

THE INDABAS BETWEEN THE BLACK COMMUNITY AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITY IN BLOEMFONTEIN, 1913-1914

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1913 an advisory body² comprising elected black leaders from the various wards in the black townships, and functioning as an official municipal institution, was inaugurated in Bloemfontein. Thus Bloemfontein became one of the first cities to establish such an advisory body and in the process broke new ground in regard to this aspect of local government. In addition, the Mayor took a progressive step by announcing during the inaugural meeting of this body that he would be prepared to meet the black residents each month at a public meeting or INDABA to hear their grievances. This step gave a new and additional dimension to the manner in which the Council managed black affairs. As no study has to date been made of the subject, this article examines the events surrounding these indabas, the creation of which must be considered as an important aspect in the history of Bloemfontein. As these indabas played a significant role in the relationship between the black community and the local authority, primarily during 1913 and 1914, the article focuses on this period.

From the start the relationship between the Town Council of Bloemfontein and the black residents in the Orange Free State Republic (1854-1902) never was very satisfactory. One of the primary reasons was the fact that the black inhabitants of the country were subjected to the authority of white rulers who invariably considered themselves racially superior. After the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), during the British occupation of the Free State, at that time known as the Orange River Colony (1900-1910), the relationship between the black community and the Town Council was particularly unsatisfactory. The complacent and slack Town Council of Bloemfontein was frequently considered to be indifferent, insensitive and irresponsible in respect of the interests of the black residents. Tension arose for

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² Initially, this advisory body was known as the Native Advisory Committee, but by 1919/1920 an official constitution for this institution was adopted and the name Native Advisory Board became the preferred title. To avoid confusion, the title Native Advisory Board will be used throughout.

on the one hand the British occupation of the Free State had awakened aspirations of political liberation among the black community, and on the other, the members of the Town Council became distinctly resentful of the fact that their draconian municipal regulations forcing blacks into the service of the white community as labourers and servants, were not passively accepted.³

Two forces prevailed which would gradually result in the black community of Bloemfontein being given a limited voice in the management of their own affairs for the first time. This would take the form of a Native Advisory Board as well as the less formal indabas. Firstly, the British occupation had undoubtedly inspired aspirations of political freedom and with it brought about a discernible change in the view taken by the black residents in respect of their subservience to their white rulers. Prominent local black leaders of Bloemfontein, of whom Thomas M Mapikela and Joseph B Twayi were the outstanding figures, realised that in order to compensate for Britain's empty Anglo-Boer War promises for black political rights, the only option remaining to them was to become more involved in the municipal management of their townships.⁴ Although they realised that they would continue to experience repression in many spheres, they felt an urgent need at least to strive for a municipal body which would comprise their own representatives and would see to the interests of their people - not realising at that time that because of the concern of the Mayor in this regard, they would be given the indabas into the bargain.

Secondly, despite their often hidden agendas, the white town management, which had become more progressive and sympathetic in regard to black interests, realised that the management of the black suburbs had become so complex that intervention could no longer be left in abeyance. In order to maintain order, the aspirations of black society needed to be met and guided in a peaceful manner.⁵

Previous mayors generally were decidedly indifferent to the interests of blacks. It was only during the term of office of the more moderate Mayor CL Botha (1907-

³ **The Friend**, 21 January 1907; **The Bloemfontein Post**, 7 July 1905, 11 January 1907; HJ van Aswegen, **Die verhouding tussen Blank en Nie-Blank in die Oranje-Vrystaat, 1854-1902** (Archives Yearbook for South African History, Part 1, Pretoria, 1977), p. 377; J Haasbroek, "Die verhouding tussen die swart inwoners en die Stadsraad van Bloemfontein gedurende die Oranjerivierkolonie-tydperk, 1902-1910," **Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein** 5(1), Maart 1999, p. 24.

