The railway history of Transvaal is however also the story of the early steps taken to promote the process of industrialization after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in the early 1880s. It is perhaps in this sphere that the new publication makes an important contribution to our existing knowledge. As a centennial publication NZASM 100 is a successful undertaking. It is a valuable and interesting reference work for the railway enthusiast, the student of socio-economic history as well as 19th century Transvaal history.

Its subject, the Nederlandsche Zuid-AfrikaanscheSpoorwegmaatschappij (NZASM), has never before been the exclusive subject of research. The company’s history does feature in P.J. van Wijmeren’s Onder Karren Hol- landers (1917-1936), D.J. Coetzee’s Spoorwongontwikkeling in die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek, 1872-1899 (1940), J.S. Mannis’s The fall of Kruger’s Republic (1961), and C.T. Gordon’s The Growth of Boer opposition to Kruger (1970). But each time the focus was predominantly on other themes. The work is based on sound research. Apart from consulting almost all the published material, the authors appear to have done considerable archival research in South Africa as well as the Netherlands. A number of new facts emerge and some old myths are debunked. The reader is given an explanation for the niche in the tunnel at Waterval Boven. The authors also make out a good case for the argument that far fewer people died in the Lowveld as a result of malaria during the time of construction of the railway than was hitherto popularly believed.

The publication is an interdisciplinary project by a team of specialists. Gerhard-Marx van der Waal, an architectural and art historian of the HSRC, stood at the helm of the undertaking. Henkie Heydenrych, currently head of the Division for Applied History Research at the HSRC, was responsible for the first chapter. The third member of the team was Robert de Jong, a cultural historian of the Transvaal Provincial Museum Services. The first chapter deals mainly with the broader background and outline history of the NZASM. It was — apart from the mining firms — one of the major industrial undertakings in the ZAR. Consequently its history deals with many important aspects of Transvaal’s social and economic history. The company was cosmopolitan and it is, for example, interesting to note that more Britons than Transvaal Afrikaners were on its payroll. The NZASM offered its employees a medical aid scheme, housing facilities, a savings plan, as well as a provident and pension fund. It even provided a travelling library service.

Attention is also given to the African workers who participated in the construction of the rail network. In 1896, for example, more than 7 000 Africans were in the employment of the company. There are illustrations and interesting but brief vignettes in the text of how these workers were accommodated and the conditions under which they worked.

The sections on the architectural history of the NZASM are excellent. Within the space of three pages the reader is given a comprehensive overview of the philosophical principles underlying the architectural policy of the NZASM. The clear and precise style could very well serve as an example to perspective architectural historians. Attention is furthermore given to the company’s approach to town planning in a rural environment and housing for employees in the immediate vicinity of stations.

As a whole the analysis and historical narratives are consistently good. Occasionally there are however unclear sentences (p. 106) and certain archaic phrases such as ‘sterling work’ being ‘performed’ (p. 113). The typsetting of the work is excellent and there are only a few minor typographical errors. The book features a host of illustrations. It is evident that considerable planning went into presenting illustrations in a visually attractive fashion. Especially the original architectural drawings of buildings are of an exceptionally high standard. Indirectly, NZASM 100 is a modern record of architectural conservation in the Transvaal in the 1980s. It is encouraging to take note of the fact that the South African Transport Services went to considerable trouble to ensure that some of the old Transvaal’s architectural treasures would be conserved. There is however reason for concern about the apparently insensitive destruction of many old buildings.
There are also some points of criticism. The artistic layout could have been better. The attempt to base the artwork on the original Gedenkboek of the company (issued in 1895), is, to a large extent, a failure. More attention should have been given to a functional layout which might have saved considerable costs.

Furthermore, it may have been easier for the reader if the illustrations had been numbered, with suitable references in the text where they are visually relevant. In Chapter 1 there are a number of illustrations of steam locomotives which might have been discussed more comprehensively in a separate section elsewhere in the book.

The policy of supplying additional information in footnotes is impractical and clumsy. A lot of excellent information is lost to the average reader who does not consult footnotes. Blocks of information could have been fitted into the text without disturbing the artistic character. The conventional usage of a footnote implies that it is a device of reference to sources consulted.

Finally, it is a pity that the publisher — as a result of current printing costs and the prevailing demands of the market place — did not deem it fit to publish N2ASZ 100 in Afrikaans too, or maybe even the Dutch language. Perhaps a fund-raising campaign could be launched by the South African Transport Services to finance a translated version for which there might well exist a demand.

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Jackie Grobler’s aim was to provide a short, balanced account for the uninformed reader of the politics of modern black protest from its beginnings in the Eastern Cape last century to the Soweto uprising. This was a worthwhile project, for much detailed work has been done on particular aspects of that protest. A short general account can, besides educating the uninformed, also show connections and — through periodization and reflective comment — advance understanding of the field as a whole. Grobler does synthesize much of the relevant literature; his bibliography reflects wide reading in primary as well as secondary sources. He furthermore adds useful biographical notes on 28 key black leaders.

A decisive clash? does not, however, make any substantial contribution to an understanding of the history of black protest, despite the 93 footnote references to a remarkable range of original archival material in various collections in the United States, Britain and South Africa. Not only are the complexities of the politics of black protest frequently lost in this sketchy history, but the framework into which the author has chosen to set his book is uninformative, while in other ways the result is flawed.

