

Fabian Connections: Bernard Shaw in Natal, 1935

It could be argued, from the vantage point of KwaZulu-Natal in 2008, that the arrival of George Bernard Shaw¹ on the shores of Natal in 1935 was an event of little consequence. It could also be argued that the interest which greeted Shaw's visit was of the kind which might greet Salman Rushdie, Bob Geldof, Steven Spielberg or perhaps Oprah Winfrey should they be visiting our province today. Public figures in the arts whose talent has drawn them into a mission to find the good society and espouse a cause aimed at improving the human condition are inevitably bold and challenging, argumentative, often arrogant, not always polite, and never far from controversy. They invariably attract considerable attention. For his time Bernard Shaw was such a person. In order to give perspective to Shaw's month-long stay in Natal it is worth recalling, briefly, some features of his multi-faceted career and reputation which made him one of the most widely recognised personalities in the world of the early twentieth century.

Shaw himself claimed to be the 'victim' of many reputations. He described his 'bread-winning profession' as that of playwright and, indeed, it was as 'the distinguished British dramatist' that he was regularly introduced while he was in Natal. But he was also a professional journalist and critic of the fine arts in music, literature and the theatre. He claimed to be an economist and a biologist and, by religion, a 'Creative-Evolutionist'. As his career developed, he would promote himself at various times as an Ibsenite, and a Shelleyan atheist. He was a Fabian socialist and, with the passage of time, his claim to being a Marxist gained increasing intensity. People were left in no doubt that he was a vegetarian, a non-smoker, a non-tea-drinking teetotaler and a very successful vestryman in St Pancras. Nothing if not self-centred, he rejoiced in being a funny man and a dangerous man and 'Heaven knows what else besides'. Quite appropriately he is said to have described himself as '... not altogether what is called an orthodox man'.²

Others, too, had opinions on Shaw. Among his contemporaries, Winston Churchill overcame his initial antipathy to him for his critical attitude to the army, and, writing in the late 1920s, summed him up thus, 'Saint, sage, and clown; venerable, profound, and irrepressible, Bernard Shaw receives, if not the salutes, at least the hand-clappings

of a generation which honours him as another link in the humanities of peoples, and as the greatest living master of letters in the English-speaking world.’³ Conversely, the historian, A.J.P. Taylor, in a piece for the *Observer* on 22 July 1956 marking the centenary of Shaw’s birth, was scathing on every score: yet he added a note declaring, ‘Perhaps this essay is a little ungrateful in view of the pleasure and intellectual stimulus I derived from Shaw’s writing. Even if he had nothing to say, he said it incomparably well.’⁴ The Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges claimed that while some of Shaw’s early writing and much in the prefaces to his plays would lose their interest, Shaw had the ability, unique among authors, to create characters superior to himself. Borges wrote, ‘I believe that from us cannot emerge creatures more lucid or more noble than our best moments.... Lavinia, Blanco Posnet, Keegan, Shotover, Richard Dudgeon and, above all, Julius Caesar, surpass any character imagined by the art of our time.’ Yet Borges regarded the public ‘G.B.S.’ as represented by his witticisms and newspaper columns as ephemeral.⁵ Assessments of Shaw never stopped coming. For his ninetieth birthday in 1946 a whole book of tributes from well-known people was published.⁶ In a review of it John Betjeman wrote of Shaw,

He can see the Victorian conventions he flouted alone, now flouted by the majority. The Socialism he advocated is now in the ascendant. His plays are performed all over the world. The adjective ‘Shavian’ is in the dictionary.... He is one of the last giants of English literature still alive and I cannot but think he feels lonely. He who started a lonely revolutionary lives now a lonely victor.⁷

On a more personal level Shaw’s friend and fellow writer, conversationalist and controversialist, G. K. Chesterton noted, ‘Many people say that they agree with Bernard Shaw or that they do not understand him. I am the only person who understands him, and I do not agree with him’.⁸ Even before his death in 1950 more had been written about Shaw than any other modern writer. And in the next 30 years there appeared, in six languages, over 130 full-length books on him. The performance of Shaw’s plays has gone in and out of fashion over the years and been limited by copyright conditions, but it has by no means ceased. The programme for the Fifth Annual Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario for July 2008 includes academic papers, talks from actors and directors and performances of *Mrs Warren’s Profession* and *Getting Married*. The International Shaw Society has a wide range of meetings and conferences on topics such as ‘Feminism Revisits Shaw’, ‘Shaw’s Contemporaries’ and ‘Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*’. And for good measure, the BBC has released Shaw’s broadcasts on CD and these can be purchased from the British Library Press.⁹

Shaw’s celebrity status as a writer of some 50 plays would have been widely acknowledged in 1935. Less understood generally, though probably more significant to his stay in Natal, was his Fabian background. The Fabian Society was founded in London in 1884 with a view to infiltrating British society with socialism. Named after the Roman general Fabius Maximus — known for his strategy of delaying the main thrust of his attack against Hannibal until the right moment — the early Fabians believed in the ‘permeation’ of institutions by socialist ideas based on a factual study of every facet of society. The ‘inevitability of gradualness’ was the philosophy of those who spread the word. They were committed to reform rather than revolution, to ideas and rational argument rather than outbursts of anger. Their influence was to be carried into fields as diverse as local government, literature, academia and the colonies. The Fabian ethos was

In the style of the 1930s, the newspaper caption to this photograph reads, 'Mrs George Bernard Shaw photographed as she left the Llangibby Castle on her arrival in Durban yesterday morning with her famous husband. With Mrs Shaw is Mr E.H. Lawrence of Durban, Headmaster of Mansfield Road School.' (The Natal Mercury, 29 April 1935)

essentially intellectual. It absorbed scientists of the Darwinian model, artist-thinkers like William Morris, compassionate men and women who believed that only the state could relieve the ills of society, students of Karl Marx who believed only revolution would relieve the hardships of the working classes, new-found trade unionists and dissidents of a variety of traditions. Seen by some as London-based, middle class and a little stuffy, it nevertheless formed a



rich reservoir of talent for the emerging socialism out of which was to grow the Labour movement of Edwardian times and, more specifically, the Labour Party, founded in 1900. Foremost among those driving it were Bernard Shaw, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Graham Wallas, H.G. Wells and, in a later generation, R.H. Tawney, Leonard Woolf and G.D.H. and Margaret Cole. It followed that, sooner or later, the colonies would become home to a sprinkling of Fabians, and Natal was no exception.