⁴ Waaihoek was the most important of the black townships in Bloemfontein at that time, but there were also other townships such as Bethanie, Kafferfontein and Third Location, while Cape Stands were primarily reserved for Coloureds. (The word "Kaffer/Kaffir" was generally used in those early years to refer to black people but because of its apartheid connotations and the derogatory tenor of the word, it is not used today.)

⁵ J Haasbroek, "The Native Advisory Board of Bloemfontein, 1913-1923", **Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein** 19(4), July 2003, p. 68.

1909) that the black community leaders felt sufficient confidence in the Mayor to take up the question of their involvement in municipal matters. In October 1908 the black leaders met with Mayor Botha in the Waaihoek township to discuss closer involvement of the black community in the administration of their townships. During that meeting, it was proposed that a system of elected block (ward) leaders should be established to manage the black townships such as had been the practice prior to the Anglo-Boer War, but it was proposed that in future such involvement should take the form of an official advisory body.⁶

However, it was not until 1913 that the Town Council, under the leadership of Mayor Ivan Hartwig Haarburger, gave effect to this proposal and, in fact, went a step further by introducing the indabas. Haarburger served as mayor from April 1912 to March 1914. He had emigrated to South Africa from Germany in 1888 and had established himself in Bloemfontein making his mark in the musical life of the town as a pianist and violinist, while running a music and publishing business registered in his name. One of his greatest achievements in this regard was the establishment in 1893 of the Bloemfontein Orchestral Association of which he himself became the conductor. After the Anglo-Boer War, Haarburger, known for his eloquence, became increasingly prominent in social, municipal and business circles.⁷

As a member of the Town Council and more particularly as mayor, Haarburger displayed considerable competence and foresight by making a concerted effort to improve the relationship between the black residents and the Town Council. His more positive attitude towards the black community and the sensitive consideration he gave to the resolution of the practical socio-economic problems brought about by the increase in the black population at that time - the suburbs were expanding daily because of a soaring birth rate and migration from rural areas - were the primary factors which convinced the Town Council of the need for a special mechanism to deal with the complex management of the black suburbs.⁸

2. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INDABAS

The establishment of the indabas in 1913 was integral to Haarburger's three-point plan to bring black municipal concerns to the fore. In his own words: "I have given considerable attention ... to the question of natives and their locations, and I have

⁶ Free State Archives, Bloemfontein (FAB), Minutes Town Council meeting, 1 October 1908; CJP le Roux, "The role of TM Mapikela in the Municipal Administration of black affairs in Bloemfontein 1902-1945", *Historia* 42(2), November 1997, p. 68.

⁷ *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek* (SABW), Vol. 5, 1987, p. 334.

⁸ FAB, Minutes Town Council meeting, 5 June 1913; *The Friend*, 8 July 1908; Haasbroek, "The Native Advisory Board ...", p. 73.

come to the conclusion that Municipal control of the locations will be greatly facilitated by the Council getting into more intimate touch with the natives and ascertaining points of view in regard to the several problems that present themselves."⁹

Shortly after his appointment as mayor, Haarburger took the first real step towards bringing the complex management of black Bloemfontein under control. This was the establishment of a municipal Native Affairs Committee under whose jurisdiction the entire municipal department of native affairs would fall. This all-white committee would consist of at least three councillors and the Superintendent of Locations who would be required to submit reports on the finances of the black townships as well as on any other matters of importance. The Mayor would also frequently attend the meetings of this committee in an ex officio capacity which were usually held monthly. This committee held its first meeting on 18 July 1913.¹⁰

On 5 September 1913 Haarburger and the Town Council realised the long awaited reintroduction of the system of blockmen which would function as an advisory body. At a meeting held in Waaihoek on that day, attended by more than 30 prominent black community leaders, among others the well-known Thomas Mapikela, Joseph Twayi, Jan Mocher and Peter Phatlane, the Native Advisory Board finally received the green light. Haarburger rebuked the blacks and the whites present at the meeting for having procrastinated to the establishment of the blockman system and reminded them that he had considered the system as desirable the previous year.¹¹

It was at this meeting that Haarburger announced that he would also be prepared to meet the black residents each month at a public meeting or indaba to hear their grievances and problems. This remark drew considerable applause.¹² Such an undertaking was indeed a brave move on the part of the first citizen of the town, particularly in view of the fact that there were numerous municipal matters about which this community were dissatisfied and which could lead to distasteful incidents should emotions get out of hand.

