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ARTICLES

An Ascendant Sugarocracy:

Natal's Millers-cum-Planters, 1905-1939

David Lincoln..... 1

Racially Segregated Transport in Durban:

The Formative Years, 1905-1927

Gordon Pirie..... 41

Municipal Fraud: The Operation of Durban's

Native Revenue Account, 1908-1953

Paul Maylam..... 69

Trade Union Organizer in Durban:

M B Yengwa, 1943-1944

Baruch Hirson..... 93

REVIEW ARTICLES

A Tainted Well. The Objectives, Historical

Fantasies and Working Methods of James

Stuart, with Counter Argument

Julian Cobbing 115

Liberals, Liberalism and the Liberal Party	
Dave Everatt.....	155

Inkatha and Contemporary Politics	
Shula Marks.....	175

BOOK REVIEWS

J Laband *The Battle of Ulundi*,(Jeff Matthews);Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest *Interfering in Politics. A Biography of Sir Percy Fitzpatrick*, (Richard Mendelsohn); Robert Edgar *Because They Chose the Plan of God. The Story of the Bulhoek Massacre* and Paul la Hausse *Brewers, Beerhalls and Boycotts. A History of Liquor in South Africa*, (Robert Morrell); Helen Joseph *Side By Side*, (Cheryl Walker); Miriam Makeba and James Hall *Makeba My Story*, (Lara Allen); Johann Maree (ed) *The Independent Trade Unions, 1974-1984; Ten Years of the South Africa Labour Bulletin*, (Steven Friedman).

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**AN ASCENDANT
SUGAROCRACY:NATAL'S
MILLERS-CUM-PLANTERS,
1905 - 1939
David Lincoln**

University of Cape Town

Bountiful soils, well-watered during the enervating months of summer, have played host to sugar cane plantations along Natal's coast since the mid-nineteenth century.¹ Originally, individual land-owners employed labour to cultivate and harvest their crops, and the cane was crushed and its juice crystallised on their respective properties. By the turn of the century these planters had witnessed the appearance of the first centralised sugarmills on the coastal landscape; mills which were technologically superior and capable of processing considerably larger quantities of sugar than their own small manufactories. The spreading influence of centralised sugarmilling at once heralded the demise of traditional plantation production along the sugar belt and the triumph of millers-cum-planters.²

Each miller-cum-planter unit comprised a sugarmill and estates. In addition to its own harvests, each crushed cane supplied by surrounding growers. These units of centralised production already dominated Natal's sugar industry when Zululand was opened to white settlers in 1905. Yet, although the Zululand coast was destined to become an extension of the Natal sugar belt, the colonial state prevented miller-cum-planter production from taking root in the territory. Instead, sugar production in Zululand was founded on a system of central mills

- 1 I wish to acknowledge the assistance of the Killie Campbell Library, the Transvaal Archives Depot and the Standard Bank Archives
- 2 A. Graves and P.Richardson, 'Plantations in the political economy of colonial sugar production: Natal and Queensland, 1860-1914', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 6:2 (1980), pp.214-29; P.Richardson, 'The Natal sugar industry, 1849-1905: an interpretative essay', *Journal of African History*, 23:4 (1982), pp.515-27.

supplied entirely by concessionaire growers. In spite of this differentiation between centralised milling south of the Tugela River and central milling to the north, Zululand's early sugarmills were erected by successful millers-cum-planters from Natal. Thus the most highly capitalised sector of the expanded sugar industry remained firmly under the miller-cum-planter yoke.

According to Richardson, there were three outstanding attributes of miller-cum-planter production which distinguished it from plantation production in the early 1900s: firstly, it was characterised by enlarged estates and milling capacities; secondly, it displayed an increasingly corporate structure as limited liability company ownership replaced individual ownership; and thirdly, it gave rise to an increasingly monopolistic structure of ownership over the industry as a whole.³ The tendency towards the concentration of capital and control in the sugar industry was manifested in the ascent and long-enduring pre-eminence of a small group of millers-cum-planters. Their economic standing, and the cultural and political influences which emanated from this small, dynastic grouping of sugar magnates, warrants their appellation as a sugarocracy.⁴

3 Ibid.

4 The term 'sugarocracy' has been adopted from M. Moreno Fraginals, The sugarmill: the socioeconomic complex of sugar in Cuba (New York, 1976). Biographical data on Natal's sugarocrats were, unless otherwise stated, collected from the following sources: E.Campbell, The life of Sam Campbell (Durban, 1933); N.Herd, Killie's Africa: the achievements of Dr Killie Campbell (Pietermaritzburg, 1982); Illovo Digest, passim; KC, M 32753, Marshall Campbell; R.F.Osborn, Valiant harvest (Durban, 1964), C.G.: a great Natalian: a biography of Sir Charles George Smith, KCMG, KStJ, JP (Durban, 1966), This man of purpose: a biography of Sir James Liege Hulett KtB, JP (Umhlali, 1973); E.Saunders, 'Katherine Saunders: the story of her life and times', in Flower paintings of Katherine Saunders (Tongaati, 1979); South African National Society, 'The Reynolds of Sezela' (1981); SASI, passim; South African Sugar Year Books; R.G.T.Watson, Tongaati: an African experiment (London, 1960).

Without examining their employment practices as such, this essay shows how the Natal sugarocracy asserted itself as a distinctive force in the cultural and political spheres of the region's social history.⁵ Initially, the sugarocratic personages and the relationships which underpinned their common yet decidedly competitive economic pursuits are considered. Thereafter, attention is given to how, out of the sugarmillers' own quotidian behaviour and involvement in community life, a sugarocratic identity was formed. Finally, the advancement of the sugarocracy's economic interests by institutional means is addressed.

I

When J.L.Hulett successfully tendered for the construction of Zululand's first two concession mills in 1905, he was almost 70 years old. It had been only four years since the ageing Hulett, Natal's foremost tea-grower, had made his debut as a sugarmiller. His Tinley Manor mill was one of many on the north coast. At Tongaat stood the mill which had been established by the deceased J.R.Saunders. Now under the control of his son Edward, this mill was the nucleus of the Tongaat Sugar Co.Ltd. which had been floated in Liverpool in 1899 with the younger Saunders and Frank Reynolds as its joint managing directors. Nearby, at Verulam, W.G.Armstrong was the proprietor of Central Sugar Factory (Pty.) Ltd., and still closer to Durban were the Campbells' two sugarmills. Marshall Campbell had floated Natal Estates Ltd. in London during 1895, and with the assistance of his son William he controlled their company's sugarmills at Mount Edgecombe and Prospect Hall.

A traveller going beyond the town of Durban and along the south coast during 1905 might also have come across William Pearce's sugarmill. Further south could be found the mill which belonged to Reynolds Bros.Ltd. (another company registered in England) and which had been operated by the brothers Frank and Charles Reynolds

5 For analyses of employment policies in the sugar industry during World War I and the interwar years, see D.Lincoln, 'Employment practices, sugar technology, and sugar mill labour: crisis and change in the South African sugar industry, 1914-1939', in W.R.Albert and A.Graves (eds.), The world sugar economy in war and depression, 1914-40 (London and New York, 1988); and D.Lincoln, 'The Zululand sore, the propaganda of labour, and the Natal Coast Labour Recruiting Corporation: migrant sugar estate labour in Natal, 1914-1939', (forthcoming).

since the deaths of their father Thomas and uncle Lewis Reynolds. Another group of brothers, George, Fred and Charles Crookes might have been encountered at Renishaw where they milled sugar in partnership with their father, Samuel. And at Umzinkulu, at the southern end of the sugar belt, our traveller would have seen the mill owned by C.G.Smith and five associates including the brothers Reynolds. Smith was, like Hulett, a comparative newcomer to the ranks of sugarmill owners, but his business links with Frank Reynolds went back to 1897, when together they had floated the Elandslaagte Coal Mining Co.

These men were themselves, or the sons of, pioneer millers-cum-planters in Natal. Coming for the most part from petite-bourgeois backgrounds in Victorian Britain, they now formed the core of colonial Natal's sugarocracy. And on the fringes of that core were a few other smaller millers-cum-planters - notably the Platts, Hawksworths and Kirkmans on the south coast, and the Addisons on the north coast - who completed the sugarocracy's corpus. These smaller millers were neither as influential nor as successful as their sugarocratic confreres, and it was principally under the aegis of capital accumulated in the names of Armstrong, Campbell, Crookes, Hulett, Pearce, Reynolds, Saunders and Smith that the sugarocratic cause was advanced. Not only did these feature prominently as eight discrete names in the affairs of the sugar industry, but they were also intertwined. Like patterns in a kaleidoscope, the structures of ownership and control in the most highly capitalised sector of the sugar industry frequently changed, yet in a circumscribed context.