On Sunday morning, 28 April 1935, Bernard Shaw and his wife Charlotte arrived in Durban on the *Llangibby Castle*. Shaw was immediately bombarded by members of the press and was reported to be 'as provocative as usual'. He was asked if he would address the Rotary Club luncheon meeting in Durban on Tuesday. He declined saying that Rotary was a good idea when it started — the banding together of professional and commercial men to insist on professional status — but had since become a luncheon club. Asked whether he would say anything about British drama, Shaw replied, 'No, certainly not. It is the one thing I know nothing about.' He did however concede that there were 'good fish in the sea' to keep dramatic writing going such as Sean O'Casey. He divulged the name of the play and preface he had written while on the voyage to Natal: it was *The Millionairess* and was about a 'female Cecil Rhodes'. There was no politics in it, but money, which was another form of politics. The play departed from the Shaw tradition in that the speeches were not as long as usual and the preface was short. Turning to Africa, he criticised people for saying that the problem was between white and black. He believed the issue was much more complicated than that. On the world scene he declared Russia to be the bulwark of the world's peace against Japan and to some extent against Germany. After some general observations on how the British prime minister Ramsay MacDonald should handle the rise of Hitler, and some brief answers to various other questions, the interview closed.¹⁰

This was a gentle opening gambit compared to what some Natalians might have been expecting. Many would have listened to Shaw's broadcast talk at the conclusion of his

visit to Cape Town in 1932. Having enjoyed a month of Cape hospitality and friendship, mountains and sunshine, bathing and motoring, fruit orchards and vineyards, he stunned his listeners by launching into an attack on the faults and foibles of privileged white South African society. He spoke of the capital invested in 'splendid hotels, golf links, polo grounds ...' and of 'unproductive plutocrats' who at the least sign of trouble 'would collect their money and sail away'. He spoke of their dependence on the labour of others 'not of my own colour' and said he felt as if he was in the worst kind of 'Slave State'. He went on in similar fashion in a broadcast which was carried by 1 500 miles of telephone wire from Cape Town to Durban, Bloemfontein, Johannesburg and Pretoria simultaneously. White South Africans were angry and there was strong reaction in the press. However unpalatable it may have been, Shaw's parting shot to Cape Town, and introduction to Natal where he was heading, contained discomfiting truths to those who regarded themselves as admirers of his fame in the world of theatre.

He and Charlotte, accompanied by Commander Newton, left Cape Town the next morning. They motored along the Garden Route towards Port Elizabeth where they were to board a ship for Durban after which they would sail back home up Africa's east coast. The story is well known. Shaw was driving, negotiated the mountainous road successfully, reached a smooth section, 'let the car rip', hit a bump and charged through a bank and five strands of barbed wire into a ditch. Charlotte was injured. They reached Knysna, booked in at the Royal Hotel and stayed for five weeks. While Charlotte recovered Shaw wrote his novella, *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God*. On 18 March they flew back to Cape Town on a chartered Union Airways Junkers, the first passengers to make the three-hour journey by air. They boarded the *Warwick Castle* and sailed home, seen off by a large crowd. That concluded Shaw's first attempt to visit Natal.¹¹

He did, however, indicate the possibility of returning to South Africa to learn more at first hand about the 'white, poor white and native questions' and it was to Natal that he and Charlotte came three years later, this time through the Red Sea and down the east coast of Africa to Durban. There was a new tone to this trip as evidenced in his fairly low-key press interview on his arrival, referred to already. In his seventy-ninth year, he made it clear that he had retired from public speaking and was looking forward to a holiday. Furthermore, he was deeper into his pro-Russia phase; on the voyage he had studied the proofs of *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* by Sidney and Beatrice Webb. This gave added impetus to his own resolve to make his travels in the 1930s something of a mission for Communism to all parts of the world. How would this affect his time in Natal? Would he seek and find opportunities to meet members of all communities to learn more about them? Would he listen to them? Certainly he was to meet some old friends, among them some prominent Fabians. Mabel Palmer, for example, (See p.15 below) in a letter to her sister in England, just two days after the Shaws' arrival, wrote, 'Bernard Shaw is in Durban & I am going to lunch with them to-morrow; it will be very pleasant to see them again.'¹² In the month ahead the people of Natal would find out which Bernard Shaw they would meet.

The Shaws stayed at the Marine Hotel in Durban and spent the first day after their arrival as any tourists would. Shaw went out to the bank and Charlotte to the hairdresser, after which they were driven round to see something of Durban before lunch. In the afternoon they were taken on a drive to Umhlanga Rocks and almost to the Valley of a

Thousand Hills by the headmaster of Mansfield Road School Mr E. H. Lawrence and Mrs Lawrence. Shaw's insistence that they were in Durban for a rest was taken seriously; callers at the hotel were told they were out all day, and *The Natal Mercury* reported that their movements were 'shrouded in an air of mystery'. There was speculation as to whether Shaw would relent and attend the Rotary meeting the following day, especially as the speaker Mr Norman Tiptaft, a visiting Rotarian from Birmingham, was a friend who had worked with Shaw in the Fabian Society and might even tempt him to speak. Shaw did attend and did speak. His first comment was that there were no women at the luncheon. Did it suggest that there were no businesswomen in South Africa? In fact there were, and nothing prevents men from 'babbling' and wasting time on speeches as effectively as the presence of a 'practical businesswoman'. He admitted being in a difficult position because instead of being able to withdraw a 'disparaging remark' which he had 'rashly made', he needed to go further by saying, 'Your business is not to be good charitable men, but as employers of labour to organise the business of this country.... I want to wake you up and draw your attention to your own affairs'. When it was suggested that Shaw might become so enthused by being at the meeting that he would feel Rotary to be the legitimate successor to the Fabian Society and would put in his application at the London club, he 'threw his head back and laughed silently.'¹³

That same evening Shaw gave an informal broadcast talk from his hotel on landmarks in English literature and their relation to current events. He discussed Walter Scott, Thackeray and Dickens. He said that it was not fully realised that Dickens in *Little Dorrit* had forecast the decay of the parliamentary system. 'The whole business of Parliament when anything is to be done is to find out how not to do it', Dickens had said. This accorded with Shaw's own view, as Durban would hear frequently in the next few weeks. He declared Dickens to be a political landmark justified by recent history in the form of rising dictators like Hitler and Mussolini. He discussed the effect of Karl Marx's writings on the contemporary social outlook, and the revolutionary effect on the theatre of Ibsen's works.¹⁴

On Sunday, 5 May, a week after his arrival, Shaw was a guest of honour at the Indian sports held at Durban's Battery Beach in celebration of King George V's Silver Jubilee. Two of the other guests were the Masked Marvel and Ali Bey, the Turkish wrestler who the next day would challenge the winner of the match between the Masked Marvel and 'Whiskers' Blake. It was reported that Shaw, accompanied by Charlotte, took a great interest in the sports and made a short speech. *The Natal Witness* report continued:

But the younger generation — and there were some hundreds of them — took more interest in the masked wrestler than they did in the playwright. Indian and European children crowded around the Masked Marvel to get a glimpse of him, but they did not seem interested in Mr Shaw. Mr Shaw was asked to sign an autograph. He made an expressive gesture and declined.

Had Shaw missed a cue? The Masked Marvel, on the other hand, signed willingly and in a few moments there were queues of children and adults with scraps of paper, backs of cigarette cards and old pieces of wrapping paper waiting for autographs in such numbers that the running tracks had to be cleared before the sports could continue. At the conclusion, as the police were escorting him to his car, the Marvel was again mobbed by autograph seekers and photographers. Not so Mr Shaw, who, as the author of the novel *Cashel Byron's Profession*, which examined the morality of prize-fighting

You have all heard your parents speak of Mr Bernard Shaw. He is a very great writer — probably as great as Shakespeare or some of the famous Greek dramatists, and his plays are known and acted in many countries. He not only writes plays but does many other interesting things, and he is well known for his original opinions. He is on a visit to South Africa with Mrs Shaw, and recently spent two days in Maritzburg. Despite his greatness, he is very fond of children, and always has time to talk to them. And children all seem to like him and go straight to him without shyness. In this photograph he is seen with a little girl and boy who live in Maritzburg.

