**POL 3013: SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**TUTORIAL 2: KRUGER’S REPUBLICANISM**

The following passage—taken from Giliomee’s *The Afrikaners*, pp. 234-35 (included in reader 1; you are encouraged to read the whole extract from Giliomee’s chapter 8)—gives a brief description of the political system of the Transvaal Republic and the views of Paul Kruger, its president from 1883 until 1900. The questions below will form the basis for discussion in the tutorials.

**‘The majority is King’: Boer republicanism:** Paul Kruger believed that only a committed republicanism could act as a counter to British imperialism and Rhodes’ sub-imperialism. In developing his republican ideology he stressed the historic links between the heroic acts of the Voortrekkers and the triumphant rebellion of 1880-81. Kruger turned the movement of the frontier farmers into the deeper interior, now called the Great Trek, into a heroic myth emphasizing the trekkers’ ‘secret passion for freedom’ . . . . For [the burghers of the republic after 1881] a close link was established between religious and national identity, and a growing loyalty to the state as guardian of those identities. . . .

By the 1880s both Boer republics had achieved a considerable measure of consolidation. In both, the white male citizens elected the president and all members of the legislative authority, the Volksraad. In the OFS the executive council consisted of the president, the officials and the Volksraad nominees, and the legislative chamber had considerable power. Indeed, James Bryce, the renowned British constituitional scholar, said that it carried ‘the principle of omnipotence of the legislative chamber to a maximum.’ Using the yardstick of the time that ignored the exclusion of all but white males, he declared: ‘In the Orange Free State I discovered, in 1895, the kind of commonwealth which the fond fancy of the philosophers of the last century painted. It is an ideal commonwealth . . .’ Its constitution, like that of the ZAR, was ‘the pure and original product of African conditions.’ It came closest to the philosophical ideal ‘of free and independent persons uniting ion an absolutely new social compact for mutual help and defense, and thereby creating a government whose authority has had and can have no origin save for the consent of the governed.’

In the ZAR’s participatory democracy white male citizens elected not only the president and members of the Volksraad, but also the commandant-general, who held his position in peace and in war and was a member of the president’s executive council. Every bill had to be published three months before the legislative session, so that the burghers could communicate their views personally to representatives, or pass resolutions.

Kruger defined a republic as a form of government where ‘the majority of voters is king, and their power sovereign.’ The Volksraad ‘represents the volk; if the voice of the majority is not heeded, the State becomes impure.’ The president could be removed by a vote of censure of the Volksraad, as Marthinus Wessels Pretorius was in 1871. Kruger, President of the ZAR (1883-1900) and Jan Brand, President of the OFS (1864-1888), could prevail over their Volksraad by virtue of their strong personalities and great political acumen.

However, on some vital issues, like lowering high import duties on Cape goods, even Kruger could not persuade the Volksraad to his view. Volksraad members were expected to vote according to the wishes of their constituents, he believed; the president was required to execute laws even if he disagreed with them. He said in 1889: ‘We live in a Republic and even if there is a great advantage [to the Executive] in a certain matter one must subject oneself to the will of the people and bow to it as long as they are against it.’

In theory the courts of law were independent, but Kruger and other politicians occasionally had great difficulty respecting this. The press in both republics was remarkably free, although in the ZAR it was subject to intimidation by Kruger and others.

Questions for discussion:

1. How did Boer republicanism differ from other systems of government of its time—for example, in Britain, the United States or the Cape Colony? In what sense was it republican—simply through the absence of inherited monarchy or nobility, or through the role of its citizens? Does a republic produce a different kind of citizen?

2. Why do you think the Boer republics had a reputation (continuing into the present) for backwardness? Was it mainly because of the openly-stated exclusion of black people from civic rights, or for other reasons?

3. James Bryce viewed the Orange Free State as matching the philosophical ideal of freedom (perhaps that of Rousseau). Was this consistent with the relative absence of philosophical enquiry and the widespread and influential religious belief, often of a somewhat literal kind?

4. Despite the exclusion of blacks from civic rights in the Boer republics, Olive Schreiner (the most outspoken advocate of racial equality at the time) supported their independence and admired their leaders, while Cecil Rhodes (the most powerful proponent of racial exclusion in the Cape) sought to end the independence of the Transvaal republic and looked upon its leaders with apparent contempt. How do you explain this apparent paradox?

5. In writing your first essay for this course, do you think that Kruger’s republicanism provides a useful reference point for understanding the differences between the political vision of Rhodes and Schreiner?