**POL 3013: SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**LECTURE 11: THE S.A. WAR AND AFRIKANER NATIONALISM**

**1..The Boer republics before 1899:** Groups of Dutch-speaking colonists left the Cape Colony in 1838, settled first in Natal and, after British annexation of Natal, in the Transvaal (or South African Republic) and Orange Free State. These independent republics were recognized by the British in 1852 and 1854. Before the discovery of gold in 1886, the Transvaal republican state was weak and often chaotic. The dominant political ideas were socially conservative, patriarchal, informed by a rudimentary Protestantism and above all a rigid belief in racial supremacy. After the discovery of gold, the question of the political rights of *uitlanders* (foreigners), mainly from Britain, dominated the politics of the Boer republics until the outbreak of war in 1899.

**2. *A Century of Wrong*: The Boer critique of capitalism:** At the outbreak of the war, the Transvaal republic published *Een Eeuw van Onrecht* (A Century of Wrong) in order to rebut British justifications for the war and present their own perspective on its causes. Publication was authorized by the state secretary F.W. Reitz, but the main author was probably Jan Smuts, the attorney-general. Various parts of the mythology of subsequent Afrikaner nationalism have their origin in their account of British greed and hypocrisy and the injustice it inflicted on Afrikaners. The text presents the Boers as “a little nation of simple folk, living in peace in the land they loved, far from the rush of cities and the concourse of men” (p. 38; cf. 91), maligned as “incompetent, uncivilized, dishonourable, untrustworthy, corrupt, bloodthirsty, treacherous, etc., etc.” and standing “on the same level as wild beasts” (p. 90; cf. 3) by capitalists seeking to rob them of their land. In the process it develops a rough critique of capitalism as “the modern peril which threatens to become as dangerous to mankind as the political tyranny of the old Eastern world and the religious despotism of the Middle Ages were in their respective eras” (p. 41) and takes on the task of beginning the struggle “against the new world tyranny of Capitalism” (p. 98). It opposes capitalism on behalf of traditional morality, rather than a rival economic or social system (e.g., p. 42).

**3. The debates at Vereeniging in 1902:** The British captured the capital cities of the Boer republics, but the Boers fought on for another two years, inflicting major defeats on the far larger British army. In May 1902 the British invited the Boer leaders to negotiate a peace settlement. The Boer leaders met at Vereeniging, debated the terms of surrender offered by the British for two days, and voted to accept those terms, bringing the war to an end. Extracts from these debates include two speeches against surrender (de Wet, pp. 164-68; Beyers (168-70) and two speeches in favour of accepting the British terms (Smuts, 188-91; Burgers, 194-98). These speeches reveal the basic shift brought about in Afrikaner political thinking brought about by the war: from a conception of the nation that depends on its *constitutional* status as citizens of an independent republic to a conception of the nation as an *organism* which must be protected from extermination and allowed to grow (cf. Burger, p. 197). The first view allows for two alternatives: liberty or death (*Century of Wrong*, pp. 2, 98; cf. de Wet, 167, Beyers, 168). The second creates the basis for a new Afrikaner nationalism after the loss of the republics and within a unified South Africa.

**4. Afrikaner nationalism after 1902:** The British went to war with the intention of creating a white South African nation, in which British-orientated power would predominate and the national identity of the Boer republics would disappear. In week 6, we’ll discuss how Afrikaner nationalism replaced it in the decades after unification in 1910. It became one of the major political forces in South Africa’s twentieth-century history.