Hulett had been the only one to respond to the Colonial Government's first invitation for tenders to build concession mills in Zululand. A second invitation had attracted tenders from Hulett and Friend Addison respectively. Although the latter was preferred neither was accepted because they embodied financial expectations of the Government. A third call was then made for tenders, and three submitted in response; one from Hulett, one from an unnamed party, and the third from E.Saunders and C.Reynolds. The doughty Hulett's

perseverance had paid off.⁶ Moreover, within a year of winning the Zululand milling concessions Hulett had added a second sugarmill to his holdings outside Zululand. This new mill at Darnall had been commissioned by Hulett primarily to crush cane supplied by 99-year leasehold planters on lands which he had procured for the purpose.⁷ Meanwhile, Samuel Crookes had died, leaving his sons in control of the Renishaw mill and estates; and William Pearce had floated Illovo Sugar Estates as a limited liability company with himself as its managing director and C.G.Smith and E.Saunders as his co-directors.

By the end of the year of Union further changes had been experienced in the sugarocratic domain, not least of which was the expansion of Illovo's board to accommodate George and Fred Crookes. At Amatikulu, a new chapter in the industry's history had opened when Hulett's first concession mill had begun producing sugar. And in anticipation of the completion of Hulett's second Zululand mill at Felixton, the former sugarmiller G.S.Armstrong (brother of Central Factory's W.G.Armstrong) had initiated an extensive cane-growing estate in the Umhlatuzi valley.

In addition to these developments since 1905, the year 1910 saw F.Addison forming a company with his son, and with capital of £100,000, to take over his north coast sugar venture as a going concern.⁸ On the south coast, G.Crookes, C.Platt and three of their associates had joined forces to float African Agricultural Estates and begin sugar production in southern Mocambique. Most significant of the joint ventures mounted during 1910 was that which involved three of the largest sugarmillers in Natal. One of them was Hulett, whose company had recently been re-named Sir J.L.Hulett and Sons Ltd., and its capital of £200,000 raised to £500,000. Another was E.Saunders, the "keen business man, drawing a good salary and 5% of the profits as Managing

6 For details on the Zululand concessions, see NLA Sessional Paper, 4 (1906); Natal Government Gazette, 27 June 1905; 'Umfolozi 1923-1973'; TAD, K39, vol 5, SC34; and SASI, 33:3 (1949), pp.157-61.

7 Hulett was an especially forceful proponent of leasehold settlement as a means of obviating speculation in agricultural land. NLA Debates, vol 37, 12 Aug. 1904, pp.523-36; vol 42, 2 July 1907, pp.81-92; and vol 48, 26 Oct. 1909, p.162.

8 SBA, Letters to London office, GMO 3/1/50, 6 April 1910.

Director of the Tongaat Sugar Co.Ltd.". The third was Marshall Campbell, Natal Estates' principal and a director of Elandsplaagte Collieries, who was considered at the time to be personally worth £50-70,000.⁹ Together, these three sugarocrats brought into being South African Sugar Refinery Ltd. and with Saunders as its managing director, the newly-formed company constructed a refinery at South Coast Junction. Whereas uneven quality had previously characterised the output of the various mills in Natal, the refinery offered the prospect of greater uniformity as well as a measure of rationalisation in the marketing of sugar.

By the end of 1910 then, the sugarocracy had made considerable progress on its route of ascent. And within a few months, G.Armstrong and his co-owners of the Umhlatuzi Valley Sugar Co. were awarded a milling concession and construction began on their newly-floated Zululand Sugar Milling Co. Ltd.'s (hereafter ZSM) mill near Empangeni. A few months later, on the south coast, Reynolds Bros. embarked on a programme of extensive expansion and restructuring. During 1913 G.Crookes was made Reynolds Bros.' joint managing director with F.Reynolds, and by the outbreak of World War I they had committed the company to the construction of its new Sezela mill.

World War I meant mixed fortunes for the sugar-producers. Amongst the positive effects of the War was the declining volume of sugar imports from Mauritius and elsewhere. Moc,ambique, however, maintained its position as a supplier of duty-free sugar to the Transvaal. Illovo, having purchased a large sugar company in Moc,ambique during 1914, was able to partake of the favours of reciprocity bestowed on the Portuguese territory by the Transvaal in terms of their *Modus Vivendi*. Towards the end of the War, C.G.Smith and Co. was to take over Illovo's investments in Moc,ambique. Meanwhile, the Smith group (Smith, W.Pearce, F.Reynolds and the Crookes') had begun to consolidate its holdings on Natal's north coast by forming the Chaka's Kraal Sugar Co. Ltd., and G.Armstrong and his associates had taken possession of the Emoyeni Co-operative Sugar Company.

These investments reflected the generally high returns to sugar capital during the War despite the constraints imposed on the sugarocracy's

9 Ibid., Inspection reports, INSP 1/1/209, 31 July 1910.

spheres of production and foreign sales. War-time strictures, coming so soon after Union's dilution of the sugarocracy's political influence, were doubtlessly part of the incentive behind the sugarocracy's commitment to new organizational enterprises, notably in the shape of the British Empire Producers' Organisation (hereafter BEPO) and the South African Federated Chamber of Industries (hereafter FCI).

And in response to the labour crisis precipitated by the termination of the indentured labour system and the massive withdrawal of Indian labour from the sugar industry in the wake of the 1913 strike, the sugarocracy had formed the Natal Coast Labour Recruiting Corporation (hereafter NCLRC).¹⁰ While the same could not be said of other employers of sugar workers, the intensity of the sugarocracy's struggle for labour was markedly reduced by the NCLRC's work. The sugarocracy was thus poised to take full advantage of the conditions which the 1918 Cost of Living Commission had anticipated.

During 1919, the exportation of sugar was again allowed under licence; a joint deputation of millers and growers to Cape Town resulted in the government's raising of the domestic price of sugar; and the campaign to restore imperial preference for colonial sugars also achieved a measure of success. Then in August 1919, with world sugar prices having risen threefold in the previous three months, another deputation met Smuts in Durban to press for a further increase in the domestic price. Yet another miller/grower deputation travelled to Pretoria the following month. When the Cabinet responded by pushing up the price fixing, the increment fell short of what the sugar-producers had hoped for. The alliance struck between the millers and the growers, by way of the formation of the South African Sugar Association (hereafter SASA) in 1919, had been inadequately effective, and the Cabinet's response has been seen as the impetus for E.Saunders to stand for election to parliament in 1920.¹¹

The strengthened sugar lobby (with Saunders and Heaton Nicholls in the Assembly and F.Reynolds in the Senate) helped to win two more

10 See Lincoln, 'Estate labour'.

11 A.H.Duminy, 'The "Natal Sugar Interest" and the Smuts Government, 1919-1924', (mimeo.).

price increases in 1920. Still frustrated by the price ceilings, and perturbed by the possibility of an imminent renewal of the Mocambique Convention which might prolong the flow of duty-free imports, the sugar-producers sent their representatives to Cape Town in April 1921. This was a vain bid, and when it was followed later in the year by two price reductions, the industry's representatives visited the Prime Minister. The upshot of this meeting was the Government's appointment of a Commission of Inquiry into the sugar industry.¹²

The Commission sat at a time when the milling companies, all of which were now registered in South Africa, were savouring the last fruits of the post-war boom. Since the end of the War, the propitious if somewhat frustrating market situation had seen considerable activity by the three largest milling groups. C.G. Smith and Co. had bought Umzinkulu and divested itself of its holdings in Mocambique; and the Smith group had acquired Addison Bros.' mill and estates on the north coast. Tongaat Sugar Co., having been unsuccessful in its bid for Addison Bros., had gone on to acquire the Umhloti Valley Mill and Estate Co. whose mill was moved to the vicinity of the existing Tongaat mill. Meanwhile, a Hulett subsidiary, Delville Estates Ltd. had taken over the Emoyeni mill from G. Armstrong.

By the end of the 1922, few of the rich fruits of the post-war boom remained to be picked, and a bank's inspectorate succinctly sketched the millers' position thus:

This Industry, after enjoying a period of exceptional prosperity during and immediately after the War, has been severely hit by the heavy slump in prices which afterwards followed. Many Sugar properties were purchased by planters, and some of the largest estates changed hands during the boom period at prices which it is difficult, and in some cases impossible to work to-day on a paying basis,

12 Ibid.; and H.I. Behrmann, 'A study of the economics of sugar-cane production in Natal', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Natal, 1959). Evidence collected by the commission is contained in TAD, K39.

