 15/10/1918, p. 6; 16/10/1918, p. 6.

148. CTMM 1918–1919, Appendix 3, p. iv.

149. *Cape Argus*, 10/10/1918, p. 5; *Cape Times*, 7/11/1918, p. 7.

150. *Cape Times*, 10/10/1918, p. 6; 15/10/1918, p. 5; 16/10/1918, p. 5.

151. *Cape Argus*, 14/10/1918, p. 5; *Cape Times*, 12/10/1918, p. 5; *De Burger*, 14/10/1918, p. 3; J. Steinmeyer: *Sprekers met Koppe*, p. 180.

152. *De Burger*, 15/10/1918, p. 3.

153. *Cape Town Chamber of Commerce Monthly Journal*, October 1918, p. 18; *Industries*, October 1918, p. 512, and November 1918, pp. 576, 577; *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, p. 6; *Tembuland News*, 8/11/1918.

154. Standard Bank Archives: General Manager's Office, Letters to London Office 1917–1919, p. 662.

155. *Cape Times*, 12/10/1918, Editorial.

156. *Cape Times*, 11/10/1918, p. 5; 12/10/1918, p. 5; Collier Collection: Letter from Mrs. I. Beater, 26/5/1972.

157. See p. 14.

158. CTMM 1918–1919, Appendix 10, pp. i–ii.

priority given to the transport of food by the Railways.<sup>159</sup>

Activities which would have brought large numbers of people together unnecessarily were halted or postponed, including meetings, fêtes, sporting events, recruiting and collections for the war effort.<sup>160</sup> A number of clergymen went so far as to cancel their Sunday services<sup>161</sup> even before the Mayor publicly requested all churches to do so.<sup>162</sup> Many bioscopes and theatres had closed voluntarily early in the epidemic,<sup>163</sup> but after 17 October all were instructed to do so by a Municipal notice issued in terms of special provisions of the Cape Public Health Act lately brought into force.<sup>164</sup>

No-one "passing down Adderley or St George's street at the moment would recognise them as the busy thronged, and usual crowded avenues of traffic", observed a reporter on 12 October.

"They are almost deserted even in the middle of the day. Business has become quite a secondary consideration, and sight seeing and amusements have lost all attractions . . . Cape Town is like a city of mourning . . . and nothing is talked of or thought about other than Influenza."<sup>165</sup>

A little girl walking through the city centre at this time recalled "deathly silent streets which were really frightening",<sup>166</sup> while the veteran politician, John X. Merriman, noted in his diary on 17 October, "Cape Town very empty & forlorn."<sup>167</sup>

In the streets passers-by were horrified as people collapsed and died in front of them.<sup>168</sup> A young boy travelling into town by train from Maitland caught sight of "bodies . . . scattered about on the expanse of field" stretching to Brooklyn and beyond.<sup>169</sup> More than one person was reminded of the Black Death or the Great Plague of London by what they saw.<sup>170</sup> A 21 year-old student at the University of Cape Town at the time summed up the situation in a few graphic words sixty years later. "Cape Town", he said, "was a veritable city of the dead."<sup>171</sup>

Most chilling of all were the carts piled high with corpses, sometimes not even covered with a tarpaulin. Even if they were, people who saw them pass by could often see "legs sticking out, with labels attached with names of people, being taken

159. Central Archives, Pretoria: SAS 719, file G1195, telegram from Railways G to All Stations, Division 7, 12/10/1918.

160. *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, pp. 5, 6, 8; 10/10/1918, pp. 4, 5, 6; 11/10/1918, pp. 4, 6; 12/10/1918, pp. 4, 5; 14/10/1918, p. 4; 15/10/1918, pp. 5, 6; 16/10/1918, p. 2; 17/10/1918, p. 5; 18/10/1918, p. 3.

161. *Cape Times*, 12/10/1918, p. 3; 19/10/1918, p. 3.

162. *Cape Times*, 23/10/1918, p. 5; 26/10/1918, p. 7. See ch. 8, pp. 145-146 for their mixed response.

163. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/1/1/75, p. 146. *Cape Times*, 7/10/1918, p. 5; 8/10/1918, p. 4.

164. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 3/1/5/1/50, p. 154; *Cape Argus*, 17/10/1918, p. 4; *Cape Times*, 18/10/1918, p. 3. Wynberg did not wait for special provisions to be brought into force before acting in this regard. On 7/10/1918 the Mayor closed all local bioscopes and "Coloured" canteens (CACT: 3/WBG, vol. 6, p. 320).

165. *Tembuland News*, 8/11/1918.

166. Anonymous letter to author, 16/10/1978.

167. South African Library MSS. Department: MSC 15 (J. X. Merriman Collection), Diary for 1918, Entry for 17/10/1918.

168. *De Kerkboede*, 17/10/1918, p. 994; *Cape Times*, 22/6/1968; *South African Nursing Record*, November 1918, p. 21; *St Michael's School Magazine* (Bloemfontein), April 1919, p. 21; B. A. Tindall (ed.): *James Rose Innes*, p. 265; S. Zuckerman: *From Apes to Warlords*, p. 8; Collier Collection: Letters from Mr. N. A. Reinbach, 14/5/1972, and from Mrs. Z. Rennie (née van der Byl), 3/6/1972; Witwatersrand University Library, Historical and Literary Papers Division: AB 186 (Archbishop W. M. Carter Letters), Archbishop Carter to Lord Wenlock, 13/10/1918.

169. Letter from Mr. J. Simenoff to author, 9/5/1980.

170. Masonic Archives, Suburban Temple, Rondebosch: Scottish District Grand Lodge Western Division, Minute Book No. 2 1915-1925, Minutes of 4/11/1918 Meeting (I owe this reference to Dr. A. A. Cooper); *Cape Argus*, 11/10/1918, p. 5; 19/10/1918, p. 7; *Cape Times*, 22/6/1968; *The Friend*, 14/10/1918, p. 8; B. A. Tindall (ed.): *James Rose Innes*, p. 265; Interview with Sister Dympla.

171. Interview with Dr. J. P. Duminy.



Cartoon by D. C. Boonzaier in *De Burger*, 16/10/1918

Three days after this cartoon appeared, Boonzaier wrote in his diary: "For a whole week everyone was sensible of the presence of some universal calamity, from which there was no escape. Death stalked by your side incessantly, you looked into its face wherever you turned. Gradually the town emptied . . . only Death remained busy and carried on its work unceasingly."

(South African Library MSS. Department, MSC 4 (D. C. Boonzaier Collection), Diary vol. 19, p. 29, Entry for 19/10/1918.

away to the cemetery.<sup>172</sup> Each morning Municipal waggons went around collecting bodies from the streets and from those addresses where deaths had been reported.<sup>173</sup> In this grim task they were assisted by ten convicts, induced to help by the promise of remission of their sentences.<sup>174</sup> After witnessing these carts in action a shocked visitor wrote:

"I actually saw the waggons going round, a bell ringing as they went, whilst the drivers called 'Bring out your dead!' Just as one reads in accounts of the Black Plague, and at which one has so often shuddered."<sup>175</sup>

Where families had transport of their own and could obtain a coffin, they took it to the station or to the cemetery themselves; Muslims, in accordance with their custom, carried their biers the whole way.<sup>176</sup> Observing the endless stream of funeral processions, a *Cape Times* reporter thought:

"It needs the pen of an O. Henry adequately to describe the scenes on the neck of the Salt River bridge, where funeral crowds upon funeral with distressing regularity."<sup>177</sup>

Any and every means of conveyance were to be seen, remarked a contemporary journal:

"Their friends carried them on biers, in coffins; they trundled them on wheelbarrows; they carted them, not single corpses at a time either, on trollies; they rushed them in motors with trailers; they sped them on [sic] taxis . . ."<sup>178</sup>

At all points ordinary burial procedures were hard pressed to cope and emergency action had to be taken by the Burial Sub-committee to prevent a complete breakdown. Extra coffins were required at once, for, as early as 7 October, a number of 'flu victims had had to be buried wrapped only in blankets.<sup>179</sup> Municipal, Railways and private carpenters were hastily enlisted to meet this need; by the end of the epidemic they had made over 2 000 coffins, which were supplied free of charge to anyone needing them.<sup>180</sup> Temporary morgues had to be set up too,<sup>181</sup> as

172. Interview with Alderman I. Ospovat.

173. CTMM 1918–1919, Appendix 2, p. xxxiii; *The Friend*, 14/10/1918, p. 8; *Industries*, November 1918, p. 576; *South African Nursing Record*, November 1918, p. 21; *Evening Post*, 28/8/1965, Weekend Magazine, p. 1 (Letter from P. J. van Niekerk); J. Penn: *The Right to Look Human – An Autobiography*, p. 44; Copy in author's possession of letter from Dr. C. F. Juritz to Reverend J. Kingon, 3/11/1918. Memories of this sight featured in the recollections of many survivors – see letters to author from Mrs. N. Peike, 27/11/1978, and from anonymous author, 16/10/1978; Collier Collection: Letters from Mr. F. Appolis, 7/7/1972, Mrs. I. Beater, 26/5/1972, Mrs. P. van der Poll (née Beuning), 22/8/1972, Mr. L. E. Holloway, 4/5/1972, Miss J. W. C. Schützler, 15/5/1972, Mrs. Z. Rennie (née van der Byl), 28/6/1972, and Mr. G. Fish, 12/5/1972; Interviews with Mr. C. F. Cassisa, Mr. Crawford, Sister Diympla, Miss S. Honikman, Mrs. S. Klaasens, Dr. M. E. McKerron, Mrs. W. Petersen, Mrs R. Shifrin, Mrs. J. Stern, Mr. S. Stone, Mrs. P. Weisbecker.

174. Central Archives, Pretoria: GG 1282, file 51/4922; *The Friend*, 14/10/1918, p. 8.

175. *St Michael's School Magazine* (Bloemfontein), April 1919, pp. 21–22.

176. *Cowley Evangelist*, January 1919, p. 17; Interviews with Alderman I. Ospovat and Mr. R. Whitford.

177. *Cape Times*, 19/10/1918, p. 6.

178. *New True Templar*, November 1918, p. 1.

179. *Cape Times*, 8/10/1918, p. 5.

180. CTMM 1918–1919, p. 19 and Appendix 8, p. xxiii; CT MOH's Report, p. 5; *Cape Argus*, 5/10/1968. Contemporaries recalled coffins being made from any wood available, including floorboards, flower-boxes and drawers (Interviews with Dr. M. Cohen, Mrs. R. Shifrin and Mr. S. Stone; Collier Collection: Letters from Miss J. W. C. Schützler, 15/5/1972, and Mrs. D. Allenberg (née Foster), 22/5/1972).

181. CTMM 1918–1919, p. 19 and Appendix 8, p. xxiii; CT MOH's Report, p. 5; *Cape Times*, 28/10/1918, p. 5; *Cape Argus*, 9/10/1918, p. 5; *Evening Post*, 28/8/1965, Weekend magazine, p. 1 (Letter from Rev. C. F. Lewis). The use of an old Municipal stable on Woodstock Beach as one of these temporary morgues gave rise to tales that corpses were being buried on the beach itself (L. G. Green, *Grow Lovely, Growing Old*, p. 160; Interviews with Mr. Crawford, Dr. M. Cohen, Mr. J. Granger and Mrs. R. Shifrin; Collier Collection: Letter from Mrs. K. Gilham (née Le Roux), 8/6/1972).

the existing one off Keerom Street was quickly filled to overflowing. From *De Burger's* offices next door, a journalist described how

“die lijke reeds op die vloer naas mekaar moet le [sic] om vir die buitengewone aantal plek te maak; dit word vertel dat hul later, in 'n staande houding teen mekaar moes gepak word.”<sup>182</sup>

In such a situation the normal procedure for issuing death-certificates from a central office was hopelessly inadequate. Permission was therefore granted for policemen, clergymen and depot-controllers to issue them too.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, if the death was from Spanish 'flu, the need for a doctor's certificate was waived.<sup>184</sup>

In town the office of the Maitland Cemetery Board was “held in a state of siege by crowds waiting to arrange for burials”, reported the Superintendent,<sup>185</sup> while at the cemetery itself the few grave-diggers not stricken with 'flu were nearly overwhelmed by the work, until assistance was obtained from Nigerian troops, casual labourers and University of Cape Town students.<sup>186</sup> Even then, many were buried communally, in long trenches,<sup>187</sup> while some funeral parties had to dig graves themselves.<sup>188</sup> Sixty years later, one woman clearly recalled the scene when her brother was buried:

“There were stacks and stacks of coffins. We were met by a Military Officer in charge of Askari Soldiers, who did the burial. These Askaries [sic] wore khaki uniforms with red sashes across one shoulder and red fezzes with black tassels. They carried the coffin further on to the trenches. We had a service round the coffin, which was left beside the trench, to be buried later. The soldiers saluted and went off duty. The trenches were very deep and were already filled with several coffins.”<sup>189</sup>

Others did not receive even these hurried formalities. At the height of the epidemic, the chairman of the Burial Sub-committee informed Dr. Anderson that he had just supervised the burial in three trenches of hundreds of Blacks “wrapped in hessian”. Lime had been sprinkled onto them and then a prayer had been said. “That's the best we could do”, he added dismally.<sup>190</sup>

Undertakers and clergymen were swept off their feet by the immense demands made on them. Anglicans arranged for a minister to be on permanent duty at Maitland,<sup>191</sup> while the Mayor's chaplain was present every day to officiate at funerals for which no other minister could be found.<sup>192</sup> At the naval cemetery at Simonstown firing parties were dispensed with at funerals.<sup>193</sup>

182. *De Burger*, 9/10/1918, p. 3. Nearly thirty years later the same journalist recalled this scene – see J. Steynmeyer: *Speklers met Koppe*, pp. 182–183; See too Interview with Mrs. J. Stern.