The title — an extremely odd one for a work of history — is taken from the last sentence in the book, in which the question is posed: ‘Are the leaders of Black and Afrikaner nationalism earnestly looking for a solution or will the situation inevitably result in a decisive clash?’. The idea that there might be such a clash goes back at least to the 1870s, when many whites predicted a ‘war of the races’, which would either lead to the establishment of white domination for all time or, less likely, to the whites being swept into the sea. Grobler not only fails to believe that there will be a ‘decisive clash’ of nationalism in the future, but winees of a ‘never-ending confrontation’ (p. 174) between black and white, suggesting that black protest has in the past been essentially racial and that black and white have, as blocs, been antagonistic to each other through history. Evidence in his own book, let alone elsewhere, challenges such an interpretation.

‘Black’ politics is here almost entirely African politics, with coloureds and Indians getting only occasional mention. Grobler can however not ignore the fact that whites have, both in South Africa and overseas, associated themselves with the cause for which blacks were fighting. As is now well known, Africans long struggled for the most modest concessions from their white rulers, and vainly used constitutional and legal forms of protest. Grobler’s account shows why, after repeated rebuffs, protest took violent forms, in response to violence by the authorities. But much of his conclusion is highly problematic, such as the assertion (p. 175) that ‘Black political protest after 1976 was a “fully-armed, national movement”’. Despite his own evidence to the contrary, Grobler stresses the “solidarity” forged among blacks by the late 1970s, and plays down the issues that divided them. For many blacks, of course, the goal of protest remained the establishment of a non-racial, democratic system of government, a goal which even the ruling National Party came round to professing in 1989.

A decisive clash? not only displays a lack of analytical rigour at key points, but also contains many oddities and errors. We are told in the preface that ‘Because of security legislation no direct references could be made to banned documents’, but various banned items, including the ANC periodical Sishobo (e.g. p. 142), are cited. What is one to make of Grobler’s statement that by the late 1970s ‘Every Black individual in South Africa was, as far as possible, being forced to take part in the struggle - in the same way that every single White male was forced to defend the system’ (p. 175)?

It is hardly true that overseas organizations and countries ‘openly declared their full support for South Africa’s Blacks’ (ibid.). What such organizations and countries did want to see was a more democratic dispensation. It is misleading to say that Odendaal points out that the South African Native Congress ‘had its origin in the ethnic [sic] conflict between the Mfengu and other Xhosa-speaking groups in the Eastern Cape’ (p. 20); the ethnic factor was one among many.

Grobler also fails to note the role of the squatter movements, and especially Manzana’s Sofasonke Party, in pushing the ANC towards more direct action in the 1940s.

There are a number of typographical errors: the title of the second part of the book is correct on e. v. for example, but incorrect on the contents page and again on p. 77. More seriously, Grobler’s remarks on the Robben Island prison with its ‘healthy, moderate climate’ (p. 137), pretend to be objective, but appear apologetic. A decisive clash? may inform some readers, but as a reliable short survey of the history of black politics it is an opportunity missed.

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The Battle of Ulundi is a fascinating account told by a trained historian and author of history books and several articles on Zulu history.

The reader is made aware of the determination of the British troops to avenge the Isandlwana disaster, and the killing of the disabled Zulus is blamed on the Natal Native Contingent (p. 40). What is not told is that this contingen was led by white officers. The question is: who ordered the contingent to kill the disabled? During the British invasion it was common knowledge that the British troops did kill the wounded. This fact was accepted by Governor H. McCallum during the 1866 Bambatha uprising. He stressed that ‘at the battle of Iyenazane it was reporred both by Europeans and Natives that the greater proportion of the wounded had been killed and that very few if any prisoners were taken’.

In Laband’s book the reader is given the incorrect impression that the Zulu king’s word was final (p. 5). The Zulu kingdom was semi-federal in nature, with all the amakhos (chiefs) having full jurisdiction in their areas, subject to allegiance to the isilo (king). They were members of the izangwana or federal parliament and could refuse to co-operate without punishment forthcoming from the king. A good example is the refusal of Prince Hhunu and his followers to defend the Zulu king against the invaders.

Laband correctly states that ‘By June all the major coastal chiefs were negotiating with Crealock, and many were to submit even before the battle of Ulundi was fought’ (p. 4). This shows the degree of independence the amakhos had from the King. It was thus not all the amakhos who defended the obonini homestead, since it was the amakhos’ duty to supply them. It is incorrect to state that the amakhos ignored the king’s orders and ‘stayed at home’ (p. 47).

What should be stressed is the breakdown in communication between the king and the amakhos. The Zulu kings, except Shaka, solicited and encouraged dissenting or alternative viewpoints since by custom they must rule by consensus. They were the arbiters of disputes and as such they were supposed to be impartial.

The use of the words iskhanda and amakhosana is wrong. The amakhosana (military homesteads) were, strictly speaking, referred to as the amakhosana (temporary shelters). Those homesteads where the king had stationed his wives, grandmothers or the isigodlo were not the amakhosana in the sense

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