AG Barlow, chairman of the Native Affairs Committee from 1917 to 1920, would later sum up the functioning and the value of the indabas quite admirably when,

⁹ **The Bloemfontein Post**, 6 April 1914.

¹⁰ FAB, MBL 1/1/2/1, Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the Town Council, 5 June 1913.

¹¹ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1, Minutes of a meeting between His Worship the Mayor ... and representatives of the Natives held at Waaihoek, 5 September 1913; Haasbroek, "The Native Advisory Board ...", p. 72.

¹² FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1, Minutes of an interview between His Worship the Mayor ... and representatives of the Natives held in Waaihoek, 5 September 1913.

during an interview with a Cape Town newspaper, he boasted about the positive manner in which the Town Council of Bloemfontein promoted black welfare: "The Town Council meets the natives of the location at a big indaba ... and at these meetings any member of the public is allowed to bring forward any grievances he may have against the Council, the Advisory Council [Board] or any member of the municipal staff. These meetings generally last for five hours and the natives love them for it is here they put the members of the Advisory Council through their paces. These meetings also clear the air a good deal and keep the native members of the Advisory Council from being too 'cocky'."¹³

There were those amongst the black community who questioned the reliability of the blockmen in the Advisory Board to raise their grievances. Some considered them to be nothing other than lackeys of the white rulers who would be reluctant to jeopardise their elevated positions by opposing the authorities. The majority of black residents therefore welcomed the indabas and saw them as the ideal opportunity to bypass the blockmen and become personally involved in the resolution of their problems. A blockman who for whatever reason absented himself from such an indaba without leave, aroused considerable indignation amongst the community. These meetings did indeed afford the black community the opportunity to call the members of the Advisory Board to account.¹⁴

The Native Advisory Board was often troubled by slanderous rumours which gave rise to the suspicion that they were indeed simply lackeys of the white authorities and served on the Board for their own benefit and prestige. Furthermore the strong support given to the indabas by the black community generally created the impression that the Board could not be trusted to attend to their general interests and this perception eroded the confidence of the Board in their endeavours. Nevertheless, it can be said that the blockmen, as members of a body which was in its infancy and was, in fact, doing pioneering work, generally attempted to serve the interests of their community as best they could.¹⁵

3. THE INDABAS OF 1913 AND 1914

During Haarburger's term of office as mayor and thereafter during the first few months when he served as chairman of the Native Affairs Committee (1914-1916, 1922/23) until the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, the indabas took place

¹³ **Cape Argus**, 10 March 1922.

¹⁴ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Minutes of a public meeting of Natives, 17 April 1914; **The Friend**, 18 April 1914; K Schoeman, **Bloemfontein – Die ontstaan van 'n stad 1846-1946** (Kaaopstad, 1980), p. 279.

¹⁵ Haasbroek, "The Native Advisory Board ...", p. 89.

monthly as he had promised at the time of the establishment of the Native Advisory Board. The first indaba took place in September 1913.