183. CTMM 1918–1919, p. 19; *Cape Times*, 24/10/1918, p. 5; *Cape Argus*, 28/10/1918, p. 6.

184. *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, p. 6.

185. *Cape Times*, 27/11/1918, p. 7.

186. CTMM 1918–1919, p. 19 and Appendix 8, p. xxiii; CT MOH's Report, p. 5; *Cape Times*, 8/10/1918, p. 5; 15/10/1918, p. 5; Interview with Dr. J. F. Midgley.

187. CTMM 1918–1919, Appendix 8, p. xxiii; *Tembuland News*, 8/11/1918; *Cape Argus*, 5/10/1968; W. D. Baxter. *Turn Back the Pages*, p. 111; Interviews with Sister Dymphna, Mr. J. Granger, Rev. E. E. Mahabane, Dr. B. Mackenzie, Mrs. S. Klaasens, Mrs. J. Stern and Mr. Solomons; Collier Collection: Letters from Mr. F. Appolis, 7/7/1972, Mrs. P. van der Poll (née Beuning), 22/8/1972 and Mr. L. E. Holloway, 4/5/1972.

188. *Cape Times*, 21/10/1918, p. 4; *South African Postal and Telegraph Herald*, November 1918, p. 55; South African Library MSS. Department: MSC 18 (Pocock Collection), Box 21, p. 675.

189. Letter to author from Mrs. C. F. Davids, 11/11/1978.

190. *Cape Times*, 29/6/1968, Weekend Magazine, p. 10.

191. *Cape Times*, 10/10/1918, p. 5.

192. *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, p. 5.

193. Collier Collection: Letters from Mr. F. W. J. Schonland, 13/5/1972, and Captain G. A. P. Webster, 7/7/1972.

The city's undertakers, though they worked all out, could deal with only a fraction of all burials. Their hearses, speeding to and fro, became a common sight. "At any rate there is one business which has not suffered of late!" remarked a *Cape Times* reporter mordantly.<sup>194</sup> Obviously he had missed an advertisement in his newspaper a few days earlier, which advised those wanting gravestones to "order immediately to avoid disappointment", as there was a "great dearth in marble!"<sup>195</sup>

During those two weeks Cape Town struggled hard to survive, improvising all the way to prevent the total collapse of the community in the face of what one resident expressively termed, "a regular tornado of plague."<sup>196</sup> No less justifiably the *Cape Times* called it, "the most terrible fortnight within the experience of . . . citizens".<sup>197</sup>

Even before the end of that fortnight, however, there were signs that the 'flu was easing, probably because its very infectiousness had left too few unaffected people to sustain it at an epidemic level. Simply put, there was "not the same amount of fuel to feed the fires", a specialist explained.<sup>198</sup> The number of deaths began to fall steadily from 15 October onwards and three days later Dr. Anderson ventured to announce publicly that "the epidemic has about run its course and is well under control."<sup>199</sup> Businesses began to re-open, public transport to run more regularly, employees returned to work in growing numbers and trade picked up. "For the first time since the outbreak was recognised as serious", noted the *Cape Argus* on 21 October, "one noticed a few people taking a leisurely and sociable morning tea on balconies."<sup>200</sup>

As the epidemic continued to subside, so a start was made to winding down the system of relief. Tighter control began to be exercised over the distribution of food and comforts to ensure that "idlers and loafers" did not receive them, house-visiting was streamlined, depots were allowed to keep shorter hours and from 21 October they began to be shut down. As the more serious cases still in the emergency hospitals were sent to regular hospitals, the former were able to close too.<sup>201</sup> By the end of the first week of November the extensive system of relief set on foot a month earlier had been more or less dismantled. Outwardly at least, Cape Town appeared almost normal again. On 2 November a satirical column in Bloemfontein's *People's Weekly* observed sardonically:

"The People Say:

"That the surest sign of the end of the epidemic in Capetown was the resumption of the murders and murder trials that appear to be part of the life – or death – of the Peninsula."<sup>202</sup>

Once the epidemic had passed, the newspapers were filled with letters and notices of thanks for assistance rendered and consideration given by employers to

194. *Cape Times*, 19/10/1918, p. 6.

195. *Cape Times*, 15/10/1918, p. 3.

196. SA Library MSS. Department: MSC 18, Box 21, p. 675.

197. *Cape Times*, 21/10/1918, Editorial.

198. *Cape Argus*, 14/10/1918, p. 5.

199. *Cape Argus*, 18/10/1918, p. 5.

200. *Cape Argus*, 21/10/1918, p. 5.

201. *Cape Times*, 21/10/1918, p. 5; 22/10/1918, p. 5; 23/10/1918, p. 5; 24/10/1918, p. 5; 25/10/1918, p. 5; 26/10/1918, p. 7; 28/10/1918, p. 4; 29/10/1918, p. 6; 30/10/1918, p. 5; 6/11/1918, p. 7; 11/11/1918, p. 7.

202. *The People's Weekly*, 2/11/1918, p. 3.



employees,<sup>203</sup> by the well-off to the poor<sup>204</sup> and, most of all, by Whites to “Coloureds” and Blacks.<sup>205</sup> The large number from the latter two groups emphasizes how seriously hit they were by the epidemic – Dr. Anderson estimated that three-quarters of the city’s “Coloureds” and Blacks were affected.<sup>206</sup> Its virulence and widespread prevalence seem to have completely overwhelmed their traditional forms of mutual help by friends or family, rendering them almost wholly dependent on the Municipality’s relief organization. It was the readiness with which this assistance was given that many found so surprising. A man on the Cape Flats was not alone when he remarked how

“The sad affliction through which we have passed . . . has revealed to many of us wholly unsuspected traits of real, practical sympathy felt for the poor by those in a happier position in life.”<sup>207</sup>

This is what “Coloureds” felt to be so heartening in the assistance given by Whites. Dr. Abdurahman “expressed the thanks of the coloured community to those citizens who had so ungrudgingly and unselfishly helped them during the Epidemic”,<sup>208</sup> while a meeting of the “Coloured” community chaired by Reverend F. M. Gow of the A.M.E. Church unanimously carried a motion of thanks to the Executive Committee

“for the noble and self-sacrificing work done for our people . . . We do so all the more because it was a real practical sympathy, not confined to any one class, but all shared alike in the spontaneous effort to relieve necessitous cases. Many of our people were rescued who otherwise would have perished from starvation and death.”<sup>209</sup>

While most “Coloureds” and Blacks seem to have been willing to accept what doctors and relief-workers prescribed – not that the high incidence and debilitating effect of the ‘flu left many with the energy to do otherwise<sup>210</sup> – it would be inaccurate to present a picture which ignored the resentment felt by some at the unwonted interference in their daily lives by strangers from a group usually quite unsympathetic to their problems. Occasionally such feelings prompted active

203. See, for example, *Cape Times*, 24/10/1918, p. 4; 31/10/1918, p. 4; 5/11/1918, p. 4; 9/11/1918, p. 5. The usual form this took was payment while employees were laid up or nursing their families or the continued payment of all staff even if the business was closed. One prominent employer, African Theatres Trust, refused to follow this practice, however, and adopted a policy of “no pay no work” with regard to its musicians for the period that its theatres were shut. The musicians responded by going on strike and won considerable sympathy from a public still infused with the spirit of co-operation and fellow-feeling of “Black October”. For details of the strike see E. Mantzaris: “Another Victory for Trade Unionism: the 1918 Cape Town Musicians’ Strike” in C. Saunders and H. Phillips (eds.): *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, vol. 3; T. Gutsche: *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa*, p. 157f.

204. See, for instance, *Cape Argus*, 5/11/1918, p. 6 (Letter from K. Ahmed); 7/11/1918, p. 5 (Letter from G. van der Schuur).

205. See, for example, *Cape Times*, 22/10/1918, p. 6 (Letter from S. Jordan); 5/11/1918, p. 8 (Letters from N. Menigo and from D.R.C. Missionary, Retreat); 11/11/1918, p. 8 (Letter from H. S. Gamildien); 16/11/1918, p. 10 (Letter from J. C. Baugaard); 18/11/1918, p. 8 (Letter from Coloured and Bantu Union of West London); *Cape Argus*, 30/10/1918, p. 6 (Letter from M. Isaacs); 2/11/1918 (Letter from E. M. Fakier); 16/11/1918, p. 5 (Letter from Ebenezer Kerkraad); *De Burger*, 18/11/1918 (Letter from F. N. van Nickerk).

206. CT MOH’s Report, p. 10.

207. *Cape Argus*, 7/11/1918, p. 5 (Letter from G. van der Schuur).

208. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/1/1/75, p. 230.

209. *Cape Argus*, 19/11/1918, p. 7.

210. The presence of Dr. Abdurahman in key positions within both medical and Municipal establishments would have ensured the compliance of most Muslims, unlike in 1882 or 1901. (See A. Davids: “The Revolt of the Malays” – A Study of the Reactions of the Cape Muslims to the Smallpox Epidemics of Nineteenth Century Cape Town” in C. Saunders et al. (eds.): *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, vol. 5, pp. 59–66 and E. B. van Heyningen: “Cape Town and the Plague of 1901” in C. Saunders et al. (eds.): *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, vol. 4, pp. 98–101).

resistance, as when corpses were concealed to prevent their being taken for burial in a mass grave<sup>211</sup> or when the Council's cleansing gangs were abused, obstructed and even assaulted as they tried to remove rubbish from backyards as part of their clean-up campaign.<sup>212</sup> Opposition was probably offered in less obvious ways too for instance, refusing to take medicine or blocking up window-panes broken by relief-visitors in their zeal to admit fresh air,<sup>213</sup> but little record of this has survived.

It would be equally misleading to deny that in the midst of the crisis some Capetonians acted quite selfishly, like the men who broke into the huts of 'flu victims at Ndabeni to steal money,<sup>214</sup> or the shopkeepers who increased the price of their lemons and oranges when these were in great demand,<sup>215</sup> or the little boys who sold the medicine bottles they had received at relief-depots after emptying the contents into the street,<sup>216</sup> or the freeloaders who took advantage of the availability of free provisions for stricken families to collect as much as they could for themselves. Instances of the latter caused relief-depots to check the bona fides of doubtful applicants; almost inevitably, it was primarily "Coloured" applicants who were subjected to such scrutiny.<sup>217</sup>

Prejudice of this sort was not slow to reappear as the epidemic abated and it was not long before White women were complaining angrily about the failure of their domestic servants to return to work quickly enough. Early in November, for instance, *The Cape's* "The Better Half" column grumbled:

"Coloured ladies, even the indispensable 'char', appear to be sitting placidly and comfortably in the fastnesses of their own homes, in undisturbed and luxurious convalescence, while the influenza-ridden housewife drags her weary limbs round a dust-laden and disorderly household."<sup>218</sup>

The authoress was not wrong about the absence of many domestic servants, but her prejudice blinded her to the main cause: the epidemic's very high toll among young "Coloured" adults in the Peninsula. Indeed, so devastating was its effect on them that well into the following year such labour remained in short supply in Cape Town. "Large numbers of families who can well afford servants are doing without them for the simple reason that none are available", reported the Magistrate of Cape Town at the end of 1919. He attributed this in part "to the ravages of the epidemic during last year."<sup>219</sup>

Two fundamental difficulties lie in the way of reaching a definitive total for the deaths caused by the epidemic in Cape Town: the overlapping nature of the

211. *Cape Times*, 31/7/1929, p. 9; 8/8/1929 (Letter for A. Abdurahman); 10/8/1929 (Letter from "Get Busy").

212. CTMM 1918-1919, p. 22; CT MOH's Report, p. 9; *Cape Argus*, 4/11/1918, p. 4.

213. *Cape Times*, 9/10/1918, p. 6 (Letter from J. Mulvihal); 16/10/1918, p. 5; Letter to author from Mrs. I. G. Reed, 26/10/1918.