*resulting, in some instances, in serious financial embarrassment....The industry appears to be in the hands of opposing Groups, who are jealous of each others interests, and until these interests are consolidated, or some satisfactory means of co-operation arranged, it is doubtful if the Industry can be organised and developed on the most economic basis giving the best results to all concerned.*¹³

As closely as they came to addressing the industry's malaise, the recommendations of the 1922 Commission were not put to immediate effect and the miller/grower status quo prevailed. Neither party, despite the removal of the sugar clause from the revised 1923 Mocambique Convention, was immune to the effects of the worsening world sugar crisis. And the growers, who always suffered more acutely during market depressions, were reminded (if they had forgotten at all) of their conviction that millers were taking an unjustifiably large dose of the sugar industry's diminishing revenue. The African Sugar and Cotton Planter articulated the growers' views thus: "We want more light thrown in the dark places, a more efficient policy of administration, and the discontinuance of the system of family-party cabals".¹⁴

It was against this background of an intensifying crisis on the international sugar market and sustained miller/grower friction that the affairs of the industry now became the focus of an inquiry by the Board of Trade and Industries (hereafter BTI). The BTI's report was the harbinger of change in miller/grower relations, although as C.G.Smith saw it, it was "a very elaborate report of a most pronounced socialistic complexion". Nevertheless, he was in favour of the Sugar Prices Bill recommended by the BTI since:

Both millers and planters at the present time are at daggers drawn...It is necessary that we should work together. These planters, as a matter of fact, are mainly supported by

13 SBA, Inspection reports, INSP 1/1/209, 4 Nov.1922. Some of the sugarocrats themselves, notably W.Pearce, experienced "financial embarrassment" during the early 1920s; and considerable losses were taken by the Smith group's Addison and Chaka's Kraal holdings.

14 African Sugar and Cotton Planter, 1(1925), p.11.

*the millers who have risked a great deal of money in starting returned soldiers and others on the land.*¹⁵

Now Smith, as far as his bankers were concerned, was something of an expert where risk-taking was involved. In 1910 it had been thought of Smith that "his liabilities are very heavy & he is somewhat extravagant in his mode of living"; in 1923, that "several investments, undertaken at his instigation and involving large amounts, have been very imprudent"; and as recently as mid-1925, that:

*there is little doubt that he is chiefly responsible for [C.G.Smith and Co.'s] very unsatisfactory financial position. He appears to dominate the company's financial policy although, as Managing Director in receipt of emoluments of £3,000 per annum, he devotes very little of his time to the company's affairs.*¹⁶

Smith's entrepreneurial optimism proved to be far better founded than his parsimonious bankers' pessimism.

The BTI's investigation had led it to recommend that the duty on imported sugar be raised as a protective measure, subject to certain conditions.¹⁷ The most pertinent of these was that the miller/grower agreements be revised to effect payment for cane according to its sucrose content. The duly instituted conference of millers and growers, under the chairmanship of the BTI's Fahey, produced the Fahey Agreement on cane pricing. The terms of the Agreement were embodied in the Bill which Smith had lauded, and which passed into legislation later in 1926 in the form of the Sugar Prices Act.

Their signatures on the Fahey Conference Agreement had barely dried before the millers-cum-planters began expanding their crop sizes on an unprecedented scale. Simultaneously, the existing refining arrangements were revised. Natal Estates had effectively reversed its commitment to the co-operative South African Sugar Refinery by introducing to its own sugarmill the double carbonation refining process. This move apparently incited Hulett's, under the hand of

15 Senate Debates, 5 June 1926, col 1229-39.

16 SBA, Inspection reports, INSP 1/1/209, 31 July 1910, 14 Dec.1923, 31 July 1925.

17 BTI, Report No. 66, Report on the sugar industry, 1926.

W.E.R.Edwards, to erect a new central refinery a few hundred metres away from the existing one. The older refining company was consequently liquidated, and in 1927 Hulett's South African Refineries Ltd. (hereafter Hulsar) began operations with Sir J.L.Hulett & sons, Tongaat and ZSM as its major shareholders.

Hulsar served a number of the north coast sugarmills, while the Smith group remained independent of the new venture. The group had not participated in the co-operative refinery movement during 1910, and C.G.Smith himself is said to have resigned from his position on Tongaat's board following a dispute he had instigated by questioning the methods of management employed by the old refinery's directors. And during the same year that the new co-operative refinery opened, a suchar process refinery was installed at Illovo, and all the Smith group's sugarmills remained outside the Hulsar scheme.¹⁸

Although these arrangements may have reflected their inability to achieve consensus over the techniques and management of refining, the sugarmillers showed little reluctance to combining forces to rationalise the system of selling their exports in London. At the end of the 1927/28 season, Edwards informed C.G.Smith and Co. of Hulsar's satisfaction with its chosen London agents, and expressed his concern that the Smith group should also deal through African Agency Ltd. This presented an opportunity to obviate mutually detrimental dealings and the following season saw the Smith group following Edwards' advice.¹⁹

Having reached agreement amongst themselves on the marketing of sugar exports, the sugarocrats had still to contend with the problem of protesting growers, many of whom had not been placated by the terms of the Fahey Agreement. As revolutionary as it was in the Natal context,

18 See Watson, *Tongaati*, p.132.

19 KC, F633 SOU, South African Sugar Association, 'Private and confidential statements and correspondence of E.Saunders and W.E.R.Edwards', Aug.1934.

the Agreement did not eliminate discord. From the outset there was abundant prejudice, shown in the refusal of 16 growers to sign the Agreement.²⁰ Breaches of the Agreement did little to enhance the prospects for a rapprochement. As a result of the averaging of statistics by Hulett's Felixton chemists in 1928, the mill's supplying growers had incurred losses, and for these and the costs of arbitration they were compensated in 1930.²¹ Given that at least two further cases were brought against Hulett's, and, more significantly, that the South African Cane Growers' Association (hereafter SACGA) split from the SASA, 1930 was a particularly turbulent year for miller/grower relations.²²

Relationships between the two branches of sugar-producers were complicated by differences along the sugar belt which had not been conducive to miller/grower unity. In Zululand, growers supplying the Hulett mills were consistently frustrated in their attempts to have their concession agreements altered. These endeavours were spearheaded in southern Zululand by the chairman of the Ginginhlovu and Mtunzini Planters' Association, C.B.Hill, and Felixton's F.Piccione. Both stalwart defenders of growers' interests in relation to the state, they were also frequently locked in combat with the millers (who were considered by Piccione to have treated concessionaires as "a lot of indentured Indians").²³ Their role was overshadowed only by that played by G.Heaton Nicholls of Umfolozi, at the northern Zululand end of the sugar belt.

Having parted company with the sugarocracy during the struggle to raise sugar prices in the early 1920s,²⁴ Heaton Nicholls became an outstanding champion of growers' interests and a thorn in the sugarocracy's flesh. His role as a growers' protagonist is suitably described in an excerpt from a speech of his:

20 BTI, Report No. 194, The sugar industry: working of sugar conference agreement and future organization, 1935.

21 SASI, 14:5(1930), p.303.

22 *Ibid.*, 14:2 (1930), p.85, and 14:10 (1930), p.667. On earlier conflict between Hulett's and Zululand growers see TAD, K39, vol 5, Memorandum from Ginginhlovu and Mtunzini Planters' Association to members, 24 Aug.1918; and SASI, 3:10 (1919), p.947.

23 *Ibid.*, 1:2 (1917), pp.131-4. See also *ibid.* 3:2 (1919), p.135.

24 TAD, K39, vol 3, Heaton Nicholls to sugar commission chairman, 20 April 1922.

They [the Zululand concession agreements] stood in the way of efficiency. To accomplish this it was necessary to organize all planters to enlist the aid of Government. That meant organizing the planters south of the Tugela, where the Government agreements did not apply... There was in existence at Umhlali an association called the Victoria County Farmers' Association, which was a very mixed bag. At my first meeting I was faced by the principal miller of the district who told the members that I was a socialist and some-what out of bounds in Umhlali; but it was not long before Umhlali formed the strongest centre in Natal. I travelled down the South Coast and stirred up considerable interest. The result was the formation of the Natal Planters' Union... from which it was a short step to affiliate Zululand and Natal into the South African Planters' Union - now the Cane Growers' Association. As its first President, I was in a position to speak, through the Executive, on behalf of all sugar planters to the Government. The objective was the revision of the Zululand agreements.²⁵

Besides having the Zululand concessions reviewed by the state, Heaton Nicholls fought to obtain state intervention on behalf of the growers.²⁶

In its conflict with the Zululand growers, the sugarocracy could not have found a more astute opponent than Heaton Nicholls. However, outside Zululand, and especially on the north coast between Durban and the Tugela River, the sugarocratic influence on growers' affairs gave rise to a more subdued miller/grower relationship. This was most evident in the case of two of the several growers' associations which were formed in the two or three years following the Fahey Conference. The Tinley Manor Planters' Association felt the presence of

25 'Opening address', Proceedings, South African Sugar Technologists' Association, 22 (1948).