This piece was obviously written by Sidney Potter, editor of The Natal Witness, whose children they were. (The Natal Witness, 18 May 1935)



and betting on the outcome, did at least speak to the wrestler. The day had been very different from the evening before when the Jubilee celebrations had taken the form of fireworks, dancing and dining at the Marine Hotel. Among the guests, ‘Mr and Mrs Bernard Shaw were hosts to Mr and Mrs A.C.D. Williams’.¹⁵

The Shaws spent Tuesday and Wednesday of the following week in Pietermaritzburg. Friends drove them from Durban and, though they stayed at the Imperial Hotel, it was Sidney Barnett Potter, the editor of *The Natal Witness* who hosted them and showed them around. Potter was a World War I veteran, a Fabian socialist, a friend of Bernard Shaw, and had invited him to the city.¹⁶ The result was generous press coverage of Shaw’s visit. After lunch at the Imperial Hotel with Mr and Mrs Potter, on Tuesday afternoon they went to World’s View and had tea at the Country Club where Shaw signed the visitors’ book. In the evening they dined privately and the following morning drove to Howick where Shaw indulged his camera enthusiasm at the Howick Falls. They drove on to Mooi River and were able to see the snow which had fallen on the Drakensberg and caused the much-discussed fall in temperature. Later they drove round Maritzburg’s Botanic Gardens and admired the autumn foliage. They particularly appreciated the views from the upper parts of the Sweetwaters road. Shaw also visited the Natal Museum and talked much about tsetse fly and nagana problems.

Shaw’s conversation during the visit ranged across various topics. He spoke amusingly about a number of men of letters and statesmen as well as British pioneers of the Socialist and Trade Union movements. He spoke of the early pamphleteering days of the Fabian Society, mentioning especially the parts played by Sidney and Beatrice Webb. He told some amusing stories interspersed with criticisms of World War I. He did not discuss South African politics beyond mentioning his liking for General Hertzog and General Smuts. His view of the ‘native question’ was that many of the ‘natives’ were more gentlemanly and civilised than many of the Europeans, and that speaking of orga-

nising the ‘natives’ within a specific framework savoured of impertinence. When near Weenen and reminded of the Battle of Blood River, Shaw’s reply was typical: ‘No need to abolish Dingaan’s Day. Let the Zulus keep Isandhlwana as an annual celebration.’ What seemed to be much on his mind was Soviet Russia and his admiration of its form of political, social and economic organisation. This was to be a recurring theme in Natal. Aside from several smart quips Shaw seems to have been unusually genial:

Despite his 78 years Mr Shaw is still erect and tall, his eye clear, his complexion fresh and his mind keen and alert. He no longer pretends to sustain the pose of a publicity seeker; on the contrary, he was very grateful for the absence of limelight in Maritzburg. Nor does the brusque and devastating Shaw of public legend find any support in his private personality. Though his range of intellectual penetration is still marked, he was unpretentious and considerate, qualities which expressed themselves with singular attractiveness in his treatment of small children and (perhaps an even better guide) their friendly reaction towards him.

Mrs Shaw, in turn, persisted in remaining in the background. ‘... a woman of much intelligence and culture with clear-cut ideas which do not always accord with those of “G.B.S.”, as she always calls him ... she handles her tall and wayward husband with little apparent effort and almost unnoticeably — but always effectively’, the report concludes.¹⁷

Potter was not going to miss the opportunity of using Shaw’s visit to publicise some of the issues about which Maritzburg citizens were protesting at the time. In an editorial entitled ‘Pursued by Civilisation’ the following Saturday, he wrote at length of the unsightly effects of commerce and industry on the beauty of the city and its surroundings. Shaw was said to have winced when he saw the large advertisement hoarding which had been placed at the entrance overlooking Griffin’s Hill, blighting the view for visitors from the coast whom the city was so keen to attract. With similar effects, there was a large poultry farm visible on entering the city from the Howick side down Town Hill. Potter continued:

But Maritzburg has better things than that to show and by the time he had glanced down Commercial Road and Church Street, seen the now famous poultry farm, admired our wealth of corrugated iron, feasted his eyes on the sylvan setting of the Railway workshops, and wondered how long it would be before the quarry off Victoria Road changes Town Hill into Town Flats, he regarded the advertisement hoarding with positive relief and gratification.

He quoted Shaw as saying, with reference to the ravages of dynamite and mechanical scoops in the Malvern Hills in England, ‘Commerce, like faith, can move mountains’. The punch line to Potter’s editorial was that those responsible for the quarries and hoardings and wireless masts and ‘all the other appendages of civilisation’ were careful to live elsewhere. ‘That, as Mr. Shaw said is “Fine”— for them.’¹⁸

To the present-day reader of *The Witness* this interchange is recognisable and fascinating. Here were two Fabians demonstrating the contradictions for which the movement was frequently criticised. On the one hand they showed a distinctly middle class, intellectual view of ‘civilisation’, which appeared to be trying to hold on to the finer things of life. On the other hand, they appeared to be distancing themselves from the unattractive realities of commercial and industrial progress. Certainly they showed the expected disdain for the bosses. But there was no mention in the report of the working classes whose well-being was presumably an area of concern to professed Fabian social-

ists. Shaw's detractors were often critical of him on this score. A.J.P. Taylor credited him with being a hard-working socialist but described his socialism as 'off-stage', springing from intellectual arrogance rather than sympathy. He went so far as accusing Shaw of despising, even fearing, the working classes and of bringing them into his plays as comic relief.¹⁹ This is a harsh judgment not always supported in Shaw commentary as a whole. However, it should be noted, in the interests of perspective, that the Fabian movement was not always regarded as a strong, mainstream force in the progress of socialism, and the Fabians, including Shaw, were not partial to the working classes. Theirs was rather a socialism of the 'comparatively well-to-do' and, by working to ease the plight of the working classes by gradual permeation, and thus postponing radical reaction, the Fabians are actually seen by some as counterproductive to the interests of the marginalised masses.²⁰ Shaw, while known to mistrust the political capacity of the common man, nevertheless had a lifelong concern for the alleviation of poverty.

On a less serious note before leaving the Pietermaritzburg scene, was how Shaw was mistaken for G.B.S. on his first day in the city. At his own request his visit was kept as quiet as possible. Shaw was looking for the Museum when a well-known Maritzburg man, seeing a familiar figure with a flowing white beard and bright blue eyes walked up and said, 'If you are not very careful you will be mistaken for Bernard Shaw.' 'But I am Bernard Shaw', he replied. Shaw's stroll in the afternoon was more successful. Though the streets were crowded he walked through the gardens in front of the Market apparently unnoticed.²¹

Back in Durban the Shaws continued their varied programme. During their stay they dined and lunched widely, called on the mayor, visited the homes of the wealthy on the Berea, saw the library, museum and art gallery, visited the Jewish Club and attended symphony concerts and a lecture at the Library Group. Shaw 'visited the less vaunted parts of ... town that lurk behind Grey Street', listened to Edward Roux preaching communism, discussed the Grey Shirt movement with its Natal leader and much else. 'He has made friends among all races and all classes, and has extended consideration and courtesy to all', wrote Maurice Webb, yet another partisan reporter.²²