214. Interview with Mrs. L. Mawu.

215. *Cape Times*, 10/10/1918, p. 5; 11/10/1918, p. 5; 18/10/1918, p. 6; *Cape Argus*, 10/10/1918, p. 5 (Letters from "Criticus" and "Fiat Justitia"); 11/10/1918, p. 4 (Letter from C.A.M. and advertisement by Nichollas and Company); Interview with Dr. J. F. Midgley. For allegations of profiteering by wholesalers see Central Archives, Pretoria: K17 (Minutes of Evidence to Cost of Living Enquiry), vol. 11, p. 1862.

216. *Cape Times*, 11/10/1918, p. 6; 16/10/1918, p. 5; Interview with Mr. Crawford.

217. *Cape Times*, 14/10/1918, p. 5; 25/10/1918, p. 5.

218. *The Cape*, 8/11/1918, p. 24. See too *Cape Argus*, 18/11/1918, p. 5 (Letter from N. A. P.) and 19/11/1918, p. 7 (Letter from E. A.).

219. Central Archives, Pretoria: J 190, file 1/307/19, Annual Report of Magistrate of Cape Town for 1919. On the post-flu shortage of labour in Cape Town see *Cape Times*, 30/11/1918, p. 8 and *Daily Dispatch*, 5/3/1919, p. 8.

TABLE 2  
SPANISH FLU AND ITS COMPLICATIONS IN CAPE PENINSULA: CASES AND DEATHS, SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER - NOVEMBER 1918

Area	Population			Cases						Cases/100 of pop.						Deaths						Deaths/100 of pop.						Sources
	W	C,L,B	T	W	C	B	I	T	W	C,L,B	W	C	B	I	T	W	C,L,B	T	W	C	B	I	T	W	C,L,B	T		
Cape Town Division	115 500*	184 500*																										UG 15-'19, p. 24; Union of South Africa: Report of the Board of the Union, No. 3-1919, p. 220
	?	?	c.300 000*	48 830	72 282	1 608	—	122 720	42,287	40,057	1 456	4 125	664	97	6 342	1,267	2,657	2,117										
Cape Town Magisterial District	71 937	132 662	204 399	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	1 111	3 192			4 303	1,54	2,41	2,1									UG 36-'19, pp. 36, 75.	
Durbanville sub-Magisterial District	3 564	5 639	9 203	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	9	311			320	0,25	5,52	3,48									UG 36-'19, pp. 37, 75.	
Simonstown Magisterial District	8 056 <sup>1</sup>	4 050	12 106	4 028 <sup>2</sup>	3 256 <sup>2</sup>	7 284 <sup>2</sup>			50	80,4	69	279			348	0,86	6,89	2,87									UG 36-'19, pp. 37, 75, except for 1 and 2.	
Wynberg Magisterial District	31 995 <sup>3</sup>	42 000	73 955	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	404	1 394	59	21	1 878	1,26	3,51	2,54									Union of South Africa: Report of the Board of the Union, No. 3, 1919 p. 220 except for 3	
CT Municipal Area	90 348 <sup>4</sup>	82 350 <sup>4</sup>	172 689								1 111 <sup>5</sup>	3 192 <sup>5</sup>			4 303	1,23	3,88	2,49										
											1 125 <sup>6</sup>	3 253 <sup>6</sup>			4 381	1,25	3,95	2,54										

\* = based on estimated totals for Magisterial Districts of Cape Town, Durbanville, Wynberg and Simonstown.

1. UG 30-'19, p. 6
2. CACT: 3SMT, file 4/1/22: Magistrate of Simonstown to Town Clerk, 6/11/1918.
3. UG 30-'19, p. 6.
4. CT MOH's Report, p. 10.
5. *Ibid.*, Table X
6. *Ibid.*, Table XI.

districts for which mortality figures are available<sup>220</sup> and, even more basically, the dubious nature of the figures themselves, both for cases and deaths. So many of the latter had gone unrecorded (especially among "Coloureds"), observed the *Cape Argus*, that "It is even doubtful whether the total [number of burials reported by the Maitland Cemetery Board] includes all who were taken to Maitland."<sup>221</sup> It is not surprising therefore, that, whereas no official estimate put the death-toll in Cape Town and its environs above 6 342,<sup>222</sup> popular estimates ranged between 7 000 and 14 000.<sup>223</sup> Dr. Willmot himself estimated the total to be 7 400 only for the period 1–25 October;<sup>224</sup> moreover his figure was generally regarded "as a very large underestimate", reported the *Rand Daily Mail*.<sup>225</sup> "If [the toll had] continued for one year", calculated one reporter, "the entire population of a city three times the size of Cape Town would have ceased to exist."<sup>226</sup>

Thus, it should be remembered that the mortality figures included in Tables 2–7 are poorly-based, to say the least; they should almost certainly be revised upwards, perhaps by as much as 40%.

Thanks to a breakdown of the figures for the Cape Town Municipal area by the City's MOH, it is possible to analyse the recorded deaths in this area in greater detail, according to sex (Tables 3 and 4), age (Tables 5 and 6) and the ward in which victims lived (Table 7). Unfortunately, this is one of the few areas in South Africa for which such particulars are available.

TABLE 3  
SPANISH FLU DEATHS IN MUNICIPAL AREA OF CAPE TOWN BY RACE AND SEX

	Male	Female	Total
White	660 (15,34%)	450 (10,46%)	1 110 (25,8%)
"Coloured", Indian and Black	1 875 (43,58%)	1 317 (30,61%)	3 192 (74,2%)
TOTAL	2 535 (58,93%)	1 767 (41,07%)	4 302

(Bracketed figures indicate each category's percentage of total Spanish flu deaths in Cape Town).

Sources: CT MOH's Report, Table VII, p. 3; Union of South Africa: *Census of Europeans, 1918, Part I*, UG 50–19, p. 26; CTMM 1918–1919, Appendix 8, p. i.

220. For instance, several of Cape Town's suburbs fell into the Wynberg Municipal or Magisterial Districts, while Muizenberg and Kalk Bay were in the Simonstown Magisterial District yet part of the Cape Town Municipality. As for the "Cape Town Division" for which the Influenza Epidemic Commission reported figures, it embraced the whole of the Peninsula and parts of its immediate hinterland (Union of South Africa: *Official Year Book of the Union*, No. 3–1919, p. 220). What the population of this amorphous Division was, is guesswork.

221. *Cape Argus*, 27/11/1918, Editorial.

222. See Table 2.

223. See, for instance, estimates in *New True Templar*, November 1918, p. 1, *Cowley Evangelist*, January 1919, p. 17; *Architect, Builder and Engineer*, 1/11/1918, p. 19; *Cape Argus*, 8/11/1918, p. 7; *Die Ebenezer*, 1/12/1918, p. 22; *South African Review*, 8/11/1918, p. 13; *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 1/11/1918, p. 983; *Cape Times*, 23/10/1918, p. 5; Copy of letter in author's possession from Dr. C. F. Juritz to Reverend J. Kingon, 3/11/1918; Witwatersrand University Library, Historical and Literary Papers Division: AB 186 (Carter Letters), Carter to Lord Wenlock 24/10/1918; CACT: A 1947 (Albrecht Diaries), vol. 1/32, p. 85; U.C.T. Library, Manuscripts Department, BC 160 (Alexander Papers), Correspondence 1918–20, Memorandum by Citizens' Housing Council, 11/3/1919, p. 2; BC 294 (Duncan Papers), Letter D1.18.10, Hennessy to Duncan, 25/10/1918.

224. *Rand Daily Mail*, 28/10/1918. He estimated that  $\frac{1}{3}$  of these were "Coloured" and Black.

225. *Rand Daily Mail*, 29/10/1918.

226. *Cape Times*, 23/10/1918, p. 5.

**TABLE 4**  
**SPANISH FLU MORTALITY IN MUNICIPAL AREA OF CAPE TOWN PER 100 OF**  
**POPULATION BY SEX**

	Male	Female
White	1,44	1,03
"Coloured", Black and Indian	4,8	3,04

Sources: CT MOH's Report, Table VII, p. 3; Union of South Africa: *Census of Europeans, 1918, Part I*, UG 50-19, p. 26; CTMM 1918-1919, Appendix 8, p. i.

Capetonians emerged from the episode of "Black October" grieving and distraught. "There has been so much heartache and misery – so much anxiety –" wrote one columnist feelingly, "that the strain has been almost past bearing . . ."227 Similar feelings prompted a critic on another journal to call for public entertainment to recommence at once to give "some respite to the residents of Capetown, who have lived in the hell of Capetown's horror this last month, and have seen sights that will haunt them to their dying day, . . ."228

To middle-class Whites, among Capetonians the least accustomed to scores of deaths in their own ranks through disease, the apparently indiscriminate decimation of the population came as a great shock. Trying to comprehend this according to the crude scientific ideas which they had picked up, they made a direct link between the epidemic's severity and unhygienic and overcrowded conditions in the slums. Few local doctors offered much by way of an alternative explanation. (Anyway, commented the *South African Medical Record*, all welcomed attention to slums and sanitation, "whatever may be the inspiring motive"<sup>229</sup>). The opinion that swarming, insanitary slums were to blame was given wide currency in print through graphic exposés and numerous letters, editorials and articles on this theme;<sup>230</sup> these were supplemented by the personal experience of conditions in the slums which many had gained in the course of house-to-house relief visits, when they themselves "learned what they never knew before, . . . [and] discovered in what hovels and under what discomfort the less-favoured classes live . . ."231 From "plague-spots" like these to the infection of the rest of the city was but a short step, they reasoned. A *Cape Argus* columnist recognised in this the essential interrelatedness of the health of all Capetonians, pointing out that

"Death has stalked from its vantage ground in these crowded rooms and seized our youngest and strongest in their immaculate surroundings."<sup>232</sup>

Since a return by the epidemic was widely forecast,<sup>233</sup> immediate action was imperative to remedy the conditions which were believed to have made its first visit

227. *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 1/11/1918, p. 983.

228. *The Cape*, 1/11/1918, p. 13.

229. *South African Medical Record*, 9/11/1918, p. 320.

230. See, for instance, *Cape Times*, 7/10/1918, p. 5 and Editorial; 8/10/1918, p. 5; 9/10/1918, p. 6; 14/10/1918, p. 6; 23/10/1918, pp. 5, 6; 25/10/1918, Editorial; *Cape Argus*, 9/10/1918, Editorial; 12/10/1918, Editorial; 14/10/1918, p. 6 (Letter from "Interested"); 22/10/1918, Editorial; *The Cape*, 1/11/1918, p. 6; 8/11/1918, p. 11; *Die Burger*, 14/10/1918, Editorial; *Architect, Builder and Engineer*, 1/11/1918, p. 19; S. W. Lavis: *Overcrowding and the Open Sore of the Slums*, pp. 4, 5.

231. *Programme of 38th Meeting of Cape Town Citizens 3/11/1918*, Memoranda p. 4.

232. *Cape Argus*, 19/10/1918, p. 7. For other expressions of this view see *Cape Argus*, 12/10/1918, Editorial; 14/10/1918, Editorial; *Cape Times*, 19/10/1918, p. 7; 22/10/1918, p. 6; 28/10/1918, Editorial; *The Cape*, 11/10/1918, p. 6; *South African Postal and Telegraph Herald*, November 1918, p. 55.

233. *Cape Times*, 19/10/1918, p. 7; 23/10/1918, p. 6; 21/11/1918, p. 7 (Letter from J. McDonald); 6/1/1919, p. 8 (Letter from J. McDonald); *Cape Argus*, 31/12/1918, p. 7; 15/1/1919, Editorial; *South African Review*, 8/11/1918, p. 9; 15/11/1918, p. 8.

TABLE 5  
SPANISH 'FLU DEATHS IN MUNICIPAL AREA OF CAPE TOWN BY RACE AND AGE

	0-1 Years	1-5 Years	Total under 5 years	5-15 Years	15-25 Years	25-35 Years	35-45 Years	45-55 Years	55-65 Years	65-75 Years	75 Years and over	Un- known age	Total
White	38 (0,87%)	68 (1,55%)	106 (2,42%)	30 (0,68%)	210 (4,79%)	384 (8,77%)	226 (5,16%)	102 (2,33%)	47 (1,07%)	17 (0,39%)	5 (0,11%)	1 (0,02%)	1 128 (25,75%)
"Coloured", Black and Indian	265 (6,05%)	392 (8,95%)	657 (15%)	245 (5,59%)	645 (14,72%)	915 (20,89%)	457 (10,43%)	210 (4,79%)	69 (1,57%)	26 (0,59%)	12 (0,27%)	17 (0,39%)	3 253 (74,25%)
TOTAL	303 (6,92%)	460 (10,5%)	763 (17,42%)	275 (6,28%)	855 (19,52%)	1 299 (29,65%)	683 (15,59%)	312 (7,12%)	116 (2,65%)	43 (0,98%)	17 (0,39%)	18 (0,41%)	4 381

(Bracketed figures indicate each category's percentage of total Spanish 'flu deaths in Cape Town.)