Haarburger's efforts to actively promote black interests received due recognition as was demonstrated by the tributes openly paid to him by well-known black community leaders. On one occasion Peter Phatlane remarked that "His Worship the Mayor had been with them and assisted them in the midst of stormy and pleasant days"¹⁶ and Joseph Twayi stated that "the Mayor has been a Councillor for many years and will be a good father to the Natives, he is always sympathetic".¹⁷

The indabas took place at night and were usually held in the Wesleyan Church's school building for black children in Fort Street, Waaihoek. This large hall or "school-room" could comfortably accommodate 300-350 people but, if necessary, could hold 500. In the absence of a hall for the black community in their own area, this school hall was one of the few places which could be used by the black community in reasonable comfort for gatherings, congresses, functions and entertainment. It was therefore to be expected that this would also be the venue for the founding of the ANC in 1912.¹⁸ At one stage the authorities suggested that the meetings should be held in the afternoon rather than at night in view of the fact that the winter nights were cold and that the evenings were not always convenient for Councillors. The opinion of the black community, however, was that the evenings were for them the more convenient time as many of them would be unable to leave work to attend an afternoon meeting. After further discussion it was resolved to continue the evening meetings.¹⁹ Interpreters were also usually employed on these occasions so that all the speakers at the indabas would be understood by everyone present.²⁰

Those who attended these public meetings with the black community were initially the Mayor in the chair, members of the Native Affairs Committee, members of the Native Advisory Board and the Central Committee²¹ as well as other interested Town Councillors and officials, which included the Superintendent of Locations, the Town Engineer, the Town Treasurer and the Town Clerk. White and black clergymen also attended the indabas from time to time and Haarburger obviously appreciated their support. When, during an indaba, Twayi, as a blockman, rebuked

¹⁶ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Minutes of a public meeting held at Waaihoek, 2 December 1913.

¹⁷ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Minutes of a public meeting of Natives, 17 April 1914.

¹⁸ J Haasbroek, "Founding venue of the African National Congress (1912): Wesleyan school, Fort Street, Waaihoek, Bloemfontein", *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein* 18(7), November 2002, pp. 129-30, 143-4.

¹⁹ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Public meeting of Natives held at Waaihoek, 19 June 1914.

²⁰ *The Friend*, 1 November 1913.

²¹ The Central Committee comprised members of each block (ward) of the townships and in turn advised the Advisory Board. This Committee was subordinate to the Board.

the church leaders for having lacked the courage to strongly express their opposition to the pass system and being content to merely adopt a sympathetic attitude, his allegations were vehemently denied. The members present pointed out that it was as a result of the role played by the clergymen that these location meetings had been organised.²²

The involvement of all these prominent officials, probably at the insistence of the Mayor, was a clear indication of the importance Haarburger attached to the indabas. When he retired as mayor in 1914, Haarburger continued for a while to lead the indabas as chairman of the Native Affairs Committee as his successor as mayor, PJ Faure, who had initially supported the indabas in principle, lacked the necessary enthusiasm to ensure their continuation.²³ During the indaba of 17 April 1914 the new Mayor stated that he did not favour the continuation of the monthly general meetings, but suggested that private grievances should be lodged with the blockmen, who could, in turn, communicate with the Town Council through the Superintendent of Locations. Mayor Faure went on to state that he was quite willing to meet the blockmen once a month and the black community at a public meeting once a quarter. Nevertheless, he pointed out that he was anxious to preserve the harmony that had been established and that he was merely airing his personal opinion as no official decision had been reached. Haarburger then asked the meeting to express an opinion on this point. By far the majority of the black residents present expressed themselves in favour of continuing these monthly public meetings, motivated as they were by their wish to be present when their representatives, in whom they lacked confidence, met the Council.²⁴

It is clear that, had it not been for Haarburger's driving force behind these meetings at that time, the survival of the indabas would have been even more severely threatened. It was obvious that the new Mayor was quite content to allow the chairman of the Native Affairs Committee to preside over the indabas.

That Haarburger was sincerely concerned about the welfare of the black community, cannot be questioned. On one occasion, he personally assured the black residents that to his knowledge, the police and the Magistrate wished to deal kindly with them. He explained that many of the black residents were ignorant of the law and assured them of his assistance should they find themselves in trouble. He explained that the authorities had their duty to do, but gave the assurance that in

²² **The Friend**, 25 July 1914.