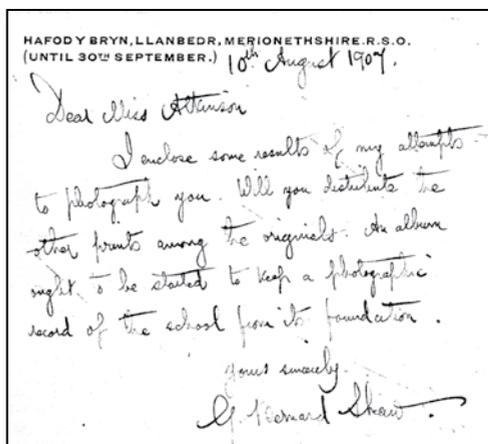
However many people Shaw knew and met in Durban, it was Mabel Palmer he would have known best. She claimed to be, probably, the only person in South Africa who had known and worked with Bernard Shaw in his capacity as a social reformer. Mabel Atkinson, as she was then, joined the Fabian Society in 1897 while an undergraduate at Glasgow University. After post-graduate study at the London School of Economics from 1900 to 1902, a scholarship from Mrs Charlotte Shaw took her to Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, for a year. Her first real acquaintance with Shaw was at the first Fabian Summer School in 1907 held in an old house in Llanbedr in north Wales. Shaw was well on his way to being recognised as an important dramatist so Fabians at the school were delighted to hear that the Shaws had taken a house nearby and would attend. She recalled how he gave them impromptu talks, swam and walked with them and photographed them at every opportunity. Subsequently Mabel served on the Executive of the Fabian Society in London from 1908 to 1916 and during that time met Shaw almost every week on various committees. Here she experienced his steady devotion to a political cause. She took considerable pleasure in relating to her Durban friends how she, when chairing a committee, had, on occasion, to tell Shaw he was out of order and he stopped talking immediately. She described Shaw as an excellent committee man who attended meetings

regularly. She took every opportunity in Durban to dispel the myth that he was a 'buffoon' and could not be taken seriously. She insisted that 'Shaw will put a truth in the lightest and most humorous way, but throughout he is faithful to the truth'.²³ She testified to Shaw's important influence behind the scenes, as, for example, in working towards the covenant of the League of Nations, a process in which the Webbs, Gilbert Murray, Leonard Woolf and, indeed, Mabel Palmer herself and others were also involved. As a founder member of the Fabian Women's Group in 1908 she also worked closely with Mrs Shaw and, as a result of research done in that group, published a Fabian Pamphlet entitled

The Economic Foundations of the Women's Movement in June 1914.

From this rich environment Mabel Palmer settled in Durban in 1921. She took a post as organiser of the Workers' Educational Association based at the Durban Technical College and then became a foundation staff member of the emerging Durban branch of the Natal University College. With all the might of her stunning intellectual power, persistent personality and Fabian intensity, she immediately engaged in activities aimed at advancing the cause of the underprivileged. She became involved in the Joint Council movement founded in the 1920s to encourage dialogue between blacks and whites. In 1929 she joined the South African Institute of Race Relations. Gradually she became recognised as knowledgeable about the social and economic conditions of the black people and a notable factor in their efforts towards racial justice. In doing so she made good use of her influential Fabian friends in England, including Bernard Shaw.

There is, for example, her involvement in the 1920s with the black trade union movement, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa. With the British writer Winifred Holtby, who had toured South Africa for three months in 1926, Mabel Palmer facilitated contacts between the ICU and the labour and trade union movements in England. During a visit to England in 1926 Mabel discussed the ICU with her socialist friends, Sidney Webb, Bernard Shaw, H.N. Brailsford and Arthur Creech Jones. She set up arrangements for the visit to England in 1927 of Clements Kadalie, the national president of the ICU, during which he met key persons, travelled widely, attended a conference in Geneva and observed the workings of the trade unions. Through the columns of *The New Leader*, of which Brailsford was the editor, Winifred Holtby and Mabel organised donations of books to be sent to the ICU in South Africa. In an extensive correspondence Mabel tried unsuccessfully to persuade Creech Jones to take up the position of adviser to the ICU, a position subsequently filled by William Ballinger. The third member of the female 'triumvirate', as it came to be called, was the writer Ethelreda Lewis who pursued the cause in the Johannesburg arena.²⁴ In fact, it is questionable whether this white philanthropic intervention did Kadalie or the ICU a



Postcard written by Bernard Shaw to Mabel Atkinson after the first Fabian Summer School in Llanbedr, Wales in 1907

favour. One questions to what extent these well-intentioned people were in touch with grassroots black opinion. And in Kadalie's absence administrative procedures became lax, finances ran out and factions developed in the ICU. Chief among these was the rivalry between Kadalie and his deputy, a Zulu leader of considerable political influence, A.W.G. Champion. Champion's main constituency was Natal — the strongest branch of the ICU numerically and financially — which, in 1928, proceeded to break away and become the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union *yase Natal* with Champion in control. This sounded the death knell of the ICU of South Africa.

Champion, described by the communist academic Edward Roux as '... urbane, slow-moving, slightly obese, an indifferent speaker but a competent organiser' was not slow in asserting his leadership.²⁵ With considerable popular support he challenged the Durban municipality's system of administering its black workers. He and the ICU were blamed for complicity in the black unrest in Durban in 1928, focusing on the beer monopoly system, and the full-scale riots and strikes which took place in June 1929. In short, Champion was banned from Natal on 24 September 1930 by means of Oswald Pirow's Riotous Assemblies (Amendment) Act (No. 19). In 1934 General Smuts allowed Champion to return to Durban where he proceeded to rebuild his career in local affairs and African national politics, and where he believed he had many white friends who understood him. While he was in Durban Bernard Shaw called on Champion at the African Workers' Club. He told Shaw the story of his exile and presented him with a Zulu walking stick. Shaw responded with a letter dated 17 May 1935 from which the following is an extract:

Bad as things are here, they can easily be paralleled [*sic*] or outdone by events in Europe. Your exile was pretty hard; but you can claim as your companion in misfortune no less a person than Albert Einstein, the greatest white man in the world. ... I am glad to have had the privilege of meeting you personally, and wish you all success in organising your countrymen and making them conscious of the resources they have within themselves to assimilate all that appears so formidable in white civilization.²⁶

This statement is as much an insight into Shaw as it is a message to Champion. Discreet but direct: Shaw reassured Champion and drew attention to the power which the black people possessed to achieve what, in their ambiguous situation, they had been led to believe lay within the greater power of the white people. With subtlety he reminded Champion that he was part of the wider world of the 1930s. Nevertheless, there was a detachment in Shaw's response. Clearly, he could deliver his message and walk away from Champion's world. Not so Mabel Palmer whose working relationship with Champion had been severely bruised in 1930. In the course of a letter asking for early documents of the ICU which she felt should be preserved for future historians, with a distinct lack of subtlety she went on to comment on his administrative inexperience and unwillingness to clear his name from 'financial slackness with trust funds' which had led to his exclusion from the Joint Council in Durban. Champion's reply came promptly:

... Why do you want to heap an insult on my injury. I do not care to be a member of the Joint Council in Durban, nor do I care to win the favour of those friends of yours unnamed.... You should always try and respect my feelings, Mrs Palmer, whether you are a European and I, a Native.... I simply cannot tell what is your ulterior

motive in writing me this disturbing letter. I do not think that a man can write me such a letter. Women sometimes do things that men cannot understand....²⁷

This was a loaded reply which, had he read it five years earlier, would have given Bernard Shaw food for thought. He would have known Mabel Palmer to be imperious but, in his quest to 'learn more' about the 'white, the poor white and native questions' in South Africa, and as a noted supporter of women's rights, he would probably have been challenged by Champion's remarks. He would no doubt have had a quotable answer but should nevertheless have been left pondering the intricacies of racial and gender dynamics in Africa.