TABLE 6  
SPANISH 'FLU DEATHS IN MUNICIPAL AREA OF CAPE TOWN PER 100 OF WHITE POPULATION BY AGE<sup>1</sup>

	<1	1-4	Total under 5	5-14	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75 +	Unknown	Total
White population of Cape Town by age group	1 797	7 118	8 915	19 826	15 493	13 058	13 532	9 887	5 203	2 411	825	24	89 174
Spanish 'flu deaths per 100 of each age group	2,11	0,96	1,19	0,15	1,36	2,94	1,67	1,03	0,9	0,71	0,61	4,17	1,26

1. This table includes Whites only as the 1918 Census (which contained the analysis of the population by age) was limited to Whites.

Source: CT MOH's Report, Table XI

Union of South Africa: Census of Europeans, 1918, Part II, UG 51-'19, p. 46.

TABLE 7  
SPANISH 'FLU DEATHS IN MUNICIPAL AREA OF CAPE TOWN BY RACE AND WARD

Ward	Sea Point	Hair-bour	West Central	Kloof	Park	East Central	Castle	Woodstock	Salt River	Mowbray	Maitland	Rondebosch	Claremont	Kalk Bay	N.A.	TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
White	85 (1,98%)	71 (1,65%)	23 (0,53%)	84 (1,95%)	62 (1,44%)	76 (1,76%)	54 (1,25%)	152 (3,53%)	166 (3,86%)	91 (2,16%)	104 (2,42%)	61 (1,42%)	64 (1,49%)	14 (0,33%)	2	1 111 (25,82%)
"Coloured", Indian & Black	20 (0,46%)	232 (5,39%)	170 (3,95%)	222 (5,16%)	60 (1,39%)	556 (12,92%)	472 (10,97%)	187 (4,35%)	263 (6,11%)	110 (2,56%)	281 (6,53%)	317 (7,37%)	249 (5,79%)	53 (1,23%)		3 192 (74,18%)
TOTAL	105 (2,4%)	303 (7,04%)	193 (4,49%)	306 (7,11%)	122 (2,84%)	632 (14,69%)	526 (12,22%)	339 (7,88%)	429 (9,97%)	203 (4,72%)	383 (8,95%)	378 (8,78%)	313 (7,27%)	67 (1,56%)	2	4 303

(Bracketed figures indicate each category's percentage of total Spanish 'flu deaths in Cape Town.)

Source: CT MOH's Report, Table VIII

so devastating. Whether their motive was self-interest, humanitarian concern for the wellbeing of the lower classes or a determination not to be caught unprepared again, middle-class Capetonians led the clamour for preventive measures. "He thought if they had any reason for [a sudden outburst of panic] legislation . . .", a city councillor told the Council, "it was their experiences during the past three weeks."<sup>234</sup> Others agreed wholeheartedly and, by the beginning of November, numerous schemes to clean up Cape Town and put an end to overcrowding were being outlined by churches and other concerned organizations and individuals. A "fervour for cleaning up the city . . . possessed every citizen and every Councillor", noted one prominent businessman.<sup>235</sup>

That this was not merely the enthusiasm of a small number of would-be reformers is clear from what followed. How deep-rooted and enduring this ardour for reform was is another matter. Cape Town had known such enthusiasm for social reform before in its recent history, notably after the smallpox epidemic of 1882 and the plague of 1901, but few lasting improvements had come of these experiences.<sup>236</sup> The *Church Chronicle* has seen it all before and had few doubts that history would repeat itself. In its past, it wrote reproachfully,

"Capetown . . . has had dozens of lessons, oceans of advice and glowing appeals from those who know. What has been the result? Floods of talk, reams of letters in the press and not a square inch less of slumland nor of new houses. Capetown lives wholeheartedly and devotedly on the old fatalistic soothing syrup of laziness. 'Wacht een beetje'. 'Alles zal recht komen'. The real trouble lies with those who hold the purse strings."<sup>237</sup>

Yet, the initial zeal with which the Municipality tackled the clean-up campaign as the epidemic receded gave promise that perhaps even the toughest obstacles might be overcome.

Houses in which 'flu had occurred were thoroughly disinfected,<sup>238</sup> cemeteries were closely inspected for evidence of burials which had been too shallow<sup>239</sup> and a comprehensive campaign was undertaken to cleanse backyards and alleys of insanitary refuse, especially in more congested areas. "Lanes are being swept and fumigated, dirt heaps are cleared," rejoiced a District Six resident, "and it seems as if at last our City Fathers have been awakened to a sense of their responsibilities, especially towards the poor, . . ."<sup>240</sup>

To monitor the sanitary state of the city more effectively, a number of extra sanitary inspectors were appointed early in 1919.<sup>241</sup> Dr. Anderson hoped that this increased staff would also ensure the speedy discovery of any recurrence of the epidemic<sup>242</sup> and to this end too, he introduced voluntary notification of influenza by

234. *Cape Times*, 1/11/1918, p. 8.

235. *Cape Argus*, 30/10/1918, p. 5.

236. V. Bickford-Smith: "Dangerous Cape Town: Middle-class Attitudes to Poverty in Cape Town in the Late Nineteenth Century", and E. B. van Heyningen: "Cape Town and the Plague of 1901" in C. Saunders et al. (eds.): *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, vol. 4, pp. 56-58, 102-103; *Cape Times*, 23/10/1918, p. 5.

237. *Church Chronicle*, 31/10/1918, p. 387. For similar fears as to the fate of reform in Cape Town, see *The Cape*, 8/11/1918, p. 11 and 20/12/1918, pp. 20-21; *Cape Argus*, 23/10/1918, p. 5; *South African Lady's Pictorial and Home Journal*, November 1918, p. 4; CACT: A 540 (Michell Diaries), vol. 8, Entry for 28/11/1918.

238. *Cape Argus*, 23/10/1918, p. 5; CACT: 4CT, vol. 1/2/1/26, p. 124. Wynberg Municipality put the onus for having infected houses disinfected on the owner or landlord (*Cape Times*, 31/10/1918, p. 6).

239. CACT: 4CT, vol. ADD 1/1/2, p. 273; *Cape Argus*, 30/10/1918, p. 5; *Cape Times*, 31/10/1918, p. 6.

240. *Cape Argus*, 7/11/1918, p. 5 (Letter from H. R. Veldsman).

241. CACT: 3CT, vol. 1/1/1/75, p. 368; CTMM 1918-1919, Appendix 8, p. xxxi.

242. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2; Evidence of Dr. Anderson, p. 7; CT MOH's Report, p. 15.



local doctors.<sup>243</sup> In addition, when in March 1919 a renewed outbreak appeared imminent, he persuaded the City Council to engage a temporary additional MOH to assist him in investigating suspected cases.<sup>244</sup>

Many ordinary Capetonians showed themselves no less sensitive to dirt and sanitation. Letters to the press and public meetings highlighted unhygienic conditions of every sort,<sup>245</sup> residents of Observatory set up a permanent Public Health Vigilance Committee,<sup>246</sup> middle-class ladies worried about the cleanliness of the conditions under which their laundry was done by “Coloured” washerwomen<sup>247</sup> and court-cases against Blacks “illegally” in the city prompted sharp criticism of the overcrowded and filthy conditions under which they lived. “I consider the state of affairs as absolutely scandalous considering the virulence and ravages of the recent epidemic, and the probability of its recurrence”, said the presiding magistrate. “I cannot understand after what Cape Town has just passed through, how such a state of things could still exist.”<sup>248</sup>

All over the Peninsula the need for healthy living conditions was proclaimed, sometimes with surprising effect. For instance, the city’s shopkeepers agreed to shorten the working day by up to an hour to allow their employees more time in the open air,<sup>249</sup> while a year after “Black October” an appeal to provide seaside holidays for poor local children could still point to the “Experience in the Epidemic [which] showed what a woeful indifference to fresh air there is in the congested areas of the city.”<sup>250</sup> Within a few weeks over £300 was raised<sup>251</sup> and in 1920 the scheme took permanent form as the Cape Times Fresh Air Fund,<sup>252</sup> a charity still operating to-day.

Moreover, the newly-awakened concern for health went beyond preventive measures and paid attention to the treatment of the sick too, for the epidemic had sharply underlined the inadequacy of hospital accommodation in Cape Town.<sup>253</sup> In the aftermath, the Cape Hospital Board stepped up its campaign for a new general hospital on the Groote Schuur Estate,<sup>254</sup> while in 1919 the Synod of the Cape Dutch Reformed Church appointed a commission to consider the erection of a “Volkshospitaal”.<sup>255</sup> “De gevolgen van de epidemie dringen ons om die zaak niet

243. CTMM 1918–1919, Appendix 8, p. xxiv.

244. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/47/1/1/10, p. 210; *Cape Times*, 25/4/1919, p. 8.

245. See, for instance, *Cape Times*, 24/10/1918, p. 6 (Letters from “Vigilant” and “Anti-Tape”); 26/10/1918, p. 8 (Letter from H. James); 30/10/1918, p. 6 (Letter from “Only a Woman”); 11/11/1918, p. 10; 19/11/1918, p. 7 (Letter from I. Super); 27/11/1918, p. 9; 28/11/1918, p. 8; *Cape Argus*, 28/12/1918, p. 4 (Letter from W. B. Taylor); 31/12/1918, p. 10 (Letter from “Satis Verborum”).

246. *Cape Times*, 15/11/1919, p. 11; 27/11/1920, p. 10.

247. *The Cape*, 8/11/1918, pp. 25–27. There was perhaps a connection between their growing concern and the dramatic increase in the number of steam laundries in Cape Town in 1919 (I am grateful to Don Pinnock for these statistics); also perhaps between this concern and the new regulation of conditions under which laundry might be done (CTMM 1920–1, pp. 36–38).

248. *Cape Argus*, 31/12/1918, p. 7. See too *Cape Argus*, 2/1/1919, Editorial; *Cape Times*, 1/1/1919, p. 8; *South African Review*, 10/1/1919, p. 18.

249. *Cape Argus*, 18/11/1918, Editorial; *Cape Times*, 8/5/1919, p. 9.

250. *Cape Times*, 31/10/1919, Editorial.

251. *Cape Times*, 9/10/1920, Editorial.

252. *Cape Times*, 9/10/1920, Editorial.

253. CT MOH’s Report, p. 14; *Cape Times*, 28/11/1918, pp. 7, 8; 14/3/1919, Editorial and p. 8; J. H. Louw: *In the Shadow of Table Mountain*, p. 115; C. G. Botha: *The Cape Hospital Board 1913–1949*, p. 9.

254. CACT: HBC vol. 3, pp. 261–262; CACT: PAH vol. 24, files H6/41 and H6/43. However, it was 1938 before the Groote Schuur Hospital was finally opened (*Standard Encyclopaedia of South Africa*, vol. 5, p. 366).

255. *Handelingen van de XXIV Vergadering van de Synode der NGK in Zuid Afrika, 1919*, Synodale Handelingen, p. 15. The Volkshospitaal was opened in 1930 (*Standard Encyclopaedia of South Africa*, vol. 8, p. 151).

langer uit te stellen", declared the Praeses of the local Ring.<sup>256</sup>

At a domestic-level, a widespread ignorance of basic nursing skills among the Peninsula's women had been revealed too and in November 1918, a fund was launched to enable the St. John Ambulance Association to give free public courses on home nursing.<sup>257</sup> Commending the idea, the *New True Templar* pointed out that in the epidemic,

"More people died from lack of nursing than from lack of medicine; . . . In no way could we as coloured people better prepare [for a recurrence] than that we should start immediately to train suitable young women to nurse the sick."<sup>258</sup>

By February 1919 over £2 200 had been subscribed<sup>259</sup> and some 500 women of all races were in training.<sup>260</sup>

As for the immediate care of the 'flu orphans and assistance for families left destitute by the death of a breadwinner, both the City Council's Executive Committee<sup>261</sup> and local charity organizations<sup>262</sup> quickly realized that the task was beyond their limited resources. Accordingly, they agreed to a proposal by the Administrator, Sir Frederic de Waal, that a joint Epidemic Relief Committee be set up pro tem. to administer relief and investigate the full extent of what assistance would be required in the longer term.<sup>263</sup> So satisfied was De Waal with its work during the next two months that he subsequently provided for the establishment of similar Boards of Relief to dispense special poor relief in cases of natural disasters when he re-organized the system of poor relief in the Cape in 1919.<sup>264</sup>

In addition, he created a permanent, financially secure body, the Cape Town and Wynberg General Board of Aid, to supervise the provision of additional and special poor relief in the Peninsula;<sup>265</sup> thereby he formally involved the two local Municipalities in such work for the first time. The establishment of this Board was aimed at trying "to perpetuate in some way the excellent Board which came into existence as a result of the epidemic"<sup>266</sup> and so prevent a repetition of the situation during the epidemic when the privately-funded Cape Peninsula Charity Organization had been unable to take charge of the provision of relief locally because of a lack of funds.<sup>267</sup>

The new Board of Aid took over the Epidemic Relief Committee's functions and continued for some years to provide help to those cases which had arisen from the 'flu.<sup>268</sup> Concerts, bazaars and collections to raise funds for their care became regular features in Cape Town over the next few years. When a Social Welfare Advisory Committee to the City Council's Public Health Committee was set up in

256. *De Burger*, 28/11/1918, p. 3.