26 Heaton Nicholls was of course a well-known figure; with a background in British colonial administration and destined for high office in South Africa. For details of his involvement in the politics of state and of sugar production in South Africa, see G.Heaton Nicholls, South Africa in my time (London, 1961).

Armstrongs and Huletts, while the Saunders' had some not inconsiderable sway over the Tongaat Sugar Planters' Association.²⁷ By the early 1930s, in the depths of the Great Depression, the sugarocratic influence on north coast growers' affairs had acquired another dimension. Many growers were selling up and it troubled the SACGA that the millers-cum-planters were such ready buyers. Such transactions undermined the remaining growers' autonomy, to such an extent that the Inanda Planters' Association for instance was rendered defunct when Natal Estates and Tongaat respectively bought a number of large estates in the district.²⁸

Besides having recently made deep inroads into the agricultural sector of the sugar industry as such, the sugarocracy had asserted itself in the manufacturing sector. On the south coast, Reynolds Bros. had absorbed both the Kirkmans' and the Hawksworths' properties. To the north, Armstrong had floated Zululand Sugar Millers and Planters Ltd. to take over ZSM and 7,500 acres of former Reserve land. This land was subdivided and offered to growers who would have pro-rata shares in the refurbished ZSM, on condition that none held in excess of 800 acres. An employees' pension scheme was launched which would be financed by the profits from 800 acres of cane. Another 500-acre tract was set aside as a source of funding for the Empangeni hospital until the state took it over; thereafter the revenue would go to church, educational or charitable institutions in the Lower Umfolozi district.²⁹ The Smith group had not been idle either. Three years after having acquired the La Mercy Sugar Co., that company's mill was sold to Tongaat, and in 1934 the Smith group's investments on the north coast were rationalised by the formation of the Gledhow-Chaka's Kraal Sugar Co. Ltd.

Thus it was quite a different pattern of ownership and control which the BTI's investigators found when they returned to the sugar industry shortly before the expiry of the Fahey Agreement's term of effect. The BTI's subsequent report provided the basis for a new agreement, the

27 *SASI*, 61:7 (1977), pp.349-51, and 62:9 (1978), p.447.

28 *Ibid.*, 15:2 (1931), pp.103-15, 15:10 (1931), p.630, and 16:10 (1932), pp.557-61.

29 South African Sugar Year Book (1930), pp.93-6.

terms of which were contained in the 1936 Sugar Act.³⁰ The sugar industry was compelled by the Act to adopt a formula for cane pricing - the "marginal formula" - which made provision for both the millers' and the growers' costs of production. The Act also laid the basis for the introduction of quotas and the establishment of a Central Board. Growers would henceforth be awarded quotas according to which they would supply specified quantities of cane to specific mills. The Central Board, upon which millers and growers would have equal representation, was designed to administer the quota system, to operate a cane testing service at all the mills, and generally to watch over the miller/grower relationship.

The 1936 Sugar Act brought a new accord, and the SASA was resuscitated. In the preceding decades of struggle, the sugarocracy had taken no steps to dispel the growers' view that it had been acting conspiratorially. A less secretive and better regulated relationship between the two principal components of sugar capital was now established, but the sugarocracy had not been stripped of the prerogatives of being in control of the most highly capitalised sector of the sugar industry.

II

Natal's sugarocrats exhibited a far from ascetic appreciation of the wealth and power which they accumulated during their ascent to supremacy in the sugar industry. Their ostentation manifested itself as an aspect of the common quotidian culture which arose out of the sugarocracy's sharing of a body of values pertaining to work, politics, education, patriotism, religion and leisure. It is appropriate to begin an exploration of that culture on the sugarocratic hearth.

Among the most conspicuous trappings of sugarocratic existence were the mansions which were built and furnished along the lines of the aristocratic British "family seat". On the north end of Durban's Berea ridge, J.L.Hulett built his Manor House in 1904. C.G.Smith took occupation of his own, slightly less imposing, Manor House on the south end of the Berea in 1912. And between the two stood Muckleneuk, the Campbell residence since 1914. The Campbells' former residence, Mount Edgcombe House, and the Saunders' country seat

30 BTI, Report No. 194.

Amanzimnyama, both of them to the north of Durban, counterposed the Reynolds' Lynton Hall and the Crookes' The Cedars on the south coast. Then there were the other rural homes such as the Pearces' Eden, the Hawksworths' Beneva, and Hulett's original Kearsney House which, we are told:

*was a well made and designed mansion with large, artistically furnished reception rooms and 22 bed-rooms... There was a big staff of Indian servants supervised by Michael, the butler, who had acted in a similar capacity to Lord Roberts in India.*³¹

Architectural styles and furnishings were transposed from the best of British bourgeois traditions, and often even in the naming of their homes the sugarocrats were determined to bring to Africa the accoutrements of a class to which they had not strictly belonged in their country of origin. In keeping with the image these houses were intended to convey, some of them became depositories of artworks collected locally and abroad. The image was doubtlessly sharpened when certain of them too were placed at the disposal of South African parliamentarians or British royalty. The most notable of these was the Umdoni Park house which F.Reynolds had built with the express purpose of donating it to the Prime Minister, Louis Botha, for use as a holiday residence by himself and his successors in office. More than that, receptions for visiting dignitaries enabled the sugarocracy to cement links, in the comfort of their own drawing rooms, with political figureheads as well as with prominent artists and writers. These receptions were impressive even by the standards of Natal's bourgeoisie, on a scale extending to the heights reached when:

Louis Botha, the newly appointed Prime Minister, was entertained [by Hulett] at Manor House. On this occasion the Durban Light Infantry supplied the music for more than a thousand guests. Frock coats and top hats, long frocks, high waists, British Officers in red mess-jackets; all interspersed with white turbaned Indian servants scurrying

31 Osborn, Man of purpose, p.37.

*to and fro; the tinkle of ice in long glasses combined to gladden a scene not forgotten in Durban for many a day.*³²

How the occupants of the grand sugarocratic houses spent their time when at home and not entertaining, was consistent with their bourgeois standing. Sugarocratic women occupied themselves when at home with gardening, hand-work, writing and culinary crafts, often with an eye to charitable causes and the annual exhibitions of the women's organizations to which they belonged as founders or members. An entourage of black domestic servants lent assistance and helped to project a genteel facade on the home front. Whether uniformly attired and discreet in the house or working outdoors as gardeners or drivers, it was these, usually adult, "boys" and "girls" whose toil gave cause for their employers' pride in the sugarocracy's homes and grounds.

From their home bases, sugarocratic families sallied forth on sporting or vacational outings. Roy Campbell, the renowned poet and author, has committed to perpetuity his memories of holidays spent by his sugarocratic family at their Peace Cottage near Umhlanga Rocks (another home in which Botha was received for holidays).³³ In later years W.Campbell paid periodic visits, once with a British royal party, to his private game reserve Mala Mala in the eastern Transvaal.³⁴ C.G.Smith went as far afield as Britain, Egypt, Madagascar and Moc,ambique to indulge his fancy for hunting and fishing. Sea excursions to Cape Town, East Africa or Europe were not uncommon, and G.Armstrong occasionally took to the air for trips to East Africa and Europe in the early days of passenger flight. Frank Reynolds' daughter preferred to be at the controls when in the air, and in the late 1920s was an aviatrix with her own aeroplane.³⁵ Another sugarocratic flier, W.H.Hulett, had the expertise to win the Govenor General's air race in 1937.³⁶ Other sugarocrats, notably C.G.Smith, had a penchant for races on *terra firma*, as members of Natal's community of race horse owners.

32 *Ibid.*, p.93.

33 R.Campbell, *Light on a dark horse*, (London, 1951).

34 *SASL*, 14:8 (1930), p.525.

35 *Ibid.*, 13:9 (1929), p.619.

36 *Ibid.*, 20:7 (1937), p.393.

Their competence at replicating the houses and life-styles of the British bourgeoisie was matched by the sugarocrats' ability to promote in Natal the religious and educational traditions of that class. As far back as the 1850s, the sugarocracy's progenitors had been instrumental in laying the foundations of church and school in the colony. As a young man, the older William Campbell - possessed of "a rigid Calvinistic spirit" - had contemplated the idea of doing missionary work in Africa.³⁷ When eventually he did come to Africa it had not been as a missionary, although elements of his proselytizing ambitions appear not to have altogether faded. In Durban he had been party to the creation of a Mechanics' Institute during 1853;³⁸ bringing to the colony a young (white) men's centre for part-time study much like those he had attended in Glasgow in his own youth (although "colonists of better financial standing were doubtful of the propriety of patronizing the institute").³⁹ Campbell had also assisted in the establishment of the Verulam Library and Literary Institute in 1858.⁴⁰

This institute was one of a number of organizations founded in Verulam's early years, at the heart of the north coast community of Wesleyan settlers which included Polkinghorne, Starrs and, of course, Huletts.⁴¹ J.L.Hulett's father had founded a small school on the north coast, and he himself had been an active member of the Verulam Sunday School Association which embodied the collaborative efforts of the town's Anglicans and Methodists.⁴² Interestingly, Hulett's staunch Wesleyanism did not prevent him from extending a hand of assistance to the Natal Indian Baptist Association during its infancy.⁴³

37 Herd, *Killie*, p.3.

38 *Ibid.*, p.10.