Bernard Shaw was a great talker. Despite his statement on arrival in Durban that there would be no speeches, he appears to have found it irresistible to hold willing or unwilling listeners spellbound. He was brought to the Durban Technical College by his escort, A.C.D. Williams. He arrived at 9.30 a.m. and the head of the institution, Dr Humphrey Jones, found him 'very fascinating, very straight with no side'. Shaw agreed to give them ten minutes but stayed until 1.00 p.m. He told the students tales of his 'guttersnipe' years in Dublin and exhorted them to work hard. He agreed to talk to the staff but told Jones, 'no women'. So he spoke to about a dozen men. Shaw was ever unpredictable.²⁸

Even more telling is the recollection by Dr Jack Cowden of an occasion when he was a part-time student at the Natal University College in Durban in the 1930s. In the University of Natal journal, *Focus*, Dr Cowden, a medical doctor, wrote in 1995:

... Completion of necessary professional examinations saw us savour the humanities via the BA. My two years with Bernard Notcutt and Mabel Palmer in the realms of Political Science, Psychology and English were the happiest studies of my life.

And Mabel Palmer, a great intellectual lady, reminds me that in 1935 she brought Bernard Shaw to campus.... He accepted her invitation to meet a cross-section of the Durban community and hear their views. There were students there, lecturers, and others of all races. But the great Bernard Shaw was not interested in our views. He spent nearly two hours telling us of his tour to Russia with the Astors, and how great Socialism was. We were impressed by his greatness as an intellectual giant and a playwright, yet in retrospect his love-affair with Stalin and Litvinov took place when a million kulaks were being liquidated for their belief in free enterprise.²⁹

Yet again one questions whether Shaw was really wanting to 'learn more' or whether he simply wanted to tell. He had already puzzled his large audience when he spoke for one and three quarter hours along the same lines in the Cape Town City Hall on behalf of the Fabians on his first visit to South Africa. He thought it was a 'stupendous lecture on Russia' but Leon Hugo, a professor of English at the University of South Africa felt 'Shaw failed himself and his audience'. He went on too long and confused his listeners who actually wondered if he was the one who was confused.³⁰ So Dr Cowden was not alone in feeling let down.³¹

In fact, many people, not least his contemporaries, wondered why Bernard Shaw became so enamoured with Stalin. Beatrice Webb challenged him on his return from his nine-day pilgrimage to Russia in 1931 about reported Soviet atrocities. Shaw's reply — which was his standard reply — was that they were 'manifestations of a backward country with a barbarous history'.³² In a recent study of Stalin the modern British writer

Martin Amis reveals the full scale of Stalin's atrocities and describes H.G. Wells, Shaw and the Webbs as the '... century's four most extravagant dupes of the USSR'. 'Shaw', he writes, 'after some banquet diplomacy, declared the Russian people uncommonly well-fed at a time when perhaps 11 million citizens were in the process of dying of starvation'.³³

For Shaw, communism as he saw it in Russia was the culmination of his life's work of preaching socialism, and Sidney and Beatrice Webb were his first converts. He felt he had found a country which had established socialism, made it a political system, thrown out private property and abandoned capitalism. He embraced it with religious fervour and a corresponding suspension of disbelief. In one of his famous paradoxes he declared, 'The Russian Revolution was pure Fabianism'.³⁴ He admitted his impression was based on instinct, so when the Webbs were going to see Russia for themselves, he encouraged Sidney Webb to do a survey and base their conclusions on facts, in true Fabian style. Hence the Webbs' tome, *Soviet Communism: A New Civilization?* the proofs of which Shaw read on his voyage to Natal. He is known to have attended a Communist Party meeting in Durban addressed by Edward Roux and by H.A. Naidoo whom Roux had introduced to the Party in the early 1930s. Naidoo recognised Shaw in the audience and welcomed their 'distinguished visitor', inviting him to say a few words. Shaw replied, surprisingly, 'Tonight I've come to listen to you, so just carry on'.³⁵ Perhaps it should be noted that Shaw started out as a revolutionary. He declared himself to have been completely converted by reading Marx's *Das Kapital*, 'the turning point in my career', during his self-education in the British Museum Reading Room, 'my daily resort'. It was there, too, that he met Eleanor Marx, Karl Marx's fourth daughter, with whom he became increasingly friendly.³⁶ Shaw admitted that he joined the Fabian Society in his early lonely London days because he knew he would meet people of his own kind there. While some moderates view Shaw's and the Webbs' obsession with Russia in their latter years as mere senility, Margaret Cole, historian of the Fabian Society, wrote of the Webbs and Shaw, 'Their hearts were in Russia and Russia alone'.³⁷ Lenin declared Shaw to be Left of the Fabians politically, and one is reminded of Lenin's often-quoted description of him as 'a good man fallen among Fabians'.

It was in 1935 that Mabel Palmer was hard at work trying to persuade the Natal University College to admit black students. The University Council's eventual agreement that, starting in 1936, black students could pursue a selected number of the university's courses on condition that the classes were conducted separately and off the campus, and Mabel Palmer's involvement for twenty years as organiser of the 'Non-European Section', as it was called, can be followed elsewhere.³⁸ In the meantime she had been tutoring black part-time students, predominantly African and Indian teachers, in her own sitting room since 1932. It was these students and some of her close friends whom she invited to a tea party at her home at 24 Clair Avenue, Manor Gardens to meet Bernard Shaw. He had various theme tunes during his stay in Durban, another of which was soon aired on this occasion. In no time the students were enlisting his support for their campaign for the parliamentary vote on an equal footing with whites. The issue was a live one as the Smuts-Hertzog government had published a bill which would end the association of black and white South Africans on the common voters' roll in the Cape and replace it with a separate African voters' roll by which they would be able to vote for three white members of parliament to represent their interests. Shaw took the ground from under their feet by meeting their pleas with the reply, 'Who wants to go

into Parliament anyway? What good will it ever do anybody?’ Florence Macdonald, Mabel Palmer’s great friend and collaborator in the black university classes, summed it up thus: ‘They could not understand what he meant, but he talked all afternoon. It was a lovely, lovely afternoon.’³⁹ Recounting the occasion later Shaw claimed to have told them, ‘Don’t try to defend the vote for natives. It is quite worthless. What you have to do is to move an amendment to the Bill abolishing the white vote as well.’ Mabel’s guests were surprised, to say the least. Shaw’s contradictions were many, but his long-standing resistance to parliamentary democracy through universal suffrage was one that was especially difficult to reconcile with his commitment to equality. It rested on his belief that government should be in the hands of competent and informed people who should completely restructure society and oversee the systematic and even-handed implementation of socialism. Furthermore, Shaw believed the vote could be counterproductive. Never a supporter of the suffragette movement, he had written in 1928:

The belief in the magic of the vote was so fervent that I could not be forgiven for warning the suffragettes that votes for women would probably mean their self-exclusion from Parliament, and that what was needed was a constitutional law that all public authorities should have a representative proportion of women on them, votes or no votes.⁴⁰

In similar vein, the Natal activist, lawyer and politician Ismail Meer — who was a student in Mabel Palmer’s classes in the early 1940s — wrote of an incident between Shaw and the Swedish-Indian activist, Palme Dutt. Dutt was a recognised interpreter of Marxism/Leninism and founder of the India League in London. When Dutt was standing for parliament in Britain Shaw wrote to say he would vote for him knowing full well that he would lose, because intelligent people like him did not stand a chance. Perhaps Shaw should be credited with some degree of prophecy. Had he lived in the present day, his reservations about the vote could very well have been confirmed.⁴¹