257. *St. John Ambulance Association, Cape Town Centre: 28th Annual Report for 1919*, p. 9; *Cape Hospital Board: Annual Report for 1918-19*, p. 17; *Cape Times*, 7/11/1918, p. 7; CACT: HBC vol. 3, p. 216.

258. *New True Templar*, November 1918, p. 4. See too *The Cape*, 22/11/1918, p. 26. For similar advice to Afrikaners, see *De Burger*, 16/11/1918, Editorial.

259. *Cape Argus*, 11/2/1919, p. 7.

260. *Cape Times*, 7/2/1919, p. 8. With the same aim in mind, in March 1919 Canon Lavis helped to form a branch of the District Nursing Organization in his St. Paul's parish (*Cape Times*, 4/6/1924).

261. *Cape Times*, 29/10/1918, p. 5.

262. *Cape Times*, 2/11/1918, pp. 7-8.

263. *Cape Times*, 6/11/1918, pp. 7-8; 9/11/1918, p. 7.

264. Ordinance 4 of 1919, section 5.

265. *Ibid.*, section 17.

266. *Cape Times*, 25/1/1919, p. 9.

267. *Ibid.*

268. *Cape Times*, 5/6/1920, p. 13; U.C.T. Library, Manuscripts Division: BZA 83/31 (Abdurahman Family Papers), Box 2, folder 4, "Cape Town and Wynberg General Board of Aid: First Report 1919", pp. 3-7.

1920,<sup>269</sup> the Board was represented on it along with other local charity organizations.<sup>270</sup> The Board continued to operate until the mid-1970s.

If there was one area in which the experience of "Black October" seemed to produce a major result quickly, it was housing. Convinced that overcrowded living conditions had been a prime factor in the epidemic's virulence, influential Capetonians recognized that urgent steps were necessary to remedy them.<sup>271</sup> In this the City Council took the lead. At its first post-'flu meeting on 31 October it agreed not only to raise £250 000 to construct houses for its own employees, but also to examine a Queensland scheme to provide advances to ratepayers of limited means to build homes of their own.<sup>272</sup> Voicing the reformist zeal in the air, one councillor declared:

"If members of the Council had been with Canon Lavis and himself on the previous day, and saw the dens and kennels in which people lived worse than rats they would support immediate steps to remove this blot on the town. He had never had an idea that such a state of affairs existed until yesterday, and he would oppose any more money being spent on the Pier or at Muizenberg until a housing scheme had been carried out."<sup>273</sup>

The Council also urged the Central Government and the private sector to do likewise for their local employees<sup>274</sup> and, as a result, the Chamber of Commerce<sup>275</sup> and the newly-constituted Employers' Housing Committee<sup>276</sup> set up committees to investigate the feasibility of such schemes. Moreover, when the former's committee appeared to be making little headway, its president, Richard Stuttaford, put forward the idea of establishing a garden city on the Uitvlugt Forest Reserve, offering £10 000 himself as a start. "For some time past, and more particularly since the influenza epidemic, I have given a good deal of thought to the question of better housing for the people of our larger cities", he wrote in January 1919. "I feel certain it [the garden city scheme] will materially help towards the physical and moral improvement of our people."<sup>277</sup> The Government readily ceded the land requested to the new Garden Cities Trust and in 1921 the construction of the first houses in Pinelands was begun.<sup>278</sup>

On a far smaller scale, the African People's Organization set up its own Mutual Building Society in 1919 to assist its members to build their own homes. By 1929 the Society had helped in the construction of some 200 houses.<sup>279</sup> It continues to function to-day as the Cape Town Terminating Building Society.

Meanwhile the City Council was also making progress with its own schemes. In May 1919 the Provincial Council passed the Municipal (Provision of Homes)

269. *Child Welfare Conference: Report of Proceedings of 4th Annual Conference, 1920*, p. 9; CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/4/7/1/11, p. 269; CTMM 1919-1920, p. 35. The original suggestion came from the 1919 Child Welfare Conference which actually proposed that municipalities should set up their own Social Welfare Departments to tackle the social problems revealed by the epidemic (*Report of Proceedings of 3rd Annual Conference, 1919*, p. 12; CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/4/7/1/11, p. 126).

270. *Child Welfare Conference: Report of Proceedings of 4th Annual Conference, 1920*, p. 9; CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/4/7/1/11, pp. 265, 269.

271. The Administrator even let it be known that he was toying with the idea of banning the owners of slum property from sitting on municipal councils (*Cape Times*, 5/11/1918, p. 9).

272. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/1/1/75, pp. 150-152; *Cape Times*, 1/11/1918, pp. 7-8.

273. *Cape Times*, 1/11/1918, p. 7.

274. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/1/1/75, pp. 150-152; *Cape Times*, 1/11/1918, pp. 7-8.

275. *Cape Town Chamber of Commerce Monthly Journal*, December 1918, pp. 9, 12-14; *Cape Times*, 18/12/1918, p. 8; 29/1/1919, p. 8.

276. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/5/1/1/8, pp. 310-311, 315; *Cape Times*, 1/1/1919, p. 4.

277. Quoted in G. Cuthbertson: "A New Town at Uitvlugt - The Formation and Development of Pinelands" (Unpublished Honours dissertation, U.C.T., 1974), pp. 11-12.

278. *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 30-32.

279. *Cape Times*, 15/8/1929 (Letter from A. Abdurahman); Union of South Africa: *Report of the Select Committee on the Subject of the Building Societies Bill*, SC 16-32, p. 67.

Ordinance allowing the Municipality to make advances to persons earning below £360 p.a. to build their own homes.<sup>280</sup> The raising of a loan of £100 000 to fund this scheme was subsequently approved.<sup>281</sup> As for the £250 000 scheme for housing municipal employees, strong backing came from the Citizens' Housing Council which launched a vigorous campaign to win support for the scheme, as the assent of ratepayers had to be secured first. Between March and August 1919 the Council held 15 public meetings where it urged that the scheme be approved "in view of the experiences of the influenza epidemic."<sup>282</sup> These had the desired effect and in August the city's ratepayers sanctioned the borrowing of £250 000 to construct what Stuttaford revealingly called, "a kind of insurance against ill-health."<sup>283</sup>

Nor did the City Council's readiness to tackle overcrowding end there. The shock of the epidemic's revelations also persuaded it to accept the quite radical idea of site-value rating of property in July 1919.<sup>284</sup> This, the local Land Values League claimed,

"would make it easy to improve and increase the housing conditions of Cape Town, those cruel housing conditions that were responsible for quite half the deaths that occurred last October, when the black shadow of pestilence hovered over the city."<sup>285</sup>

However, the scheme was voted down by a majority of ratepayers in October 1919 and had to be shelved.<sup>286</sup> "They'd been beaten by money-power and taxicabs", declared the Land Values League angrily.<sup>287</sup>

The tide of reformist ardour appeared to be ebbing and the promise generated by the flurry of post-flu, post-Armistice activity fading in the face of new concerns and the reassertion of vested interests. The following months confirmed this trend, as delay, red tape, rising costs and a waning sense of urgency all took their toll, curtailing intended schemes and putting paid to any hope of mass housing projects to solve the problem of overcrowding. It was with a mixture of anger and despair that the *Cape Times* noted in July 1920:

"To-day, in spite of the tragic and appalling lessons of the Influenza visitation, the insanitary state of affairs in the slums has in no way changed for the better. If anything, it has probably become worse, since the housing problem has reacted more disadvantageously upon the poorer classes than upon any other section of the community. At the present time, therefore, it is idle to advocate such grandiose schemes as cleaning up the City by clearing out the slums  
.. .<sup>288</sup>

By September 1926, seven years after the approval of the Council's schemes, nearly 1 000 houses<sup>289</sup> had been built in terms of them or with the assistance of funds under the 1920 Housing Act.<sup>290</sup> This meant that not even the estimated shortage of houses in 1919 (conservatively put at 3 500<sup>291</sup>) had been overcome yet, let alone the additional requirements that had developed since then. "All the work

280. Ordinance 23 of 1919. Ordinance 5 of 1920 extended the scheme's provisions to those earning up to £500 p.a.

281. *Cape Times*, 13/8/1919, pp. 7-8.

282. *Cape Times*, 15/3/1919, p. 10 (Letter from Citizens' Housing Council).

283. *Cape Times*, 13/8/1919, p. 7.

284. *Cape Times*, 15/7/1919, p. 7.

285. *Cape Times*, 13/10/1919, p. 8.

286. *Cape Times*, 13/9/1919, p. 9; 15/10/1919, p. 7.

287. *Cape Times*, 15/10/1919, p. 7. (The taxicab reference is to the use of taxis to take voters to the polls).

288. *Cape Times*, 19/7/1920, Editorial.

289. CTMM 1925-6, Appendix 9, p. lxxvi.

290. See ch. 11, pp. 225-226.

291. UG 4-20, para. 7.

which the Council has put into the task of providing more houses during the last few years", commented the *Cape Times* sadly in December 1927, "has no more than touched the fringe of the problem."<sup>292</sup> With rare frankness it put its finger directly on a major reason a year later, when it admitted,

"... at no moment in the whole history of municipal housing in Cape Town has the situation ever looked like being taken seriously in hand. This ten or twelve years' test is surely enough. It is the final condemnation of municipal housing in a mixed society like ours . . . The melancholy fact must be faced that a local authority elected mainly by Europeans will not, in the absence of epidemics which take heavy toll of Europeans and non-Europeans alike, interest itself in non-European housing sufficiently keenly to do any appreciable good."<sup>293</sup>

Given the enormous gap between the promise of 1919 and the meagre results of the following decade – by 1927 the shortage of houses had increased to over 6 000<sup>294</sup> – it is easy to judge the Municipality's performance harshly. Yet, compared to the decades before the 'flu epidemic, the extent of the Council's involvement in the provision of housing in the 1920s was unprecedented. Whereas before 1918 public funding of housing had been approached with great circumspection, the pros and cons of forsaking private enterprise being endlessly debated,<sup>295</sup> after 1918 those reservations disappeared almost entirely. The question was no longer whether public funds should be utilized in this way, but how much the Municipality could afford to allocate to housing. As early as September 1919 the City Council set up a standing Housing and Estates Committee in place of its Overcrowding Committee, "having regard to the increase in the Council's activities in this connection."<sup>296</sup> In this change of attitude and approach, the experience of "Black October" was crucial: it accelerated the acceptance of a principle which was only beginning to gain ground among the City's councillors and ratepayers. "Such awful conditions were disclosed at that time [of the epidemic]", explained one councillor in 1919, "that now housing was being brought within the same practical range as politics."<sup>297</sup> Throughout the 1920s, whenever housing was being debated, the epidemic formed the backdrop, either explicitly or implicitly. For instance, when new housing proposals met with opposition in 1928, a former mayor asked angrily:

"Surely our memories are very short if they fail to carry us back ten years! Do we need another *Epidemic* to awaken our consciences again? Do we need the presence of the grim Reaper, standing scythe in hand, waiting to claim his next victim, to remind us of unfulfilled promises?"<sup>298</sup>

The 'flu's dramatic lesson that "Germs recognise no colour bar" (as Lavis put it<sup>299</sup>) was not forgotten. When an earlier housing scheme was under discussion in 1924, a councillor had reminded the Council, "If once an epidemic breaks out it will be no respecter of persons or parish boundaries – it will sweep the whole of Cape Town; whether you live in Sea Point or District Six you will not be safe."<sup>300</sup>

Significantly, most of the new housing schemes which were undertaken by the Municipality (for instance those at Athlone, on the Cape Flats and in Lower Claremont) showed that middle-class Whites had learnt this lesson well – as a

292. *Cape Times*, 30/12/1927, Editorial.

293. *Cape Times*, 17/12/1928, Editorial.

294. *Cape Times*, 15/8/1927.

295. UG 4–20, para. 8; J. Shorten (ed.): *Cape Town*, pp. 451–452.

296. CTMM 1919–1920, p. 12.

297. *Child Welfare Conference: Report of Proceedings of 3rd Annual Conference*, 1919, p. 125.