²³ Cf. i.a. FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Minutes of a public meeting of Natives held at Waaihoek, 2 December 1913; **The Friend**, 1 November 1913; 3 December 1913; 18 April 1914; 29 August 1914.

²⁴ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Minutes of a public meeting of Natives, 17 April 1914; **The Friend**, 18 April 1914.

instances where officials were convinced that an offence had been committed in ignorance, they were always prepared to give offenders the benefit of the doubt.²⁵

The press were also ready to give the indabas the necessary recognition and usually reported on these meetings. "The monthly meetings at Waaihoek are the official medium of communication between the natives and the town authorities", **The Friend** announced in a leading article,²⁶ while **The Bloemfontein Post** conceded that "the indabas proved interesting and useful".²⁷ After the first indaba **The Friend** drew attention to the popularity of the indabas amongst the black inhabitants: "The idea of holding monthly meetings of the natives at the location ... has proved very popular among the people concerned, who are taking full advantage of this channel of communication with the Town Council."²⁸ On occasions up to 500 blacks attended the indabas.

At these indabas diverse matters of a serious or less serious municipal and local nature affecting the black community were discussed openly in the presence of the interested parties. Needless to say, members of the local authority also made use of the opportunity to inform the black community of the fact that municipal functions and procedures were carried out in terms of legislation. Considerable discontent prevailed within the black community at that time so that at almost every indaba valid and complex problems as well as numerous grievances were hotly debated. Although the meetings usually took place in good spirit, mainly because of the esteem in which Haarburger was held by the black residents and the sensitive manner in which he handled the meetings, they did become heated from time to time depending upon the gravity of the matters raised.

One of the critical issues which was raised repeatedly during the first two years of the existence of the indabas and which caused deep resentment, was the detested pass system, coupled with the often brutal manner in which the police, ironically enough frequently black constables, implemented this system.²⁹ By bringing to the fore shocking evidence of such police brutality and ill-treatment of the black community, especially the conduct of black policemen who abused the pass system to molest black women, the indabas helped to compel the Town Council to act decisively in this regard.

²⁵ **The Friend**, 22 June 1914.

²⁶ **The Friend**, 4 December 1913.

²⁷ **The Bloemfontein Post**, 4 October 1913.

²⁸ **The Friend**, 4 October 1913.

²⁹ Cf. i.a. FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Minutes of a Native meeting held at Waaihoek, 14 May 1914; **The Friend**, 1 November 1913; 3 December 1913; 22 June 1914; 25 July 1914.

During the indaba of 2 December 1913 Twayi remarked on these appalling deeds: "They even wait for them at the water pumps where they are daily arrested. Women are afraid to go out of their houses. We know the Police must do their duty but just now there is great trouble about Native Police."³⁰ Twayi also drew attention to the fact that complaints of the public against police action often offended these black officers of the law to the extent that their arrogant conduct against the women was intensified and was described as 'most awful'. Another black community leader also stated during this indaba that the feeling was not that the black police had proved a failure as police, but that the fault lay with the class of blacks employed. In response to a question posed by the chairman, Mayor Haarburger, to the ministers of religion who were present at the indaba as to whether or not they were aware of any improper conduct on the part of the black policemen, they said that when they saw a minister coming, these policemen would be on their best behaviour.³¹

During the meeting of 19 June 1914 a certain Kotse stated that "the Magistrate and the Authorities show that they wish to work leniently with the natives; the White police also deal leniently with the Natives, but the Native Police treat them worse than dogs".³² When Haarburger drew the attention of the meeting to the fact that this matter had been sufficiently aired, P Indadisi ignored these remarks and went on to say that he was forced by his conscience to make mention of the actions of black policemen which he had witnessed the previous Sunday. He said that the treatment which had been meted out by the policemen to a pregnant woman who was almost naked and not sober, was, to say the least, disgraceful.³³