Ismail Meer attended a meeting addressed by Shaw at the Gandhi library in Durban. It was there that he offered miscegenation as a solution to South Africa’s race issue.⁴² This is the topic most associated with Shaw by those South Africans today who know anything about him. It formed a significant part of his pronouncements in Cape Town and assumed concrete form in his novella written in Knysna, *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God*. In it Shaw’s creative mind runs through various recognisable colonial themes, most notably the damaging effect of the missionaries on black identity, and he ends up with his much-quoted image of the ‘coffee-coloured’ South African of the future. Furthermore, while he was in Durban he heard the pro-Nazi Minister of Transport and Defence Oswald Pirow make an appeal to immigrants to keep up the white population. Shaw concluded that interbreeding of the races was the answer to what seemed like a drop in the white birth rate. When he returned to England he declared himself an ‘advocate of intermarriage between the white and black inhabitants’ of South Africa. This brought Shaw considerable notoriety in newspapers around the world. The South African press reported that it was regarded as a bad joke in Britain and as blasphemy in Germany. Shaw did not relent. All his life he kept to the view that South Africa’s ‘ghetto legislation’ was comparable to the persecution of the Jews by Nazi Germany.⁴³ Pauline Podbrey observed the negative effects of his pronouncements during his Natal visit. She wrote:

During his visit to South Africa Shaw earned the opprobrium of the whites by declaring that South Africa's problems would be solved by intermarriage between the races, by the dreaded word miscegenation. After that he was shunned by the white population and maligned by the press. He spent most of his time in Durban strolling around the Indian area of Grey Street.

However, it should be noted that Podbrey could have been over-sensitive to the issue. She was soon to marry H. A. Naidoo, the Indian speaker at the communist meeting Shaw attended, and was experiencing the difficulties attached to mixed marriages in South Africa. Her observations might well have been close to the truth but she could also have been overlooking Shaw's pure interest in 'exploring the less vaunted parts of our town that lurk behind Grey Street' as reported in the press. The Shaws were also reported as having '... been everywhere and seen everybody as far as their time and strength allowed.'⁴⁴

It is probably true to say that Shaw received most of his media publicity while he was in Natal from those associated in some way with his Fabian connection. Among these was Maurice Webb. It was Webb who interviewed him in the radio talk on books, broadcast from Durban throughout South Africa. It was Webb who published the valedictory article which appeared in *The Natal Witness* on the Shaws' departure from Natal. And it was Webb who entertained the Shaws in front of a log fire one afternoon when Durban was hit by pouring rain and howling wind and who later published their conversation in *The Outspan* under the heading 'By the Fireside with George Bernard Shaw'.

Because of his role, tangentially, within the Fabian dynamic of Durban, a little more needs to be said of Maurice Webb. Of lower middle class origins and self-educated, Webb was first and foremost a Quaker but, in his early years in England, he was also exposed to influential Fabians — in night schools, in the Workers' Educational Association and elsewhere. He emigrated to Durban in 1921, the same year as Mabel Palmer. He took up a post at Braby's directory publishing firm in Durban and launched into a whole range of activities aimed at the betterment of the less privileged classes of society. His approach has been described by one historian as 'social welfare liberalism'.⁴⁵ He aspired to a Fabian intellectualism and served in most of the same fields as Mabel Palmer. In some cases they worked together as, for example, in the Workers' Educational Association, Adult Education, Bantu Child Welfare, and Joint Council movements. In particular, Webb was on the Council of the Natal University College so in all her negotiations regarding the 'Non-European Classes', Mabel worked through him and often sacrificed the credit to him. He was also chairman of the Council of Adams College where Mabel held the July vacation schools for her students. They did not like each other. Mabel did not fully trust Webb as she felt he was a committee man and a talker rather than a worker. Webb found Mabel overbearing in her indefatigable persistence, as did a number of people, and he was jealous of her intellectual prowess and the honorary doctorate which the University of South Africa awarded her in 1947 in acknowledgement of her work in race relations and education. He claimed acquaintance with Bernard Shaw in London but did not come anywhere near the association with Shaw that Mabel had. Mabel, too, was a writer of journal and newspaper articles, including ones on broadcasting, and she also gave radio talks on Durban's A Programme. With no firm evidence available, it can be surmised that she would have been a trifle peeved that Webb dominated the interviews with Shaw. On the other hand, she was content to accept the male dominance of the

day if it achieved the goals for which she was working, and she would have wanted the best for Bernard Shaw.⁴⁶

In this media publicity many of the familiar themes were aired. Webb wrote of Shaw's 'talking' which he described as very good, ranging over the stage and actors and actresses, music and musicians, politics and painters and writers, motor cars, and countries and people and causes. When asked how they liked Durban, Mrs Shaw was profuse in her praise, but Shaw sneaked in his gibe that 'the pervading laziness in the air' would cause him 'moral degeneration' and he would do no work if he stayed on. With regard to queries that Shaw was funny but not sincere, Webb wrote, 'Bernard Shaw is sincere *and* funny which is the secret of his power. The fact is that behind all his wilfulness and paradoxes there is a fundamental sincerity and simplicity'. Shaw's belief that war 'is the great destroyer' and the enemy of the artist, is set against his belief that to get rid of war, those who believe in it should be allowed to get on and shoot each other off. Perhaps one needs to remember that Shaw's paradoxes are meant to proclaim a truth with a bang. There was room for another gibe. Shaw told how he asked a young woman if she had come to South Africa from England. She replied that she was from Durban. 'Ah', he said, 'then you are a native.' Shaw waxed strong in these interviews on his aversion to parliament: 'Scrap Parliament. The modern world needs a system of government that gives the people a voice, not an ineffective vote, and gives the executive the necessary power to make and carry out decisions.' While in Durban Shaw, it is reported, 'has given and taken hard knocks on what now appears to be his favourite topic — the decline of Parliament and the Russian experiment' but apparently he enjoyed the controversy. Webb's articles contained much praise, wit and incidental chatter, but perhaps his most telling summing up of Shaw's current message was this:

Bernard Shaw, the Fabian, and Socialist propagandist, looks back on the enthusiasms and hopes of the earlier part of the century and sees them frustrated by war, dissipated by Parliament. His Socialism and Fabianism have survived, and it is in the experiments of modern Russia that his hopes are centred. Many logs have to be added to the fire before G.B.S. tires of talking of his favourite topic, Russia.⁴⁷

Shaw's intent becomes clearer when it is remembered that during his travels, he spent part of his time on the ship every day writing letters and preparing his press interviews.