298. *Cape Times*, 30/6/1928.

299. *Cape Times*, 16/7/1929.

300. *Cape Times*, 29/11/1924.

leading local businessman and political organizer had pointed out with alarm in October 1918, "the rate of mortality amongst the better classes has been particularly high."<sup>301</sup> If the risk of being infected by the poor was to be minimized, the latter should be made to live apart, preferably at some distance from areas inhabited by those who felt threatened. As far as the latter could see, separation on the basis of race would do this most effectively, for, to no small degree, race coincided with class. The housing schemes which were built, therefore, were designated as either for Whites or for "Coloureds".

It is clear, therefore, that although the experience of "Black October" may not have produced anything like enough houses to end overcrowding in Cape Town, it did exercise a major formative influence on the provision of housing in the Peninsula. Acceptance of the principle of public funding of housing, segregated townships for "Coloureds", sub-economic schemes and the construction of tenement accommodation all owe a significant amount to Cape Town's experiences during "Black October".

Perhaps the clearest example of the heightened sensitivity of middle-class Whites after the 'flu to the threat of being infected by other Capetonians is to be seen in their treatment of the city's Blacks. The epidemic had highlighted the wretched state of both Ndbeni and the Docks Location, making it plain that considerable improvements were necessary. Even more alarming for middle-class Whites (since the 'flu had arrived via the harbour) was the realization of exactly how close to the city centre the Docks Location was and how easily its residents could be infected. It is "a nursery for any nimble germ that may be lurking on vessels on which these natives are employed", an anxious reader wrote to the *Cape Argus*;<sup>302</sup> moreover, many were convinced that men from the locations had spread the 'flu city-wide as they wandered all over town carrying it.<sup>303</sup> While the Docks labourers were still under canvas at Green Point Cycle Track,<sup>304</sup> the Executive Committee was wondering, "whether it would not be advisable to locate the natives beyond the limits of the City as a health precaution", instead of allowing them to return to their old Location.<sup>305</sup> This would mean that they "may not be so readily able to frequent the city as they are at the present time, whilst housed in the Dock area."<sup>306</sup>

Equally disturbing to middle-class Whites was the discovery by house-to-house relief workers that there were large numbers of Blacks residing within the city itself (usually crammed into areas like District Six, the fringes of the Malay Quarter and Salt River), in contravention of the Cape colonial law which stipulated that most Blacks should reside in a location.<sup>307</sup> The explanation was simple: Ndbeni was too full to accommodate them.<sup>308</sup> These men were held to have carried the 'flu even

301. U.C.T. Library, Manuscripts Division: BC 294 (Duncan Papers), Letter D1.18.10, Hennessy to Duncan, 25/10/1918. In an earlier letter, Hennessy had wondered whether "the scenes we had seen and heard of in connection with others, were going to be repeated at closer quarters . . ." (Letter D1.18.9, Hennessy to Duncan, 17/10/1918). On Hennessy see *Standard Encyclopaedia of South Africa*, vol. 5, p. 485.

302. *Cape Argus*, 25/10/1918, p. 6 (Letter from "Health").

303. *Cape Times*, 28/11/1918, p. 8. When Cape Town was threatened with a renewed outbreak of influenza in March 1919, the danger of Blacks in the city spreading it was frequently mentioned during the City Council's debate on the matter (*Cape Times*, 7/3/1919, p. 8) as well as in business circles (*Industries*, March 1919, p. 174).

304. See p. 17.

305. *Cape Argus*, 22/10/1918, p. 5.

306. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 3/1/183, p. 645.

307. *Cape Times*, 23/10/1918, p. 6; 24/10/1918, Editorial; 31/10/1918, p. 6; 29/1/1919, p. 8; 7/3/1919, p. 8; CACT: 3/CT, vol. 3/5/1/16, p. 78; 3/CT, vol. 3/1/183, p. 624.

308. *Cape Times*, 13/12/1918, p. 9; 1/1/1919, p. 8; 20/1/1919, p. 7.

more widely through the Peninsula and, in the event of a recurrence, commented the *Cape Times*, would once again “fall easy victims to the disease, and at the same time . . . act as fearfully effective agents in the dissemination of the influenza germ, whatever it is.”<sup>309</sup>

Early action followed these revelations. Although the harbour’s need for a reliable supply of labour nearby precluded the closure of the Docks Location, the number of residents permitted there was reduced by restricting accommodation to Railways and Harbours employees only.<sup>310</sup> Meanwhile, the Government tried to rid itself of responsibility for Ndabeni (“an eyesore and a reproach”, the Acting Prime Minister called it)<sup>311</sup> to a not unwilling City Council. The Council saw in this offer a chance to take full control of the location, extend it and thus provide enough accommodation there for all Blacks currently within the city.<sup>312</sup> In this way it hoped to reduce the “threat” to the health of Whites in Cape Town.

However, when the Council discovered that land to extend Ndabeni would not be available, its willingness to take it over faded and it instead began to investigate other sites for a large, completely new location.<sup>313</sup> Amidst concern that Ndabeni was “a serious menace to the health of the natives who occupy it as well as indirectly to the city of Cape Town”,<sup>314</sup> negotiations over sites dragged on for some years until in 1922 several acres on Vijgekraal estate in the Uitvlugt Forest Reserve were finally accepted. Here a new location, Langa, was to be built to replace Ndabeni.<sup>315</sup> Blacks had few illusions about what lay at the root of this protracted tussle between the respective authorities over where their location should be sited. It raised “suspicion as to the real motives prompting the white-inhabitants in making these incessant shiftings of the Location”, a member of a deputation from Ndabeni told the Acting Minister of Native Affairs in December 1919. It appeared, he added,

“that only their hands were needed at work, and that if some mysterious arrangement could be devised whereby only their hands could be daily brought to town for purposes of labour and their persons and faces not seen at all, that would perhaps suit their white masters better.”<sup>316</sup>

Even if the improvements in the light of Cape Town’s experience of the Spanish ‘flu epidemic fell far short of what the enthusiasm in its immediate wake seemed to promise, it is nevertheless clear that the epidemic did produce important results, directly or indirectly. Its lasting impact at the local level in the Peninsula lies in the way in which it fixed a concern for health (as perceived by the White middle-class establishment) into attempts to solve local social “problems” at a time when distinctive features of 20th Century Cape Town were being moulded. The Board of Aid, the *Cape Times* Fresh Air Fund, Pinelands, Langa, Council housing schemes, “Coloured” townships on the Cape Flats all testify to this fact. Or as the Mayor during “Black October” put it the following year,

“ . . . there is an awakening of deep interest by our citizens in the question of social betterment of those whose circumstances are not affluent and require

309. *Cape Times*, 8/3/1919, Editorial.

310. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/5/1/1/8, p. 285; *Cape Times*, 31/10/1918, p. 6.

311. *Debates of the House of Assembly* . . . as reported in the *Cape Times*, vol. 4, p. 446, col. 2.

312. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/5/1/1/9, pp. 18, 22; 3/CT, vol. 1/1/1/75a, pp. 34–35. See ch. 11, pp. 226–228 for the Central Government’s efforts to systematize urban residential segregation on a national scale.

313. CACT: 3/CT, vol. 1/5/1/1/9, pp. 255–256; *Cape Times*, 24/10/1919, p. 8; 27/11/1919, p. 8.

314. *Cape Times*, 26/3/1920, Editorial.

315. C. C. Saunders: “From Ndabeni to Langa” in C. C. Saunders (ed.): *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, vol. 1, p. 169.

316. *Cape Times*, 9/12/1919, p. 10.

help in this direction, to relieve what we know as a menace to the health and well-being of the community, in that we are all liable, by contact and association, to detrimental results that may arise in any section of our community from time to time."<sup>317</sup>

317. *Cape Times*, 5/9/1919, p. 5.



## CHAPTER 3

## KIMBERLEY

It was seven to ten days after the Spanish 'flu had made its appearance on the Rand and in Cape Town that the first cases were reported in those parts of Kimberley where Blacks and "Coloureds" were most densely concentrated: the gaol,<sup>1</sup> the military camp,<sup>2</sup> De Beers' Compounds,<sup>3</sup> the Black locations<sup>4</sup> and the ramshackle Malay Camp area.<sup>5</sup> Almost certainly it had been brought from Cape Town by rail passengers – the first case at the gaol, for instance, was a "Coloured" prisoner who had arrived from Cape Town by train two days earlier.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it was probably virulent second-wave Spanish 'flu which began to infect Kimberley late in September rather than the milder first-wave 'flu emanating from Durban.

In 1918 Kimberley, with a total population of almost 53 000, consisted of three separate but interacting spheres: the town and its locations (population 39 221),<sup>7</sup> De Beers' Compounds (holding 11 445 labourers)<sup>8</sup> and the military camp (containing 2 322 troops).<sup>9</sup> In all of these, health and living conditions were generally poor. The town still retained many of the worst features of its mining camp days less than 50 years before – jerry-built houses (often dilapidated and heavily overcrowded), narrow and irregular streets, a pail system of sewage-removal, defective sanitation and an uncertain supply of water. In 1917 the average death-rate was estimated to be 25,2 per thousand, while infant mortality was calculated to be 194,6 per thousand births.<sup>10</sup> "With conditions existing as they did previous to the epidemic it was not surprising that when the epidemic started conditions for its spread were all in its favour", the General Manager of De Beers and member of the Board of Health, Alpheus Williams, told the Influenza Epidemic Commission.<sup>11</sup> To cap these "naturally bad" conditions (as a Government Inquiry described them in 1919),<sup>12</sup> responsibility for Kimberley's health was divided between the Municipality and the small, local Board of Health which dated back to the town's early years. This anomalous division of authority was to cause delay and confusion in initiating measures against the epidemic.

At first, the outbreak of influenza in Kimberley caused little alarm, especially as it coincided with a spell of unusually cool, windy weather.<sup>13</sup> Press reports, both

1. Kimberley Board of Health: Report by Alpheus F. Williams, dated 26th November, 1918, on the Epidemic of Spanish Influenza in Kimberley, p. 21. (Hereafter cited as Williams). See too IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. E. J. Jones, p. 3; Evidence of Dr. G. Pearson, p. 1.

2. SADF Archives, Pretoria: WW1 ISD 24, file 685, "Medical Situation for Week Ending 28/9/1918"; OC Troops Kimberley to Staff Officer, UIS Details, Pretoria, 4/10/1918.

3. Williams, p. 14.

4. Cape Archives, Cape Town (hereafter CACT): Kimberley City Council Minute Book 18, p. 55, Report to Mayor and City Councillors from Deputy Mayor, Cllr C. W. Lawrence on "Organisation Work To Combat Epidemic of Spanish Influenza, 7th November, 1918", p. 3. (Hereafter cited as Lawrence).

5. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. S. Zweiback, p. 2.

6. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Jones, p. 3.

7. Williams, p. 11.

8. Williams, p. 17.

9. SADF Archives: DC 1303, file 4003, OC Troops Kimberley to Staff Officer, UIS Details, Pretoria, 4/10/1918.

10. Williams, p. 25.

11. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Explanatory Statements by A. F. Williams, p. 8.

12. Union of South Africa: Report of the Housing Committee to Inquire into Matters Concerning Housing Accommodation in Urban Areas and the Amendment of the Unhealthy Areas Bill, UG 4-20, para. 46.

13. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Observations by J. H. Thorpe, p. 3.

local and overseas, suggested that it was nothing out of the ordinary, even if it was rather infectious. "The general opinion had been that influenza was nothing to worry about", recalled the Board of Health's MOH, "provided ordinary precautions were taken."<sup>14</sup> Anyway, had the Public Health Department not assured them that recovery was a matter of three to five days at the most, with mortality "trifling"?<sup>15</sup>

However, as the disease spread through the town, some doctors were puzzled by what they found. The District Surgeon, who had diagnosed the first cases at the gaol as ordinary 'flu, was perplexed when he made a second visit with the Board's MOH on 28 September. "Then they felt they were not dealing with ordinary influenza", he admitted.<sup>16</sup> He "had not seen any other sickness in any shape or form which bore any resemblance to these cases; he had had no previous experience of bloody exudations from the respiratory organs".<sup>17</sup> The two doctors agreed to send off specimens to the South African Institute for Medical Research for analysis.<sup>18</sup>

On 30 September operations at Dutoitspan Mine were halted because of the large number of men laid up.<sup>19</sup> In the locations the Acting Superintendent was instructed to do what he could to minimise the outbreak and two days later, the Municipality opened soup kitchens there for those indisposed by 'flu, while the Board of Health provided a large quantity of medicine.<sup>20</sup>

Numerous cases also began to appear among Whites in town and on 3 October the general hospital advised intending patients to telephone first to find out if there was place for them.<sup>21</sup> Businesses suddenly found themselves seriously short of staff,<sup>22</sup> postal deliveries were disrupted,<sup>23</sup> cargo piled up at the station undelivered and uncollected<sup>24</sup> and on 4 October a lack of witnesses and official court-personnel made it impossible for any cases to be heard.<sup>25</sup> On that Friday too, the town received a further shock: the mighty De Beers Company, the heart of all activity in Kimberley, suspended work at its mines amidst rumours of an appalling number of deaths in its compounds. "No one realises what is lying there", a nurse told her awed family on her return from helping at Dutoitspan.<sup>26</sup>

With fear and panic now growing among Whites and as much as half the town stricken with 'flu,<sup>27</sup> the City Council began to realise how bad the situation had become. It was like an "avalanche that fell on us", recollected a local doctor.<sup>28</sup> The whole town was being engulfed by a disease which, contrary to all assurances, was both virulent and dangerous – half-measures by the Board of Health (whose MOH

14. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Pearson, p. 2. See too letter to author from Mr. D. P. Veary, 11/10/1981.