39 A.F.Hattersley, *Portrait of a colony* (Cambridge, 1940), p.102.

40 See M.Park, 'The history of early Verulam, 1850-1860', *Archives year book for South African history*, 2 (1953), pp.241-306.

41 See R.E.Ralls, 'Early immigration schemes in Natal, 1846-1853', (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Natal, 1934).

42 See Park, 'Early Verulam'.

43 Osborn, *Man of purpose*, p.32.

When Bishop Colenso's "hereticism" had become an issue of public concern among the colony's settlers, sugarmillers were embroiled in the melee which culminated in the bifurcation of the Anglican Church.⁴⁴ Although Marshall Campbell is said to have concurred with Colenso's attitudes towards Africans, he was offended by the bishop's radical approach to religion.⁴⁵ And the Saunders' - "reactionary products of mid-century Anglicanism" - had been equally intolerant of Colenso's style.⁴⁶

As stalwart protestants, the sugarocrats sought to provide schools which would serve the spiritual as well as the mundane educational needs of their own offspring. And if their houses were a reflection of the sugarocrats' achievement of, and keenness to display, the status they had as an adjunct to the British bourgeoisie, their accomplishments in the sphere of schooling were no less impressive. It was J.L.Hulett's offer of Kearsney House which enabled the Methodist church to found Kearsney College in 1921. In the early 1930s the school was moved to Botha's Hill, where part of the grounds had been made available by G.J.Crookes. One of the houses on the school's new site was donated by J.J.Crookes, and named after the Crookes' former home town in Yorkshire; another was named after the Huletts' home town in Kent.⁴⁷

The metropolitan and sugarocratic connections were just as pronounced at Hilton College. An Anglican school, it was owned since 1903 by Hilton College Ltd., of which Marshall Campbell was one of the largest shareholders. Partly inspired by England's Rugby School, and proclaimed "the cradle of school rugby in Natal",⁴⁸ Hilton College could count amongst some of its largest benefactors the Campbells,

44 See B.B.Burnett, Anglicans in Natal (Durban, n.d.).

45 Herd, Killie, p.14.

46 Watson, Tongaati, p.74. On J.R.Saunders' involvement in church affairs, see Natal Mercury, 3 April 1879; and English Churchman (1890).

47 Osborn, Man of purpose, passim; J.F.Reese, The birth and development of Kearsney College (Eshowe, 1975); and SASL, 20:11 (1937), p.651.

48 A.F.Hattersley, Hilton portrait (Pietermaritzburg, 1945), p.51.

Crookes', Saunders', Reynolds', G.Armstrong, C.G.Smith, C.G.Smith & Co. and Natal Estates. Hence the William Campbell and the Crookes blocks of the school, and its Edward Saunders Sanatorium.⁴⁹

W.E.R.Edwards, Hulett's managing director and the guest speaker at Hilton's 1938 speech day, might just as well have been referring to Kearsney College when he expressed his confidence that "whilst [its pupils] are at Hilton, with its traditions of manliness and sporting spirit, the foundation for the future is being laid".⁵⁰ The future of every young sugarocrat may not have been determined by his schooling, but that experience undoubtedly buttressed his class position. The schools established by sugarocrats, or chosen for their sons' education, were colleges for the progeny of Natal's elite: private, expensive, protestant, boys' boarding schools, originally intended to imbue their pupils with the social and ideological attributes of the British bourgeoisie, and the tenets of that class's morality.

The institutions originated and supported by the sugarocrats were complemented by their conjugal relations to endow them still further with bourgeois status; there was little ambiguity about their class position reflected in their choice of marriage partners. While dynastic lineages were maintained through inheritance, marriage partners furnished ties amongst sugarocratic families and between the sugarocracy and other branches of the bourgeoisie. Perhaps the most relevant of the local connections in this respect were between Hulett, Polkinghorne and Starrs; Hulett and Gillatt, and the Hulett/Jex/Smeaton/Goble chain; Campbell and Hepburn, and the Campbell/Armstrong/Barend links; the Crookes/Hawksworth link, and the Crookes and Gillatt and Dunsmore associations. Thus, if the sugarocratic families were not directly related by marriage (as in the case of the Campbells and the Armstrongs), marriages between their members and those of the old planter families and the old merchant families helped to create a close- if not always tight-knit community of

49 N.Nuttall, Lift up your hearts (Durban, 1971).

50 SASI, 21:11 (1938), p.625. For useful contextual information on the schools supported by the sugarocracy, see P.Randall, Little England on the veld: the English private school system in South Africa (Johannesburg, 1982).

millers, large planters, sugar company directors and senior company personnel.

This community owed its all to the success of Britain's colonial adventure on Africa's southeastern coast, and when it was shaken to its economic and cultural roots by the threatening winds of *Realpolitik*, soldiering traditions were created within the sugarocracy. Many of Natal's sugarmillers fought under arms in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, and some during the 1906 Bambatha rebellion.⁵¹ For example, F.Addison, W.G.Armstrong, W.Pearce and C.G.Smith were amongst the sugarocrats-to-be who fought in 1879; with Addison going on to become a colonel and officer commanding of Umvoti Mounted Rifles. In 1906 Pearce was commander of Durban County; and both R.A.Armstrong and W.A.Campbell served as captains. World War I also saw sugarocrats in action. Although their side again emerged triumphant, it was for the small sugarocracy a victory tinged with mourning, for a son of E.Saunders', members of the Armstrong family, and H.E.Hawksworth had lost their lives. Members of sugarocratic families had responded to the imperial call to arms three times in four decades; usually seeing military action with officer rank.

On another front, sugarocrats were often remembered for their philanthropy. Sometimes it was of a patriotic nature, as when C.G.Smith supplied Britain with horses worth half a million pounds for military purposes; and sometimes humanitarian, as when G.J.Crookes donated a hospital to the province of Natal. Such largesse did not go unnoticed in London. F.Reynolds was knighted in 1915 for his philanthropy, his donation of Umdoni Park to the Prime Minister, and his contributions to Michaelhouse, another of Natal's exclusive schools.⁵² In 1923 C.G.Smith was also knighted, so that not forgetting J.L.Hulett (knighted in 1902) and M.Campbell (knighted in 1916), the sugarocracy, small as it was, could boast of having had four knights in its midst.

The sugarocrats' benefactions were not untainted by controversy, and in 1930 the South African Sugar Journal, which was still at the time

51 For a detailed analysis of the rebellion, see S.Marks, Reluctant rebellion: the 1906-8 disturbances in Natal (Oxford, 1970).

52 National Society, 'Reynolds of Sezela'. For a portrayal of Michaelhouse, a boys' school founded 'especially for the upper and middle classes', see A.M.Barrett, Michaelhouse 1896-1968 (Pietermaritzburg, 1969).

primarily a growers' organ, expressed the opinion that certain sugarocrats had not paid their dues:

*Sir Frank Reynolds, who departed from the Sugar World at the end of September, left about a quarter of a million sterling, made entirely out of the Sugar Industry; yet not a penny has he left to benefit the industry to which he owed so much. In this he merely emulates his predecessors, Sir Liege Hulett, Sir Marshall Campbell and a few others.*⁵³

Nevertheless, the knighting of Natal sugarocrats had given symbolic affirmation of the connections between their quotidian culture and that of the British bourgeoisie with which they identified so closely. This was the way of life that could be held up as an example of the rewards due to those "who worked through the years to bring civilization to a barbarous country".⁵⁴

III

Being settlers and colonists, the early sugarocrats conceived of their social role in terms of ideas which were rooted in Victorian Britain. As they worked to foster a social and political climate amenable to the pursuit of their economic goals, the ruling class ideas of imperial Britain influenced their outlook on conditions in Natal. This much was evident from their interventions in the colony's affairs of state. Albeit only by glimpsing at fragments of speeches or by identifying affiliations there emerges a picture, coloured by personal nuances and dominant figures, of a coherent and sustained "sugarocratic position".

Natal's sugarmillers were well-represented in the Colonial Government, and most of the prominent sugarocratic families had members elected or appointed to office. Thomas Reynolds and his son Frank represented Alexander County at different times. J.L.Hulett became a member of Natal's Legislative Council when he ousted Saunders from the Victoria County seat he had occupied for a quarter

⁵³ SASL, 14:10 (1930), p.665.