Mabel Palmer, for her part, continued to promote Shaw at every opportunity, but on a different level. Her presentations were based on knowledge, not reportage. In her personal papers are scripts of public talks, articles, broadcast talks and lectures on Shaw, all with a didactic purpose. Of particular interest are her short handwritten notes, on yellow writing pad paper, of a lecture she gave to her black students entitled 'G. B. S. Special ref, to Man & Superman'. Although she told them that '... it must be difficult for non-E-students — indeed for all S. African students — to understand him', she spared them nothing. She analysed the characters, gave page references for reading, gave details of Shaw's life and his political thinking and activity, spoke of the developments at the time — the 'new' women, the 'new' theology and the 'New Theatre' in which Shaw was a major influence. She developed Shaw's theory of 'Life Force', linking it with the theory of evolution and explaining that unless 'man' was always working towards something higher than himself, humanity was doomed.⁴⁸ In a manuscript attached to a broadcast talk given in 1949, Mabel explained Shaw's rejection of what she called

'Marxianism' in their Fabian Society days, thus influencing the direction of socialism in England and the British Labour Party away from Marxist economic theory. His obsession with Communist Russia when he visited Natal must have at least puzzled her. She referred, too, to the help Shaw gave her personally in stirring up opinion on the position of women and the treatment of the suffragettes, of which she was one, and 'in doing so had some effect on the history of S. Africa'.⁴⁹ Another elegantly-written, comprehensive article was entitled 'G.B.S.', written to mark Shaw's death in 1950. It was requested by Ismail Meer for publication in *Indian Views*. It begins, 'It is amazing what a blank the death of Bernard Shaw leaves. It is fifteen years since I saw him ... but one felt he was always there, almost like a great natural force making for wisdom & righteousness. Why did he loom so large in the public eye?'⁵⁰

One might ask whether the people of Natal would have identified with this last statement. Shaw's visit to Natal in 1935 was but a small episode in his long and many-sided life and it could be said that it was but a small episode in the long and complex history of the Natal and Zulu region. When Shaw's visit is mentioned today, a memory or a story is quite often ready at hand. Here is an example from someone whose father-in-law 'remembered Shaw's visit to Durban before the War very well':

He remembered that GBS was staying at the Royal Hotel and a waiter asked him whether he would like a whisky. GBS replied by asking the waiter what that thing suspended in a glass of water was. It was an avocado pear pip. GBS then suggested to the waiter that he replace the water with whisky which the waiter declined to do 'because then it won't grow'. 'Precisely!' replied GBS. 'That's why I won't have a whisky....'⁵¹

These memories are invariably on the level of Shaw's idiosyncrasies and witticisms, or on his rather provocative pronouncements on miscegenation. A worthwhile assessment of his impact on Natal or Natal's impact on him is hindered by the absence or inaccessibility of sources. What, for example, might be contained in the Shaws' letters from Natal to Lady Astor? Or what other details might emerge if more sources were discovered in Natal? One communication that has been unearthed, dated 'Durban 18 May 1935', was to Gilbert Murray in Oxford and it revolved around Shaw's own English agenda. He sent Murray a cutting from *The Natal Witness* of 15 May 1935 of his article entitled, 'Bernard Shaw on the Jubilee: The King in Relation to Art and Drama: Why Lawrence of Arabia, Wells, Chesterton (and Shaw) are Without Titles: Royal Preference For Football'. The opening question is, 'Would it be indiscreet, Mr Shaw, to allude to the fact that though you have talked on many things since your arrival in Durban, you have said not one word about the Jubilee?' This is a lengthy, in-depth, argumentative 'interview with himself' written and copyrighted by Shaw. It is rich in facts about his contribution to drama but is largely self-serving and self-congratulatory, using a contradictory method of disparaging King George V for his attitude to the arts, then defending him. On the subject of no title having come his way Shaw wrote:

As for myself I am a Red Marxist Communist of 50 years' standing, a persistent friend of the Russian Revolution and the Soviet State and the prophet of a modern religion which would make short work of the Thirty-nine Articles. And the King to confer on me the Order of the Garter — and I should consider anything less an insult — and he will reply: 'Am I the defender of the faith or not?'

The article would have been of interest to a section of the empire-loving component of Natal's population but it had more meaning for Shaw and Murray. He appended a cynical note to Murray suggesting that Mrs Murray should receive nothing but a dukedom, then ended by saying, 'Still, it's a real difficulty. We expect to be back in the middle of June. G.B.S.'⁵²

On the whole it seems safe to say that Shaw's Fabian connections were pleased with his visit and a fair cross section of Natalians recognised that a famous figure had been in their midst. The Shaws themselves appear to have had a restful and entertaining holiday ending with perhaps the most interesting of their experiences. On their last Monday they were the guests of Mr and Mrs Denis Shepstone who took them to Maphumulo where Shaw joined in a Zulu war dance. He sang with the warriors and even attempted a step or two. He was very interested in the music and informed the chief that one of the songs had obviously given Wagner the inspiration for the *Flying Dutchman*. Shaw made a brief speech telling the entertainers what a fine race of people they were and what pleasure their music had given him. The chief thanked him and hoped that he and Mrs Shaw had many photographs to take home with them. Two days later, on 22 May 1935, the Shaws left Durban on the fast train for Cape Town where they were to join the *Winchester Castle* for their return to England.⁵³

It would be presumptuous in the extreme to attempt a definitive article on Bernard Shaw on the basis of his short visit to Natal in 1935. So long was his life and so vast his output, and so extensive the Shaw discourse, that one can but explore the subject and attempt to trace ideas, influences, opinions, associations and connections. The question remains, 'Has Shaw anything to say to KwaZulu-Natal today?' Many people who have never read a Shaw play, like to quote Shaw: in speeches, in introductions to guest speakers, in votes of thanks or in 'reflections for the day' in newspapers. They feel they know him by reputation. More salutary is to look afresh at his writing and to discover that, despite the long period it covers, there is a timelessness about the kernel of Shaw's deepest thinking. Winston Churchill took his children to a performance of *Major Barbara* in the late 1920s. The world had undergone profound and sweeping changes and a complete reshaping of opinion since Churchill had seen the play twenty years before. Yet, wrote Churchill,

... in *Major Barbara* there was not a character requiring to be re-drawn, not a sentence nor a suggestion that was out of date. My children were astounded to learn that this play, the very acme of modernity, was written more than five years before they were born.⁵⁴

Of more lasting value than his visit to Natal in 1935 would be a refreshed reading of *Major Barbara*, especially the preface. In G. K. Chesterton's words, 'The ultimate epigram of *Major Barbara* can be put thus. People say that poverty is no crime; Shaw says that poverty is a crime; that it is a crime to endure it, a crime to be content with it, that it is the mother of all crimes of brutality, corruption, and fear.... The point of this particular drama is that even the noblest enthusiasm of the girl who becomes a Salvation Army officer fails under the brute money power of her father who is a modern capitalist.'⁵⁵ In a world beset by anxieties generated by industrialisation, capitalism, money, brutality, religion and, above all, poverty, Shaw's message in this work continues to be modern, not least in South Africa and, indeed, in KwaZulu-Natal.