15. Union of South Africa: *Report of the Influenza Epidemic Commission*, UG 15–19, para. 76 (telegram from Health, Pretoria to Magistrate Kimberley, 1/10/1918).

16. IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of Dr. Jones, p. 5.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

18. IEC, vol. 1, file 2: Written report by Dr. F. S. Lister, p. 2.

19. *Diamond Fields Advertiser* (hereafter cited as *DFA*), 1/10/1918, p. 7.

20. Lawrence, p. 3.

21. *DFA*, 3/10/1918, p. 7. Patients awaiting less than urgent surgery had already been discharged to make room for 'flu cases (Collier Collection: Letter from Mrs. L. M. Keightley, 9/6/1972).

22. Lawrence, pp. 3–4.

23. *DFA*, 4/10/1918, p. 7.

24. Central Archives, Pretoria (hereafter CA): SAS 719, file G 119/5, telegram from Div. Superintendent Kimberley to Railways, Johannesburg, 4/10/1918; Collier Collection: Letter from Mr. W. J. Bulmer, 16/5/1972.

25. *DFA*, 5/10/1918, p. 5.

26. Interview with Mrs. H. L. Gibson.

27. Lawrence, p. 10.

28. *South African Medical Record*, 11/1/1919, p. 6.

was himself down with 'flu'<sup>29</sup> and the Municipality were not going to stay its course. "A point has been reached", declared the *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, "when it becomes absolutely essential that the community should improvise measures in the general interests of the public at large."<sup>30</sup> Already on 4 October the Municipality had started depots to dispense free soup, medicine and other necessities to families hard hit by the 'flu'<sup>31</sup> and next day it arranged for 5 000 leaflets containing the *Diamond Fields Advertiser's* "Hints on Treatment" to be printed for general distribution.<sup>32</sup> To prevent the assembly of large numbers of people (which posed a risk of accelerated infection), bioscopes were urged to close, while householders were warned to take appropriate precautions, as the town's sewage and refuse removal system was faltering.<sup>33</sup> Most importantly, on Sunday 6 October a systematic door-to-door canvass of the city was organised with the assistance of volunteers to ascertain the extent of the 'flu and give help where necessary.<sup>34</sup> The information obtained "further emphasised the gravity of the position", reported the Deputy Mayor.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, the Board of Health was trying to secure doctors and nurses for the town. Four of the town's ten<sup>36</sup> doctors had fallen ill in the first days of the epidemic, putting the rest under enormous pressure. One of these recalled these harrowing days as follows:

"At every place you called the neighbours on each side waylaid you and almost dragged you into their houses, so that you could not get on with your planned-out work. After a few days, brutal as it seemed, you had in many cases to turn a deaf ear to all entreaties, and go on to the patients whom you knew to be seriously ill. . . . Everyone with the slightest attack, whether influenza or 'in-funk-enza', demanded to be visited at once (many slight cases even expecting two visits a day), and called in any passing doctor, even though they had been seen by their own doctor a couple of hours before."<sup>37</sup>

Despite telegrams from the Board of Health outlining the town's worsening plight and intimating that help should be sent, the Public Health Department in Pretoria did not deem it necessary to give any reply while it cast around for medical assistance.<sup>38</sup> "The telegrams . . . were of the nature of reports as to the happenings", explained the Assistant MOH in Pretoria defensively to the Influenza Epidemic Commission. "One looked upon these telegrams from a different point of view now but from their then information there was nothing in them to indicate that they had got beyond the resources of thr [sic] Kimberley Board of Health."<sup>39</sup> Finally, in desperation, the Board of Health's chairman, the Resident Magistrate, appealed to the Department of Justice to try and secure military doctors. "Position here appalling," he cabled on 6 October, "258 buried from one Compound, police

29. Kimberley Public Library (hereafter KPL): Kimberley City Council Archives, Town Clerk's Letter Book, vol. 59, p. 98.

30. *DFA*, 5/10/1918, Editorial.

31. Lawrence, p. 11.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13, 20-23.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 14.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 14. Councillor C. W. Lawrence, the Deputy Mayor, acted as mayor until the return of the Mayor, Councillor John Orr, from Cape Town on 10 October. Orr had gone down to Cape Town on 29 September for health reasons unconnected with the 'flu (Lawrence, p. 3).

36. Even ten was only half as many doctors as usually served Kimberley in peacetime. Four years of war had reduced the 21 of 1914 to ten by 1918 (*South African Medical Record*, 11/1/1919, p. 6).

37. *South African Medical Record*, 11/1/1919, pp. 6-7.

38. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Dr. F. A. Arnold, pp. 2-3, 8, 10; Evidence of Dr. J. A. Mitchell, pp. 1-2, 6-7.

39. IEC, vol. 2, file 8, part 2: Evidence of Dr. J. A. Mitchell, pp. 1, 2.

districts for which mortality figures are available<sup>220</sup> and, even more basically, the dubious nature of the figures themselves, both for cases and deaths. So many of the latter had gone unrecorded (especially among “Coloureds”), observed the *Cape Argus*, that “It is even doubtful whether the total [number of burials reported by the Maitland Cemetery Board] includes all who were taken to Maitland.”<sup>221</sup> It is not surprising therefore, that, whereas no official estimate put the death-toll in Cape Town and its environs above 6 342,<sup>222</sup> popular estimates ranged between 7 000 and 14 000.<sup>223</sup> Dr. Willmot himself estimated the total to be 7 400 only for the period 1–25 October;<sup>224</sup> moreover his figure was generally regarded “as a very large underestimate”, reported the *Rand Daily Mail*.<sup>225</sup> “If [the toll had] continued for one year”, calculated one reporter, “the entire population of a city three times the size of Cape Town would have ceased to exist.”<sup>226</sup>

Thus, it should be remembered that the mortality figures included in Tables 2–7 are poorly-based, to say the least; they should almost certainly be revised upwards, perhaps by as much as 40%.

Thanks to a breakdown of the figures for the Cape Town Municipal area by the City’s MOH, it is possible to analyse the recorded deaths in this area in greater detail, according to sex (Tables 3 and 4), age (Tables 5 and 6) and the ward in which victims lived (Table 7). Unfortunately, this is one of the few areas in South Africa for which such particulars are available.

TABLE 3  
SPANISH ‘FLU DEATHS IN MUNICIPAL AREA OF CAPE TOWN BY RACE AND SEX

	Male	Female	Total
White	660 (15,34%)	450 (10,46%)	1 110 (25,8%)
“Coloured”, Indian and Black	1 875 (43,58%)	1 317 (30,61%)	3 192 (74,2%)
TOTAL	2 535 (58,93%)	1 767 (41,07%)	4 302

(Bracketed figures indicate each category’s percentage of total Spanish ‘flu deaths in Cape Town).

Sources: CT MOH’s Report, Table VII, p. 3; Union of South Africa: *Census of Europeans, 1918, Part I*, UG 50–19, p. 26; CTMM 1918–1919, Appendix 8, p. i.

220. For instance, several of Cape Town’s suburbs fell into the Wynberg Municipal or Magisterial Districts, while Muizenberg and Kalk Bay were in the Simonstown Magisterial District yet part of the Cape Town Municipality. As for the “Cape Town Division” for which the Influenza Epidemic Commission reported figures, it embraced the whole of the Peninsula and parts of its immediate hinterland (Union of South Africa: *Official Year Book of the Union*, No. 3–1919, p. 220). What the population of this amorphous Division was, is guesswork.

221. *Cape Argus*, 27/11/1918, Editorial.

222. See Table 2.

223. See, for instance, estimates in *New True Templar*, November 1918, p. 1; *Cowley Evangelist*, January 1919, p. 17; *Architect, Builder and Engineer*, 1/11/1918, p. 19; *Cape Argus*, 8/11/1918, p. 7; *Die Ebenzer*, 1/12/1918, p. 22; *South African Review*, 8/11/1918, p. 13; *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 1/11/1918, p. 983; *Cape Times*, 23/10/1918, p. 5; Copy of letter in author’s possession from Dr. C. F. Juritz to Reverend J. Kingon, 3/11/1918; Witwatersrand University Library, Historical and Literary Papers Division: AB 186 (Carter Letters), Carter to Lord Wenlock 24/10/1918; CACT: A 1947 (Albrecht Diaries), vol. 1/32, p. 85; U.C.T. Library, Manuscripts Department, BC 160 (Alexander Papers), Correspondence 1918–20, Memorandum by Citizens’ Housing Council, 11/3/1919, p. 2; BC 294 (Duncan Papers), Letter D1.18.10, Hennessy to Duncan, 25/10/1918.

224. *Rand Daily Mail*, 28/10/1918. He estimated that  $\frac{1}{2}$  of these were “Coloured” and Black.

225. *Rand Daily Mail*, 29/10/1918.

226. *Cape Times*, 23/10/1918, p. 5.

ill or had died were entrusted to young mothers still breastfeeding their own babies. In this emergency arrangement race seems to have been ignored.<sup>55</sup>

Emergency measures to contain the epidemic were not limited to the living. The rapidly rising toll of dead and the shortage of coffins and gravediggers quickly overwhelmed ordinary funeral arrangements and the roads to the cemetery were soon filled with carts laden with corpses wrapped only in blankets or sacks.<sup>56</sup> From the stoep of his house in West End, a convalescent saw

"some heart-breaking sights – a brother pushing his bicycle with his dead sister wrapped in a sheet . . . a husband pushing a wheelbarrow with his wife's body in a home-made box . . ."<sup>57</sup>

On 8 October a special Burial Committee was set up to assist undertakers with the funerals of Whites and "Coloureds". It tried to obtain more coffins and ensure that there was transport for them to the cemetery where burial-times were fixed for each denomination.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, coffins piled up at the cemetery<sup>59</sup> and funerals had to continue into the night, lit by the headlamps of motor cars.<sup>60</sup>

No such consideration was accorded to Blacks: De Beers, deciding that the interment of hundreds of corpses from its Compounds in the location cemetery daily was "unwise, and unfair to the General Public",<sup>61</sup> shifted its burials to mass graves on its own land, well out of public view.<sup>62</sup> Nor did the treatment of Black corpses differ very much elsewhere in Kimberley. A German missionary working in the locations graphically described how

"Daaglik van [sic] 2 tot 4 nm was massabegraving. Daar word niemand geregistreer of gevra aan watter kerk die oorledene behoort, en of hy/sy christen of heiden, man, vrou of kind is nie. 'n Sloot word diep gegrawe, 10x4 voet groot, daar word die eerste laag van omtr. 25 lyke naas mekaar gelê, elk in 'n kombers toegewerk. Dan sing ons, ek hou die diens, en 'n dun laag grond word daaroor gegooi, dann [sic] kom die tweede laag lyke. Gewoonlik word so elke dag 100 lyke begrawe, . . . soms was dit eger 125, en eenmaal 150; dit was ses begraafdienste op mekaar."<sup>63</sup>

Thus, by the end of the second week of October ("Black Week" contemporaries called it),<sup>64</sup> a series of ad hoc measures had been taken to deal with the sick and the dead in Kimberley. Yet, in a situation in which more and more people were succumbing to "flu every day and others were leaving the town for their own safety or to look after their families elsewhere,<sup>65</sup> Kimberley was running short of manpower to keep relief operations and essential services going. Attempts by the

55. Interview with Mrs. M. Jones.

56. Interviews with Mr. D. Drever, Mr. Eden, Mrs. M. Jones and Miss J. Kay; Letters to author from Mrs. M. E. Hardcastle, 20/10/1978; and from Mr. M. Kaye, 27/11/1978; Collier Collection: Letters from Mr. J. C. Butler, 10/5/1972; Mr. M. Kachelhoffer, 4/5/1972; Mr. J. Sperber, 11/5/1972; and Mrs. E. Barnard (née White), 4/5/1972.