⁵⁴ J.Hulett, 'Umhlali - a century of progress', Women's Institute, (n.d.), p.36. On other writing by the same authoress (wife of W.H.Hulett), see note 99 below.

of a century, and he was returned when he shared an anti-Responsible Government platform with M.Campbell and T.Groom in the 1892 general election. Hulett went on, after Britain's granting of self-governing status to Natal, to become the colony's Minister of Native Affairs and later Speaker of the House. And at one time or another, G.S.Armstrong, M.Campbell, J.Saunders and C.G.Smith also belonged to the Legislative Assembly (hereafter NLA).

From their contributions to debates in the NLA, it was made quite plain that the sugarmillers maintained an understandably strong allegiance to Britain. Imperial connections had some obvious connotations not least of which was the promise of military security. There were also sources of capital and mercantile guarantees which, over and above emotional bonds, indebted the sugarmillers to their former homeland. But, for all its acts of submission to metropolitan crown and flag, the nascent sugarocracy had left the fold of the British petite-bourgeoisie and it had an autonomous struggle to wage as a part of a colonial bourgeoisie: it had to engage itself in the formation and functioning of a colonial state; it had to work towards the objective of creating and then maintaining in servility a supply of cheap labour; it had to be assured of the political support of white settlers; and it had eventually to arrive at some compromise in its relationship with the ruling settlers in adjacent territories.

In order to grasp how the sugarmillers responded to these challenges, it is necessary to return to the time of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. It was a time when Hulett, desiring "the complete annihilation of the Zulu power", looked forward to being able to "mould and shape the incongruous mass of barbarism in our midst".⁵⁵ Hulett proceeded to suggest how he expected to "mould and shape" when he addressed himself with typical candour to his political supporters in Victoria County. It was his contention that the colonists should:

see that the natives are dealt with upon a basis of civilisation, which cannot be done under the tribal system. Increase the wants of the people; foster their industry, and give them a direct interest in the land - you make them

⁵⁵ Natal Mercury, 8 May 1879.

By supplanting "barbarism" with "loyalty"; by taking up cultural matters which encompassed modes of dress, medicine and marriage;⁶⁶ by attempting to break down the Reserve economy; and by other measures, the sugarocracy hoped to hasten the proletarianisation of Africans in colonial Natal. Some, notably M.Campbell, appeared to have enjoyed some success at tempering these ambitions, of fashioning a well-endowed local labour market, by winning a degree of loyalty in certain African quarters. Ever-ready to appeal to nationalist and populist sympathies in his dealings with Africans, Campbell was recognised as an "adviser" to a Zulu clan, and he and John Dube were said to have collaborated in a successful attempt to keep local Africans out of the fray during the 1906 rebellion.⁶⁷

The uprising led by Bambatha in 1906 had several sugarocratic figures donning their uniforms and taking up arms in retaliation. It also evoked in some of them sentiments of humanitarianism and paternalism. While his son was commanding troops to suppress the rebellion, M.Campbell afforded African refugees from the conflagration sanctuary at (but improbably in) Mount Edgecombe House.⁶⁸ And the paternalistic Hulett, somewhat less charitably, wrote to a cousin in Dover that :

*The warlike instinct of the natives, once roused, leaves no moment for consideration, but once over the people are like children, a momentary passion without reason or thought of consequences, and then docile as a dog.*⁶⁹

For Campbell and Hulett, and indeed for any other sugarocrat, the quest for labour as much as the colonist struggle for domination motivated an immersion into the institutions of rule and control. If this was apparent from their speeches in the NLA, it was also evident in the part they played as members of the Indian Immigration Trust Board. The sugarmillers had always been represented on the Board, but by 1907 E.Saunders was its chairman and Hulett, C.Reynolds and A.Platt

66 See *ibid.*, vol 1, 4 Dec. 1879, pp.149-52; vol 28, 27 June 1899, pp.340-1; vol 40, 8 May 1906, pp.13-4.

67 Herd, *Killie*, p.190.

68 *Ibid.*, p.37; and Womens' Institute, 'Mount Edgecombe area annals', (1964). And the paternalistic Hulett, somewhat less charitably, wrote to a cousin in Dover that:

69 Osborn, *Man of purpose*, p.76.

made up half of its membership. The following year saw C.G.Smith and E.Hawksworth joining the Board, and such was its composition by 1910, with sugarmillers predominating, that the Colonial Secretary saw fit to remark that "the Indian Immigration Board resemble Directors of a Company".⁷⁰

However enthusiastic they were about belonging to the organization which effectively determined the parameters within which they could operate as employers of Indian workers, the sugarmillers were not wholeheartedly in favour of an indentured labour system which relied perforce upon immigrants. Nor did it please them that Indian workers did not eagerly re-indenture themselves in droves upon the expiry of their first term. Lamenting their dependence on indentured workers from India, they searched feverishly for alternative, institutionalised means of recruiting labour.⁷¹ For G.Armstrong however the solution to the sugarmillers' quandary over labour was not too remote. As he articulated it in 1908:

To educate a Native or an Indian, without teaching him to work, is to give him a weapon which he will use against us...

...our Natives have never been in want. And to-day what is at fault is the laziness. They are an indolent people, and they want to be trained; and the only way to train them...is when they are young, and give them a continuous service for three or four years...the Indians work so well in this Colony simply because they are indentured for a term.⁷²

Armstrong repeated this proposal in the NLA,⁷³ and although it did not receive widespread support, it was an idea that was pressed again by F.Addison. In his personal deposition in the 1909 Report of the Indian Immigration Commission, Addison outlined what he perceived to be the benefits of a **konza** system for 14-year old Africans. "If the indentured youths are properly treated, housed, fed, and taught" he

70 NLA Debates, vol 49, 12 Jan. 1910, pp.417-24.

71 See for example *ibid.*, vol 49, 10 Jan. 1910, pp.341-2; and 19 Jan. 1910, pp.521-8; vol 42, 15 July 1907; and Osborn, Man of purpose, p.87.

72 NLA Debates, vol 44, 25 June 1908, pp.145-167.

73 *Ibid.*, 22 July 1908, pp.481-94; and 23 July 1908, pp.520-6.

opined, "they would and could not live as their forefathers did, and would be dissatisfied with the comforts of kraal life".⁷⁴

The tempo of proletarianisation in Natal and Zululand obviously bedevilled the sugarocracy's cause. What they found particularly frustrating were the legal constraints which prevented the creation of a coercive alternative to the Indian indentured labour system. Thus, on the eve of Union, Armstrong was to be found arguing as "a Britisher and an Imperialist" that:

If there is one thing that ought to be left in the hand of [the Union Parliament] it is the Native question...once for all we shall have no interference from Downing Street...

*I trust that this [Draft South Africa] Act will pass the House, and that we will become a nation equal to none under the British flag.*⁷⁵

It was not every sugarocrat who was enthralled by visions of what the Draft Act of Union might herald, and even Armstrong himself shared some of his confreres' reservations. They had previously taken a strong stand against rentier capital, and had been instrumental in having absentee owners persuaded by taxation to dispose of over 20,000 acres of land in Victoria County alone.⁷⁶ Now, as they contemplated Union, some of them voiced their misgivings about the nature of ruling class alliances that might arise in their own disfavour. Armstrong sounded a warning that "capitalists" were not to be trusted, and that in the Transvaal they were friendly with "the Dutch".⁷⁷ In sugarocratic parlance, "the Dutch" and British settlers stood apart as two distinct "races", while mine-owners were "capitalists" and they themselves "farmers". Thus it was with some prescience that J.Kirkman projected the unlikelihood of "racial division", thinking rather that "it will be a division on the great lines of country interests, merchants' interests, and magnates' interests".⁷⁸

74 Report of the Indian immigration commission (1909), appendix 1.

75 NLA Debates, vol 47, 1 April 1909, pp.42-65.

76 Ibid., vol 48, 3 Nov. 1909, pp.292-306; also vol 24, 1 July 1903, pp.8-11.

77 Ibid., vol 47, 1 April 1909, pp.42-65.

78 Ibid., vol 47, 5 April 1909, pp.78-88.

In the event, some of their worst fears were realised with Union. In its pursuit of "country interests" then, the sugarocracy was not relieved of the need to frequent the corridors of power after 1910, and it maintained a strong presence in the Union Parliament. As might be expected, the sugarocrats' trip to parliament followed the route set by the South African Party (hereafter SAP). At one time or another between 1910 and World War II, G.Armstrong, F.Reynolds and E.Saunders were elected to serve as SAP Members of Parliament; and Reynolds, M.Campbell, J.L.Hulett and C.G.Smith sat in the Senate. Smith, who had replaced Reynolds in the Senate in 1921, was the Natal leader of the SAP until his resignation in 1930, when he was made the Party's life president. In addition to these, W.Pearce was a member of Natal's Provincial Council; W.Clayton, who was J.L.Hulett's son in law, became a Senator after having twice been colonial Minister of Agriculture and having represented Zululand as a SAP Member of Parliament; and Reynolds' son, Lewis, was honorary assistant private secretary to Smuts before filling the seat for Natal Coast as a SAP Member of Parliament. The only noteworthy departure from the sugarocracy's obvious political leaning was seen in the ineffectual attempt made in 1929 by W.Campbell and G.Hulett to rally support in Natal for the National Party.

