**POL 3013: SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**LECTURE 5: SCHREINER’S CRITIQUE OF MONOPOLY CAPITALISM**

**1.Rhodes, Schreiner and the making of modern South Africa:** The dispute between Cecil Rhodes and Olive Schreiner, which came to a head in 1895, can be read as a conflict of rival perspectives on the character of the unified South Africa. Both saw unification as necessary and inevitable. For Rhodes, South Africa was to be dominated by corporate monopolies, integrated into the global expansion of British power, with the population (especially African) a regimented labour force, and racial inequality made systematic. Schreiner emphasized not economic scale but the integrity of the individual citizen, arising from specific local context (the family farm rather than the monopoly corporation) in which racial and gender equality is pursued, at least at the level of individual rights and dignity. Rhodes’s ethic of expansionist power triumphed over Schreiner’s conception of the local-scale virtues in the political order of racial domination after 1910. Rhodes prepared the way for systematic racial domination and apartheid (cf. Rotberg, *The Founder*, pp. 455, 472). Schreiner is often described as the earliest proponent of a non-racial South Africa (cf. *Closer Union*, p. 7).

**2. The scope of the contrast:** The conflict between Rhodes and Schreiner is often seen as “boiling down” to the question of racial policy (in William Plomer’s words, cf. *Cecil Rhodes*, p. 124). The larger stakes are conveyed in an exchange reported in Plomer’s chapter, when Schreiner asked Rhodes why he “made friends” of certain corrupt and self-promoting politicians. “*Those* men my friends!” he replied. “They are not my *friends*! They are my tools, and when I have done with them I throw them away! (pp. 120-21). Rhodes’ policies can be interpreted as expressing a similar instrumentalism: what is good for the population is what enables them to contribute to the larger economic and political goals he upholds: capitalist expansion and the imperialist power. The choice of mining as the engine of progress was also a choice for a specific idea of human progress and specific kind of society. Industrialization based on mining did not require an internal market; diamonds and gold are sold on a world market, are not perishable, are not household necessities, do not depend on trust in people or workmanship. From these facts, much of Rhodes’ ideas, and much of the pattern of South African development since his time, follows.

**3. Schreiner’s protest against spiritual conformity:** Olive Schreiner grew up on a German mission state in the Northern Cape, and became a governess in remote rural areas, mainly in the Eastern Cape. Her novel *The Story of an African Farm* was first published in 1883 and became a huge literary success. The central figure in her novel is a girl on the cusp of womanhood, resisting the conventional expectations of a life of domestic submission. Lyndall’s protest was Schreiner’s also, and motivated everything she did, including her feminism and her sympathy with rural Afrikaner life and its customs. Schreiner shared with Rhodes and almost all of her contemporaries, a conception of civilization as the necessary basis for any viable society. What she sought was a civilization which allowed for authentic and creative forms of life which she saw as threatened by the demands of large-scale industry (cf. *Political Situation*, p. 13; *Closer Union*, p. 29).

**4. Schreiner’s critique of monopoly capitalism:** Schreiner’s *Political Situation* is the text of a speech delivered by her husband, S.C. Cronwright Schreiner in 1895. It defines that situation as a conflict between a liberal or progressive movement, on the one hand, and retrogression, on the other. It condemns monopoly power as inherently destructive. Rhodes’ policies are targeted both explicitly (pp. 3, 12) and by implication. It condemns racial injustice (e.g., p. 5), but treats it as damaging for all citizens. Monopolist policies prevent the organic development of social bonds, treat people “merely as a means for acquiring wealth” and create a “diseased” political life (p. 17). Although Schreiner shared with Rhodes a conception of the gradual and beneficial spread of Western institutions, technology, she thought the process justified only if it led to greater individual freedom, relative equality in economic condition and morally better human beings.