57. *Evening Post*, 28/8/1965, *Weekend Magazine*, p. 2 (Letter from R. Fitzpatrick).

58. Lawrence, pp. 16–19.

59. Interview with Mr. D. Drever.

60. B. Roberts: *Kimberley – Turbulent City*, p. 366.

61. Williams, p. 5.

62. *Ibid.*; *DFA*, 11/11/1918, p. 6; Interviews with Mrs. M. Bohako and Mr. D. Drever; Collier Collection: Letter from Mr. W. J. Bulmer, 16/5/1972.

63. CA: Accession 172, vol. 2, Eerw. E. O. K. Müller, "Lewensloop", pp. 37–38. See too interview with Mr. W. S. O'Brien and Collier Collection: Letter from Mrs. E. Louw, 14/5/1972.

64. Interview with Miss J. Kay.

65. CA: GNLB 301, no. 2, part file 370/18/103, telegrams from Magistrate Kimberley to Natlab., 17/10/1918; and from Chief Registrar of Natives to Natlab., 21/10/1918; Lawrence, pp. 9, 21; Williams, p. 34; *DFA*, 15/11/1918, p. 7; Letter to author from Miss E. Westphal, 10/10/1981.

Deputy Mayor<sup>66</sup> and the Chief Registrar of Natives<sup>67</sup> to have the S.A.R. bar Blacks from leaving the town by rail proved in vain, despite the former's protests that, "Apart from inconvenience caused by stopping work, consider it dangerous as Natives may infect other centres."<sup>68</sup>

The influenza's high incidence apart, the death-rate in the town and locations alone during the first twelve days of October reached the equivalent of 600 per thousand p.a., a rate which would have wiped out the entire population of Kimberley within 16 months had it continued.<sup>69</sup> "If you get it, you must say your prayers", remembered one woman melancholically.<sup>70</sup> "South Africa is being called upon to confront by far the gravest crisis of its kind in the history of the Union," noted the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* sombrely on 10 October,

"and nowhere have its effects been more severely felt, relatively to the size of the place and the number of the population, than here . . . [where] all existing local resources have been strained to the utmost limits. . . ."<sup>71</sup>

Both literally and figuratively, ordinary life in Kimberley had all but come to a standstill: its streets were still and deserted, its shops kept short hours,<sup>72</sup> banks were open only between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m.,<sup>73</sup> the Post Office limped on with less than half its staff,<sup>74</sup> schools were closed,<sup>75</sup> trams ran free of charge for want of conductors,<sup>76</sup> the Railways carried only medicines and perishables,<sup>77</sup> no edition of the weekly *Kimberley Evening Star* could be printed on 12 October<sup>78</sup> and rumours of new deaths,<sup>79</sup> secret "Malay" remedies<sup>80</sup> and strange phenomena<sup>81</sup> multiplied. It felt as if, "Over the city of Kimberley a dark, sinister, threatening shadow of horror hung brooding for days and days", wrote one contemporary,<sup>82</sup> while others were reminded by the scenes about them of descriptions of London during the Great Plague.<sup>83</sup> Gloom, fear and resignation pervaded the city. Dejectedly, a postal official noted that it was

"impossible for me to describe the consternation and depression of spirits that existed amongst those who were not struck down with the malady. We were all wondering whose turn it would be next to be carted away."<sup>84</sup>

By the end of that week the municipal authorities were almost at their wits' end to know what to do to turn the tide. 11 October found them considering a plan to commandeer the town's doctors to enable "flu victims to be visited and treated more

66. Lawrence, pp. 9, 21.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 21; CA: GNLB 301, no. 2, part file 370/18/103, telegram from Chief Registrar of Natives, Kimberley to Natlab., 21/10/1918.

68. SADF Archives: DC 1303, file 4501 vol. 1, Memorandum from Dr. J. A. Mitchell, 9/10/1918.

69. CA: GG 924, file 33/1029, Report by Colonel A. J. Orenstein to Secretary for Defence, 21/10/1918, p. 4. (Hereafter cited as Orenstein).

70. Interview with Mrs. M. Jones.

71. *DFA*, 10/10/1918, Editorial.

72. *DFA*, 8/10/1918, p. 8 and 9/10/1918, p. 5.

73. *DFA*, 8/10/1918, p. 1.

74. Union of South Africa: *Report of the Postmaster-General for 1918*, UG 27-'19, p. 21.

75. *DFA*, 5/10/1918, p. 2.

76. *DFA*, 9/10/1918, p. 5; Interview with Mr. Eden; Letter to author from Mr. M. Kaye, 27/11/1978; Collier Collection: Letter from Mr. J. Sperber, 11/5/1972.

77. *DFA*, 15/10/1918, p. 3.

78. *Kimberley Evening Star*, 19/10/1918, p. 3.

79. *DFA*, 10/10/1918, p. 8.

80. Letter to author from Mrs. D. Campion, 27/10/1978.

81. See ch. 7, p. 132; *DFA*, 17/10/1918, p. 3 (Letter from "Observer"); Interview with Mr. W. O'Brien.

82. *Methodist Churchman*, 28/10/1918, p. 4 (Letter from "Adrem"). For similar impressions see letter to author from Mr. M. Kaye, 27/11/1978; and Collier Collection: Letter from Mr. M. Kachethofer, 4/5/1972.

83. Orenstein, p. 4; G. Findlay: *Dr. Robert Broom*, p. 42; Sir David Harris: *Pioneer, Soldier and Politician*, pp. 287-288.

84. *South African Postal and Telegraph Herald*, November 1918, p. 52.

promptly.<sup>85</sup> On that Friday, however, they learnt that in response to earlier appeals to Pretoria, the UDF's Acting Director of Medical Services, Colonel A. J. Orenstein, was prepared to come down from Pretoria for a few days to direct their efforts against the epidemic. Realizing what an outsider like Orenstein might be able to achieve with his experience (he had played a major role in combating epidemics during the construction of the Panama Canal),<sup>86</sup> authority and access to medical resources, they quickly accepted. Their reply well reflects their feeling of desperation: "Please come at once", it begged. "You will be in absolute control." They urged him to try to bring extra medical help too.<sup>87</sup>

Orenstein arrived by train at 11.30 a.m. on Sunday, 13 October. By the end of the day he had replaced the existing piecemeal measures which were so wasteful of the limited manpower still available with a tightly-organized and systematic counter-offensive which inspanned military, civilian and private (mainly De Beers') resources and which was under his absolute direction. To rationalize doctors' calls, the town was divided into twelve medical districts, with one doctor responsible for all day calls in each; night calls were left to a duty military doctor. Chemists were given three standard prescriptions to prepare and doctors were told to confine themselves to these. The visits by the doctors and the prescribed mixtures made up by chemists were free of charge for those who could not pay. Where patients required medical attention at home, a red cloth was to be hung out as a signal. To ensure that this was done at once and to see that no sick person lacked food or medicine, a second house-to-house visitation was organized on 13 and 14 October. Once this had established how many patients needed hospital-care and the hospitals themselves were rendering daily returns, bad cases were concentrated in the general hospital where the best treatment was available. The acute shortage of helpers at the hospitals was eased by the arrival of 60 soldiers secured by Orenstein from the Potchefstroom Camp; 40 more helped with the house visits. In short, in less than 24 hours Orenstein had more or less remodelled Kimberley's campaign against the epidemic, converting it into a co-ordinated, well-directed system, the running of which was entrusted to an enlarged Board of Health which took over all responsibility from the Municipality.<sup>88</sup>

In operation from the start of the third week of October, Orenstein's system was soon functioning smoothly and effectively. Yet, it was probably not so much on account of this, but more because the epidemic was rapidly exhausting the stock of as yet unaffected locals that the death-rate began to drop significantly.<sup>89</sup> Morale picked up at once, cheered by what were interpreted as swift results attendant upon firm direction from above. With the presence of the 100 soldiers from Potchefstroom, help was more freely available too. To drive home this improvement and remove "the depressing atmosphere at present prevailing in the city", Orenstein recommended that businesses return to their usual trading-hours as soon as possible.<sup>90</sup> Clearly he understood that

85. Lawrence, p. 25.

86. SADF Archives: DC 1303, file 4501 vol. 1, McLoughlin to Hewat, 16/10/1918; *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa*, vol. 12, pp. 112-113; A. P. Cartwright: *South Africa's Hall of Fame*, ch. 15; and idem: *Doctors of the Mines*, pp. 30, 37-49.

87. Lawrence, p. 25.

88. Orenstein, pp. 2-3, 5-7; Lawrence, pp. 25-26; Williams, pp. 3-5; H. Kloppers: *Game-Ranger*, p. 24.

89. Orenstein, p. 7 and Appendix F.

90. *DFA*, 16/10/1918, p. 5. Within ten days shops had returned to normal trading-hours, except they now kept a longer lunch-break to ease the strain on convalescing employees. Subsequently, this two-hour lunch break became a permanent feature in Kimberley during the hot summer months (*DFA*, 26/10/1918, p. 7 and 15/3/1919, p. 5; *Kimberley Evening Star*, 26/10/1918, p. 4).

an important dimension of the fight against the epidemic was the psychological.

After three days in Kimberley, Orenstein felt that his presence was no longer necessary as the situation was well in hand. On 16 October he returned to Pretoria, leaving Alpheus Williams of De Beers as head of the organization he had created. Under Williams the improvement was maintained: other than essential services were slowly restored, businesses opened for longer and on 19 October De Beers recommenced work on a small scale.<sup>91</sup> To hasten the end of the epidemic and prevent a revival, all "Coloured" and Black canteens were closed,<sup>92</sup> the disinfection of houses where people had died was begun,<sup>93</sup> shopkeepers were urged not to send goods out on approval<sup>94</sup> and on 26 October all public gatherings including church services and cinema performances were forbidden "in view of the extraordinarily infectious nature of the disease and the rapidity of its spread," and the need "to, as far as possible, completely eradicate the disease."<sup>95</sup>

With the number of new cases decreasing markedly<sup>96</sup> and calls on doctors reduced by 60–70% by 21 October,<sup>97</sup> Williams slowly began to curtail the provision of relief and medical assistance. On 25 October doctors were allowed to resume their normal practices, though five doctors from outside Kimberley were retained to attend the poor.<sup>98</sup> Two days later relief depots replaced general house-to-house visits as the source of free food and comforts<sup>99</sup> and on 29 October the temporary hospital in the Training College Hostel was closed.<sup>100</sup> The Belgrave followed suit on 4 November.<sup>101</sup> With the removal of the ban on public gatherings on 6 November,<sup>102</sup> the formal launching on 8 November of the Influenza Epidemic Relief Fund to provide long-term help to needy 'flu orphans and widows<sup>103</sup> and the re-opening of schools three days later,<sup>104</sup> "Black October" may be said to have ended in Kimberley. On that day too, the first of several fulsome tributes to the city's relief organization by Black and "Coloured" leaders appeared in the press. "Their action", wrote Sol Plaatje in one of these,

"not only justified, but it also enhanced the reputation, for tolerance of colour, for which the Europeans of this city are justly noted among the natives of South Africa and the Protectorates."<sup>105</sup>

One year later, looking back on "Black October", the Mayor minuted that, in the space of four weeks, Kimberley had gone through "the most disastrous event to be recorded in the history of the Diamond Fields".<sup>106</sup> As an old resident had

91. DFA, 19/10/1918, p. 7.

92. DFA, 18/10/1918, p. 7.

93. *Kimberley Evening Star*, 19/10/1918, p. 3; DFA, 21/10/1918, p. 4; IEC, vol. 2, file 6: Evidence of S. E. Sharwood, p. 1.

94. DFA, 29/10/1918, p. 7.

95. DFA, 7/11/1918, p. 8.

96. SADF Archives: DC 1303, file 4501 vol. 1, telegram from Williams to Orenstein, 21/10/1918.

97. Williams, p. 4.

98. DFA, 24/10/1918, p. 7.

99. DFA, 26/10/1918, p. 7.

100. *Kimberley Evening Star*, 2/11/1918, p. 5.

101. DFA, 5/11/1918, p. 6.

102. Williams, p. 7.

103. DFA, 11/11/1918, p. 7 and 16/11/1918, p. 3; *City of Kimberley: Mayor's Minute 1916–1919*, pp. 4–5.

104. Williams, p. 7.

105. DFA, 12/11/1918, p. 7. For other tributes in the same vein see DFA, 11/11/1918, p. 6 (Letter from "S"); 14/11/1918, p. 3 (Letter from L. J. Malghas); 29/11/1918, p. 7 and 6/12/1918 (Letter from H. J. Tobin); KPL: Kimberley City Council Archives, Unnumbered file, dossier 722, Letter from Secretary, Green Point Stand Holders Association Executive Committee to Superintendent Native Locations, 26/11/1918.

106. *City of Kimberley: Mayor's Minute 1916–1919*, p. 4.