Unlike the colonial situation, where the causality of sugarocratic politics had been self-evident,⁷⁹ the sugarocracy's sway was conspicuously diminished after its absorption into a wider and more differentiated national bourgeoisie. What was more, when the most outspoken of the sugarocrats were heard in Cape Town after 1910, the ambiguities inherent in the "sugarocratic position" were starkly exposed. Campbell's opportunity to make an indelible mark in the Senate arose three years after having enunciated his unashamedly instrumentalist belief that "the native who is Christianised and educated, and is not simply a clothed native, is far more useful than a raw kafir".⁸⁰ During 1914, Campbell used his position in the Senate to defend free Indian workers against the notorious £3 licence. It was a valiant role which he played towards having the licence repealed, and it earned plaudits from

⁷⁹ Besides the above references, see Richardson, 'Natal sugar industry'.

⁸⁰ *Argus*, 14 Sep.1911. Copy filed in KC, P 4291.

among others Gandhi; but as vehemently as he opposed the licence, Campbell favoured the repatriation of its victims.⁸¹

As the largest employers of Indian workers in Natal hitherto, the sugar-producers at large were deeply pre-occupied during World War I with the question of how to compensate for the loss of India as a source of labour. However this concern for means of producing surplus value could not be permitted to deflect the sugarocracy's attentions from the related matter of realising value in the sphere of marketing, all the more so because it was now subsumed as a small part of a complex national bourgeoisie. Denied the possibilities which involvement in the pre-Union state had offered, the sugarocracy plunged with new determination into the politics of realisation and protectionism. Its earliest organizational enterprise in this respect was its involvement with the BEPO.

Broadly conceived by E.Saunders as a propaganda agency and founded in London during 1916, the BEPO represented an important vehicle for Natal's sugar exporters. In Natal, the BEPO enjoyed the material support of the sugarmillers, and both Saunders and Hulett's W.E.R.Edwards served terms as BEPO executives.⁸² On the London end, Major Sir Humphrey Leggett was the Natal sugar industry's permanent representative on the BEPO Council. The BEPO's secretariat, which amongst other duties distributed the quarterly Empire Producer to 70-odd affiliated associations in various parts of the British empire, shared the same London address as the Royal African Society (of which Leggett was the honorary treasurer). Leggett was obviously an "organization man" *par excellence*, and the Natal sugarocracy was no doubt reassured that it had a competent representative in him when he had proudly announced that:

in addition to [the BEPO's] sugar committee, on which I sit, they have appointed a very strong new committee, frankly styled "The Propaganda Committee"... They have paid me the compliment of making me Chairman of this

81 Senate Debates, 1914, col.424-5, 498; M.Gandhi, The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi (Delhi, 1959), vol 11, pp.465-70, and vol 12, p.433.

82 SASI, 2:3 (1918), p.1072; and 15:3 (1931), p.155.

*Committee, and I shall of course, do my best in that capacity for the interests of South African sugar.*⁸³

Within the Natal sugarocracy, E.Saunders was peerless as an organic intellectual. His involvement with the BEPO was crowned in 1918 by the publication in London of his A Self-Supporting Empire. Therein he gave support to his father's earlier attempts to instil in English minds a greater awareness of the "history and potentialities of the Empire".⁸⁴ His professed mission in this regard was to provide a blue-print for a "self-supporting empire" maintained by research, planning and imperial protectionism. Some of the measures which he advocated were the establishment of joint industrial[ists'] councils, and the greater application of science to agriculture in order to "set the labourer free from the treadmill that exhausts the body and dulls the intelligence".⁸⁵ These devices would, he claimed, contribute to "the true solution for the Capital and Labour difficulty [which] is to give every workman the opportunity of becoming a capitalist".⁸⁶

Turning to South Africa, Saunders cautioned that "the white population must be safeguarded from the tendency to degeneration which shows itself in a labour market liable to be flooded with masses of coloured workers".⁸⁷ And as for African workers themselves, he held that "everything depends upon utilising them not only in a manner beneficial to themselves but so as to prevent them becoming serious competitors with the white race".⁸⁸ There in a nutshell were the principal contradictions which the sugarocracy sought to resolve both by practical and ideological means: to foster a protected and progressive industrial environment while simultaneously preventing the de-colonisation, in body and in mind, of black workers.

83 *Ibid.*, 10:11 (1926), pp.758-9.

84 E.Saunders, A self-supporting empire (London, 1918), p.9. On J.R.Saunders' views, see *inter alia* his 'Natal in its relation to South Africa', Proceedings, Royal Colonial Institute, 13 (1881-82), pp.103-45.

85 Saunders, Empire, p.47.

86 *Ibid.*, p.68.

87 *Ibid.*, p.180.

88 *Ibid.*, p.142.

Another organization used by the sugarocracy to address these issues was the FCI. Although the sugarocracy played as instrumental a role in the formation of the FCI as it had with the BEPO, the nature and depth of its immersion in the politics of protectionism appear not to have been fully appreciated by social historians. In Belinda Bozzoli's pathbreaking analysis of the ideology and ideologues of manufacturing in South Africa prior to 1924, for example, she mentioned J.L.Hulett but ignored E.Saunders.⁸⁹ While there is no question as to Hulett's import as an ideologue, and even as a protectionist, when the FCI was launched in 1917, Saunders' contribution overshadowed anything that the 80-year old Hulett did or might have done in that sphere.

Saunders has been acknowledged as having made the original proposal which led to the formation of the FCI, and he served two terms as the FCI's president, first in 1919/20 and then in 1933/34.⁹⁰ His commitment to the FCI was based on the ideal of uniting manufacturing and agrarian capital and labour in "an industrial Parliament, capable of putting united propositions to the Government which would be impossible to turn down!"⁹¹ In this campaign he received the sugarocracy's active support, and until 1936 the Natal Sugar Millers' Association (hereafter NSMA) had three representatives on the FCI's Executive Council. Thereafter the revived SASA, instead of the NSMA, nominated the industry's representatives, which still meant that sugarocrats such as W.A.Campbell and G.V.Crookes were executive councillors of the FCI.⁹²

89 B.Bozzoli, 'The origins, development and ideology of local manufacturing in South Africa', Journal of Southern African Studies, 1:2 (1975), pp.194-214.

90 SASI, 19:1 (1934), p.15; and FCI Viewpoint, 1:6 (1967), p.30.

91 Ibid. If this appears to have smacked of industrial fascism, see the sugar milling companies' support in the 1930s for the periodical The Industries of South Africa, which editorialised in its issue of August 1933: "We think that the only hope of salvation that South Africa has lies in the bringing about in this country of an Industrial Fascism under a Dictator. This is what every true South African should work for".

92 South African Federated Chamber of Industries, Annual Reports.

In addition to their international and national campaigns, through the BEPO and the FCI respectively, the sugarocracy had stood four-square behind a domestic expedient in the form of the SASA. Formed in 1919, the SASA represented the sugarmillers' success in drawing the growers into their campaign to win the state's support for improved domestic marketing conditions. Growers were from the outset reluctant partners with misgivings about, *inter alia*, the envisaged tripartite structure of the SASA to accommodate agents/brokers as well as themselves and millers.⁹³ The close affiliations between millers and sugar distributors had for decades been a major bone of contention for the growers. In the event, the agent D.Fowler (who was well-connected with the sugarocracy) was elected the SASA's first chairman, and E.Saunders, who had been the prime mover behind its formation, the SASA's first president.

It very soon became obvious that the SASA was nothing more than a fragile association born of compromise and pragmatism, and it could hardly have been surprising when the SASA collapsed in 1930, following the growers' withdrawal. But despite its period of dormancy until its revival in 1936, the SASA had stood the sugarocracy in good stead in its time of greatest need; as indeed had the other organizations which the sugarmillers had backed with such enthusiasm.

By forging institutionalised alliances to lobby for higher domestic prices and to enhance export prospects, the sugarocracy was grappling with the vicissitudes of the sugar market in the main. On the other hand, the uncertainties of the labour market had provoked the sugarocracy to find practical remedies which did not depend on the formation of political alliances as such. Indeed, the NCLRC, a creation of the NSMA, functioned in direct competition with some of the most likely of allies, and many cane growers, the Zululand concessionaires in particular, saw their labour supplies being actively diverted by the

93 See Duminy, 'Natal sugar interest'; A.Hammond et al, South African Cane Growers' Association: the first 50 years (Durban, 1972); and SASJ, 3:5 (1919), p.319.