NOTES

- ¹ Shaw disliked the name George and dropped it professionally when he moved from his native Dublin to London in 1876. See Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, Vol. 1 1856–1898: *The Search for Love* (Penguin, 1988), p. 25.
- ² Michael Holroyd ed., *The Genius of Shaw: A symposium* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1979), Introduction, p. 9.
- ³ Winston S. Churchill, 'George Bernard Shaw' in *Great Contemporaries* (Fontana, 1959), p. 51.
- ⁴ A.J.P. Taylor, 'Shaw: The Court Jester' in *From the Boer War to the Cold War: Essays on Twentieth Century Europe* (Penguin, 1996), p. 61.
- ⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, 'A Note on (towards) Bernard Shaw' in *Labyrinths* (Penguin, 1970), pp. 249–50.
- ⁶ S. Winston, ed., *G.B.S.* 90 (Hutchinson, 1946)
- ⁷ John Betjeman, *Coming Home: an anthology of prose 1920–1977*, ed. Candida Lycett Green (Vintage, 1998), p. 198.
- ⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw* (House of Stratus, 2001), p. iii. (First published 1910)
- ⁹ This is an example of what is available on the Internet.
- ¹⁰ *The Natal Witness*, 29 April 1935. Also *The Natal Mercury*, 29 April 1935.
- ¹¹ See Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, Vol. 3 1918–1950: *The Lure of Fantasy*, (Penguin, 1993), pp. 271–284 for the details of the Shaws' Cape visit from 11 January to 19 March 1932.
- ¹² Campbell Collections, Mabel Palmer Papers, KCM 16732, Mabel Palmer to Mildred Atkinson, 30 April 1935.
- ¹³ *The Natal Mercury*, 29 and 30 April and 1 May 1935.
- ¹⁴ *The Natal Mercury*, 1 May 1935.
- ¹⁵ *The Natal Witness*, 7 May 1935. Williams was involved in taking Shaw to various places on behalf of Durban Publicity.
- ¹⁶ Simon Haw, *Bearing Witness: The Natal Witness 1846–1996* (The Natal Witness, 1996), p.197, pp. 207–8.
- ¹⁷ *The Natal Witness*, 10 May 1935.
- ¹⁸ *The Natal Witness*, 11 May 1935. Griffin's Hill is usually associated with Estcourt, but it would appear that the name was also given to the hill rising towards Ridge Road on entering Pietermaritzburg from Durban. At one time the Griffins owned substantial properties there. The poultry farm on entering the city from the Howick side would have been L.T. Forsyth's *Granton* where Granton Mews is today. (Information from Shelagh Spencer, Pietermaritzburg.)
- ¹⁹ A.J.P. Taylor, 'Shaw: The Court Jester', pp. 62–3.
- ²⁰ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964), p. 259. The chapter, 'The Fabians Reconsidered' is helpful in understanding the place of the early Fabians in the developing socialist movement in Britain.
- ²¹ *The Natal Mercury*, 8 May 1935, from the City Correspondent.
- ²² Maurice Webb in *The Natal Witness*, 24 May 1935.
- ²³ Mabel Palmer Papers, KCM 17325, 'G.B. Shaw as I knew him', broadcast talk by Mabel Palmer on Durban 'A' Programme, Sunday, 31 July 1949.
- ²⁴ Kingston-upon-Hull Central Library, Winifred Holtby Papers, correspondence *passim*. For a full study of the ICU see P.L. Wickins, *The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa*. (Oxford University Press, 1978).
- ²⁵ Edward Roux, *Time Longer than Rope: The Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), p.177. (First published 1948)
- ²⁶ Quoted in M.W. Swanson ed., *The Views of Mahlathi: writings of A.W.G. Champion a black South African* (University of Natal Press and Killie Campbell Africana Library, 1982), p. 41.
- ²⁷ University of South Africa, Champion Papers, Mabel Palmer to Champion, 13 February 1930 and Champion to Mabel Palmer, 17 February 1930.
- ²⁸ Personal interview, Dr Humphrey Jones, Durban North, 7 August 1979.
- ²⁹ *Focus*, Vol. 7, No. 1, undated, p. 3. The reference is to Maxim Litvinov, Foreign Commissar to the Soviet Union, who accompanied Shaw and his party during much of their Russian visit.
- ³⁰ See Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, Vol. 3, p. 273.
- ³¹ Personal interview, Mrs Nancy Gardiner, Hilton, 2 February 2006. (Dr Cowden's sister)
- ³² Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, Vol. 3, p. 249.
- ³³ Martin Amis, *Koba the Dread* (Vintage, 2002), p. 21n. Perhaps it should be noted that support of communist Russia was not uncommon among intellectuals in the 1930s and 40s. There were the notorious

Cambridge spies — Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt, Kim Philby and Donald Maclean — for example. Even the distinguished historian Eric Hobsbawm, in his recent autobiography, argues that the full extent of Stalin's tyranny was not known to British communists until the revelations of 1956, thus justifying his own continued membership of the party. See Eric Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (Abacus, 2002), pp. 197–209.

³⁴ Quoted in Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, Vol. 3, p. 251.

³⁵ In Pauline Podbrey, *White Girl in Search of the Party* (Haded Books, 1993), p. 28.

³⁶ Yvonne Kapp, *Eleanor Marx*, Vol. I 1855–1883 (Virago, 1979), p. 192.

³⁷ Margaret Cole, *The Story of Fabian Socialism* (London, 1961), p. 252.

³⁸ See Sylvia Vietzen, 'Mabel Palmer and Black Higher Education in Natal c1936–1942' in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, Vol. VI, 1983, pp. 98–114.

³⁹ Personal interviews, Mrs Florence Macdonald, Sea View, Durban, 8 November 1977 and 5 August 1979.

⁴⁰ Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism & Fascism* (Penguin, 1982), p. 481. (First published 1928)

⁴¹ Ismail Meer, *A Fortunate Man* (Zebra Press, 2002), p. 56.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ See Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw*, Vol. 3, pp. 283–4.

⁴⁴ Podbrey, *White Girl in Search of a Party*, p. 28 and *The Natal Witness*, 24 May 1935.

⁴⁵ See Barry White, 'Maurice Webb: A Case Study in Social Welfare Liberalism in Natal, 1926–1953' in *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, Vol. XV, 1994/5, pp. 1–16.

⁴⁶ Webb's tendency to infiltrate intellectual circles had caused his clash with Roy Campbell. Campbell resigned the editorship of the two-year-old literary journal *Voorslag* in 1926 because he felt Webb as publisher was intruding on his role as editor. He raged at the owner, 'You yourself confided in me in the beginning that we must take care not to let *Voorslag* develop Webbed feet. Now you want it to have a Webbed head....' He went on to lampoon Webb, among others, in his poem *The Wayzgoose*:

A Socialist thou art in thought and act,
And yet thy business flourishes intact:
A Boss in trade, thou art securely placed,
And only art a Bolshevik in taste:
To kill a sheep, too tender is thy heart,
Yet wilt thou massacre a work of art.

See Peter Alexander, *Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography* (David Philip, 1982), pp. 48–55 and 71–2.

⁴⁷ Campbell Collections, Maurice Webb Papers, KCM 22306, *The Outspan*, 14 June 1935, 'At the Fireside with George Bernard Shaw' and *The Natal Witness*, 24 May 1935, 'Bernard Shaw Leaves South Africa: Impressions of a Distinguished and Charming Visitor'.

⁴⁸ Mabel Palmer Papers, manuscript stapled to KCM 17323, undated. The yellow writing pad paper would date it around 1936 or soon after as she used this stationery to submit records in the early days of the black classes.

⁴⁹ Mabel Palmer Papers, carbon copy of manuscript attached to KCM 17325, 31 July 1949.

⁵⁰ Mabel Palmer Papers, KCM 17324 attached to letter, Mabel Palmer to Mr Meer, 7 November 1950.

⁵¹ Told by Dr André le Roux of Cape Town, formerly of Natal. The Shaws stayed at the Marine Hotel at the start of their visit to Durban. Reference to the Royal Hotel could be a trick of memory, or it could suggest they stayed there later, or that perhaps Shaw was visiting there.

⁵² Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Gilbert Murray 167, f. 130.

⁵³ The Idler in 'Down Our Lane', *The Natal Mercury*, 22 May 1935.

⁵⁴ Churchill, *Great Contemporaries*, p. 44. *Major Barbara* was written in 1905.

⁵⁵ Chesterton, *George Bernard Shaw*, pp. 72–3.