However, on occasions the police were accused falsely by offenders in an attempt to exonerate themselves or it did happen from time to time that the high-handed actions of the police were justified in order to control a situation. It was for this reason that during the indaba of 24 July 1914, which abounded with lamentations about the black police/pass question, a letter was read from the police authorities in which it was stated that they had investigated a case brought to their notice at a previous meeting and had found that the complainant had, in fact, been the aggressor in the first instance in that he had interfered with the police in the execution of their duty.³⁴ Nevertheless the black community was assured that any complaints in this regard would be thoroughly investigated and should a black constable be found guilty of such an offence, he would be dealt with severely.

³⁰ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Minutes of a public meeting of Natives held at Waaihoek, 2 December 1913.

³¹ **The Friend**, 3 December 1913.

³² FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Public meeting of Natives held at Waaihoek, 19 June 1914; **The Friend**, 22 June 1914.

³³ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Public meeting of Natives held at Waaihoek, 19 June 1914.

³⁴ **The Friend**, 25 July 1914.

The strong opposition to the pass system which was evident at the indabas motivated the Advisory Board at one stage to convince the Town Council at least to abolish the humiliating system for women.³⁵ However, it was pointed out that as the pass system was implemented in terms of national legislation, it did not fall within the jurisdiction of the Town Council to abolish it. The Council did, however, undertake to ensure that the system would be administered in a sympathetic manner.³⁶

Other important issues discussed at the indabas were those concerning the introduction of more convenient times for the curfew in the black townships as well as the sale of illicit liquor. The curfew had been set in terms of national legislation to maintain order and to restrict lawlessness and loafing. To some extent the black leaders of Bloemfontein accepted this but were nevertheless of the opinion that the rules were sometimes too restrictive. The Native Affairs Committee, especially under the chairmanship of Haarburger, had an open mind on the matter of amended times for the curfew. During the indaba of 24 July 1914 general satisfaction was expressed in regard to the decision of the Town Council to extend the curfew hours in the townships to midnight. However, there were also demands for further concessions. At this meeting Haarburger also touched on the matter of the shocking increase in the number of convictions for the sale of illicit liquor. The conservatives in the black community requested the Town Council to prohibit dealers, who were illegal brewers and distributors of sorghum beer to the black community, from selling 'momela' to black women. They also pointed out that drunkenness and the associated problems which afflicted the black townships, were primarily the result of the use of strong drink, chiefly brandy, which was smuggled to the townships from the town rather than the use of sorghum beer.³⁷ Haarburger appealed to the leaders of the black community to "see that the evil be stamped out once and for all",³⁸ but of course this was easier said than done.

Several questions of purely local interest were also raised at the indabas. These included daily public and municipal problems such as health matters, the upgrading of schools, the condition of roads, the grazing of cattle, as well as the provision of electricity, water and sanitation, all of which were important aspects of the lives of the black residents.³⁹ Although generally the local authority was not insensitive to black municipal interests, white domination of the country and the need to keep the white electorate satisfied meant that as a rule white interests were given priority. In

³⁵ Haasbroek, "The Native Advisory Board . . .", p. 80.

³⁶ **The Bloemfontein Post**, 1 November 1913.

³⁷ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Public meeting of Natives held at Waaihoek, 19 June 1914; **The Friend**, 16 May 1914; 25 July 1914.

³⁸ **The Friend**, 25 July 1914.

³⁹ Cf. i.a. FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Public meeting of Natives held at Waaihoek, 19 June 1914; **The Friend**, 4 October 1913; 16 May 1914.

as far as funds would allow, the authorities did attempt to promote black interests and resolve problems, but on many occasions, the criteria for attending to such problems was whether or not the white community would benefit. For example, appeals for attention to be paid to the health concerns of the black community usually received immediate attention. This was probably due to the fact that poor health conditions in the black suburbs would obviously have a detrimental effect on the health of the white community, especially in view of the close socio-economic interaction between the communities.⁴⁰

While Haarburger as mayor and later as chairman of the Native Affairs Committee was the driving force behind the indabas and was willing to chair these meetings each month, the indabas served an admirable purpose. The outbreak of World War I in August 1914, however, had a negative effect on the usefulness of the indabas. During the indaba of 28 August 1914 Haarburger informed the meeting that due to the current difficult circumstances it might be necessary to reduce the frequency of these meetings.⁴¹ The Native Affairs Committee on 6 October 1914 officially decided that the indabas would be held on an ad hoc basis and that the press and strangers would not be invited to attend.⁴²

By this time it was also clear that a substantial group within the white community of Bloemfontein regarded the indabas as nothing more than a waste of time because, so it was argued, there existed sufficient official structures such as the Native Advisory Board/blockman system, the Native Affairs Committee and a capable Superintendent of Locations to serve the interests of the black community. Inspired by a sense of racial superiority, some whites apparently found Haarburger's liberal attitude towards the black community which was seen as currying favour with them, particularly annoying. CW Carter's letter to the press of 29 August 1914 was the first salvo of public criticism fired at the indabas. In this he mentioned amongst other things that he was under the impression that there was consensus in the town that the indabas should be abolished as they served no purpose. He scathingly remarked: "Mr Hancock (Superintendent of Locations) with a life-long experience, is a much better judge of the fairness of the natives' grievances than Mr Haarburger, who so persistently poses as the champion of the natives."⁴³ The Carter letter paved the way for heated controversy in the press amongst white and black residents in regard to this matter and lasted for almost two weeks under the heading "The Waaihoek Meetings". The majority of the correspon-

⁴⁰ Haasbroek, "The Native Advisory Board ...", p. 82.

⁴¹ **The Friend**, 28 August 1914.

⁴² FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/1, Minutes of a meeting of the Native Affairs Committee, 6 October 1914.

⁴³ **The Friend**, 31 August 1914.

dents on either side were agreed however that everyone had the right to express his own opinion, but insulting remarks were condemned.

The anti-indaba correspondents continued to emphasize that the existing system provided sufficient opportunity to accommodate black interests and that the meetings were of no value. They were convinced that the indabas did not meet with the approval of the general public, the police or the Superintendent of Locations and, in fact, undermined the authority of these officials. The fear was also expressed that it was possible that the indabas could contribute towards the promotion of a black franchise and direct representation in local government. Malicious correspondents even alleged that Haarburger - "the Great Pioneer" - harboured a hidden agenda whereby he intended, by means of the indabas, to pursue votes in anticipation of the blacks being given the franchise at some time in the future.

On the other hand there were the advocates of the indabas who praised Haarburger for the sacrifices he had made in this regard, often working for this cause in his own free time, regardless of the animosity directed against him in his personal capacity. They pointed out that he had never taken the credit for the establishment of the indabas and had always recognised the role played by the clergy. The pro-indaba correspondents emphasised the fact that because the tax-paying but voteless black community attached enormous importance to the indabas, these meetings served as ideal opportunities for the black residents freely to air their otherwise suppressed views, grievances and emotions while at the same time diffusing any volatile situations which might arise.⁴⁴

Twayi was responsible for the black community also entering the debate. His contribution to the press was placed under a prominent sub-heading "The Native View - Mr Haarburger looked to as their champion". Apart from a strong plea for the continuation of the indabas because "right-thinking men - and there are such men in our Council - have long felt the desirability of giving the natives a direct channel of approach, if not representation on the councils", he expressed the feeling of many by taking up the cudgels for Haarburger. By doing this Twayi dispelled any dispute which might have existed in regard to Haarburger's positive attitude towards black interests. "We have been with Mr. Hancock for long", this prominent leader continued, "but it was not until Mr. Haarburger's advent that we saw improvement in the treatment of our people, that we began to live as free subjects not as slaves of King George, that the police began to show some respect to our womenfolk, that we were assured of the interest the Council takes in the welfare of its natives and its determination to redress real grievances."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Cf. i.a. **The Friend**, 1, 2, 5, 9 and 15 September 1914.

⁴⁵ **The Friend**, 2 September 1914.

The fact that the indabas did not come to an end at this time despite the intense criticism they faced as well as the negative effects of the war can, unquestionably, be attributed to the thorough manner in which Haarburger had conducted these indabas. Their significant achievements were naturally also due to the positive view and enthusiastic support of the black inhabitants. On the initiative of Councillor AG Barlow, the Native Affairs Committee again resolved in September 1917 that the indabas with the black population should continue to be held monthly. However, this appears to have been a rather optimistic decision as the Committee resolved the following month to rescind that decision and agreed that they would only meet the blacks once every two months.⁴⁶ This ruling was upheld for a while but unfortunately the arrangement was frustrated by the Great 'Flu Epidemic of 1918. It was only in June 1919 that the indabas were reintroduced but it seems that these continued only spasmodically. It was at this June indaba that the well-known black leader, Henry Selby Msimang, confronted the local authority with a request that black members be permitted to serve on the Native Affairs Committee so that they could speak at first hand on issues concerning blacks. It was also on this occasion that he lodged an objection to the indabas because he felt that these meetings led to enormous gatherings which made it impossible for black leaders to put their case calmly.⁴⁷

4. CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that the creation of the Native Affairs Committee and the subsequent inauguration of the Native Advisory Board as well as the establishment of the associated indabas brought about an improvement in the living conditions of the black community. These structures provided them with a voice in the management of their own affairs. The Board in particular and the indabas in general, became official structures through which they could express their grievances and aspirations. In addition, a municipal committee, comprising councillors and other municipal functionaries, was brought into being and these officials were charged specifically with matters of concern to the black community.

Although the local authority was generally sympathetic towards the black community and, in certain instances, tried sincerely to serve black interests as was evident particularly during the term of office of Mayor Haarburger, this could not be described as the norm. A considerable number of the requests that the black leaders addressed to the local authority to improve the living conditions of their people,

⁴⁶ FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/2, Minutes of an adjourned meeting of the Native Affairs Committee, 4 September 1917; FAB, MBL 1/2/4/1/2, Minutes of an ordinary meeting of the Native Affairs Committee, 29 October 1917.

⁴⁷ **The Friend**, 16 June 1919.

were ignored for various reasons. The reasons given were diverse but included a lack of funds; that requests could not be met because they failed to comply with the accepted manner in which a town was managed; that the matters raised did not fall within the jurisdiction of the Town Council or because of an underlying fear that compliance with these requests would unnerve the white voting public. The political and economic pressure on local government emanating from the white voters/ratepayers for preferential housing, laid on water, flush sanitation, electricity, hospitalisation, market related wages and employment should not be underestimated.⁴⁸

For having inaugurated a new system such as the indabas regardless of the open antagonism shown by a section of the white electorate who saw it as toadyism, Haarburger indeed deserves the credit and respect he received for this pioneering step. Although the clergymen of Bloemfontein encouraged this dispensation behind the scenes, Haarburger, supported by the majority of black leaders, could indeed be considered the founder of this three-tier-system to advance black interests. It was in fact as a result of his endeavours and perseverance that they materialised and achieved the desired results.

On the other hand, the strong support given to the indabas by the black community undeniably indicated that they were eager to grasp any opportunity offered to them to extend their democratic rights. The establishment of the indabas was indeed a step forward for the black residents of Bloemfontein.

⁴⁸ CJP le Roux, "Openbare gesondheidsorg in die swart woonbuurte van Bloemfontein, 1900-1945", *Acta Academica* 29(2), August 1997, p. 63; Haasbroek, "The Native Advisory Board ...", pp. 79-80.