NCLRC. When the difficulties of labour recruitment were taken up with government officials, the sugarocracy occasionally did so with its colleagues, the Natal mine-owners, but more commonly on its own account.⁹⁴

As "civilised labour" policies began to take their divisive effect, C.G.Smith used his position in the Senate to display some considerable foresight. Speaking in mid-March 1924 on the Industrial Conciliation Bill, he opined that:

*This Bill seems to be a direct challenge to the unfortunate Mr [Archie] Crawford. He is endeavouring to consolidate the working men, syndicalism it may be, but that makes no difference; it seems to me they will speak with one voice for labour, and under this conciliation board scheme it would facilitate the arguments of both sides and make complicated questions more capable of quick decision.*⁹⁵

Smith was certainly not speaking for the sugarocracy as a whole on this occasion, for the sugarocracy was generally ill-disposed towards organized labour, and committed with equal fervour to according special privileges to "civilised labour".⁹⁶

In 1925 the NSMA submitted a statement to the Wages and Economic Commission, which included references to the blend in sugar production "of uncivilised labour, indigenous or imported, and European inventive genius and managerial energy"; and to the "considerable ingenuity [which] has to be displayed in so balancing the European staff that it can be employed during the off-season".⁹⁷ Nevertheless, statutory job reservation was anathema to C.G.Smith, and if he had seen the possibilities that might be opened up by the enactment of the Industrial Conciliation Bill, he was just as adept at

94 See Lincoln, 'Estate labour'. But if the sugarocracy's struggle for manual labour was largely waged as an independent quest (in the face of competition from the Witwatersrand mining houses, urban employers and other sugar-producers), the renovation of labour legislation during the 1920s was a national issue which invited responses from sugarocrats.

95 Senate Debates, 18 Mar. 1924, col 347.

96 See Lincoln, 'Employment practices'.

97 African Sugar and Cotton Planter, 1:12 (1925), pp.3-8.

spotting the portents when the Bill to amend the Mines and Works Act was before the Senate in mid-1926:

*The colour bar is going right through the country, and...the Government has power under this Bill to make repressive regulations which will destroy the chances of advancement of the native races, and if it goes right through the country what hope have you got for peace in the land...It will throw back the country for years and years because whatever happens this Bill is now firmly fixed in the minds of the people as an oppressive measure.*⁹⁸

Smith's views on these particular matters may not have been commonplace in sugarocratic circles, but then the sugarocracy's political work was always fraught with ambiguity and contradiction. Inevitably, the sugarocracy sometimes appeared divided, and given to proposing idiosyncratic methods for the resolution of its manifold dilemmas. However, the world of sugarmilling retained a remarkably homogeneous character; a visible expression of the underlying homogeneity of the "sugarocratic position".

Conclusion

The ascent of Natal's sugarocracy was accompanied by the growth and concentration of sugar capital, and by distinctive political and cultural campaigns. But sugarocratic hegemony within the sugar industry was not easily attained. It had to be built on the shaky foundation of long-standing growers' antipathy and suspicion. And it grew against the background of a struggle to secure a protective dispensation without foregoing autonomy from state interference. Unable to preserve entirely the desired *laissez-faire* environment - protection without accountability to the state or to civil society - the sugarocracy had nevertheless captured and defended the commanding heights of the sugar industry. In addition to their control over the means of sugar processing and distribution, the self-made capitalists who constituted Natal's sugarocracy were also remarkably influential cultural agents. Their own culture was in every sense - from the quotidian way of

⁹⁸ Senate Debates, 17 Mar. 1926, col 206-7.

sugarocratic life to their institutional and political activities - bourgeois yet sectarian, dynamic yet conservative. Moreover, they saw themselves, and applied themselves in several spheres of civil society, as cultural superiors and ideologues.

The sugarocracy's distinctive cultural and political projects reflected a confluence of social theories. Theories of human nature and of race, of property and of class rule, were applied in what was initially a campaign to promote development beyond a primitive stage of capital accumulation. Having been a primary catalyst in the general ferment of embourgeoisement and subjugation in colonial Natal, the sugarocracy then shifted its attention from the wider cultural and political arena, to become increasingly involved with the more immediate politics of accumulation and competition as such.

The ascent of the Natal sugarocracy spanned a period which, according to Bill Albert and Adrian Graves' international survey:

*saw an increase in the relative autonomy of the state vis-a'-vis the old guard in sugar production, since the demands of this group were less homogeneous and influential than in the past, and legislatures were in a stronger position to dictate to the industry.*⁹⁹

It would seem then that the Natal sugarocracy was something of an anachronism in the international context: less influential it had certainly become after Union, and even its homogeneity might be questionable in

99 W.R.Albert and A.Graves, 'Introduction', World sugar economy, p.22.

the light of the existence of "opposing Groups"; yet its collective impress, and demands, retained a certain coherence throughout the period and beyond.

But if the sugarocracy had represented a coherent and once potent force as a bloc, it was indeed a transient phenomenon. After reigning supreme (though not uncontested) in the sugar industry for over half a century, the sugarocracy was atomised between the early 1960s and the early '80s, following continued internal concentration and, more significantly, corporate intrusions from outside the sugar industry. In the course of this post-war restructuring of sugar capital, the heirs to the sugarocratic legacy have shown a keen interest in publishing their forebears' biographies and chronicles of their individual and collective accomplishments.¹⁰⁰ In one instance however, an effort has been made to rescue an erstwhile miller-cum-planter from being stereotyped as a sugarocrat. Indeed, the renowned Africanist Killie Campbell was insistent that her father, Marshall Campbell, was not cast in the mould of a typical "Sugar Baron".¹⁰¹

100 See the works listed in note 3 above. Osborn's Man of purpose was based in part on a text compiled in 1957 by J.M.Hulett to commemorate the centenary of J.L.Hulett's arrival in Natal; that had in turn been based on Eric Rosenthal's unpublished manuscript biography of J.L.Hulett. J.M.Hulett had a hand in editing Osborn's rendition, and her husband published it. In 1982, Kearsney College's principal, H.E.Hopkins (a Hulett descendant) abridged Man of purpose into 'The South African connection of the Hulett family'. The publication of this abridgement was sponsored by the Hulett family and the Hulett Corporation to mark the 125th anniversary of J.L.Hulett's arrival in Natal. The Hulett biography itself has thus acquired a history with the air of a saga about it. The SASI has also played a role in this respect, as have the house journals Hulett's News (incorporating KwaHulett's) and Hulett's Review; Tongaat's Condenser and NkosiBomvu; the Illovo Digest; and Smithlink.

101 Herd, Killie, p.52.

Campbell had of course displayed some exceptional qualities, and that KwaMashu - "the place of Marshall" - was named after him may have reflected something of his prowess as a respected conciliator. But there can be no gainsaying his ideological conformity with his sugarocratic contemporaries. As the writer of his obituary in the Natal Mercury put it: "Whilst a strong upholder of the white man's supremacy in South Africa, he enjoyed in a unique degree the confidence of our native and Asiatic populations".¹⁰² Such were the ambiguities of supremacy which pertained to Campbell; they differed only slightly from those surrounding most other sugarocrats. And these ambiguities were not unrelated to the ambiguities of dependence which Shula Marks has so cogently explained in her analysis of, amongst others', John Dube's situation.¹⁰³ After all, as Dube himself once recalled, it had been Marshall Campbell who "brought [Dube] before the eyes of the authorities. It was he by his gifts and advice that [Dube] was able to carry on".¹⁰⁴

Marks has skillfully shown how the threads of the past and present politics of Zulu ethnic nationalism might be spliced. Her exposition would be complemented by a similar treatment of the ascent of the sugarocrats before World War II, and the engagement of their successors with the present-day politics of regional compromise. It would be presumptuous to claim that this essay furnishes an adequate base from which just such a complementary task might be undertaken. If anything, it shows that the "sugarocratic position" has had quite specific connotations, not to be confused with the peculiarities - however closely they sometimes corresponded - of other components of sugar capital in Natal.

102 Natal Mercury, 21 April 1917. Cited in Campbell, Sam Campbell, p.179.

103 S.Marks, The ambiguities of dependence in South Africa: class, nationalism, and the state in twentieth-century Natal (Johannesburg, 1986).

104 KC, MS CAM 1.04, folder 12, Dube to Campbell, 24 Sep. 1936. The Campbell/Dube relationship had indeed been based on mutual respect which was encapsulated by Dube's speech-making on the occasion of Campbell's knighting. See Herd, Killie, p.50.

Abbreviations:

BTI Board of Trade and Industries

KC Killie Campbell Library, Durban

NLA Natal Legislative Assembly

SASJ South African Sugar Journal

SBA Standard Bank Archives, Johannesburg

TAD Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria