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Origin, Nature and Dismantling of Apartheid Policy in the Union of South Africa (1948-1994) (Pp. 496-509)

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Abstract

The apartheid policy of racial discrimination and segregation against the blacks in South Africa was officially introduced in 1948 by the all- white government of Daniel F. Malan. It was abolished in April 1994. While it lasted, blacks in South Africa suffered economic and political subjugation and degradation that were better imagined than real. Resistance by blacks to the obnoxious policies of the apartheid initially involved protests and demonstrations between 1912 and 1950's but became militant between 1960 and late 1970's. This resulted in a number of imprisonments, deaths and loss of property. By the 1980's however, apartheid began to lose its potency in South Africa. Liberal policies introduced by the government of F.W de Klerk between 1989 and 1994 as well as growing international condemnation of the policy paved way for its eradication. This paper attempts an exploration of the features of apartheid policy in South Africa, the nature of African resistance, signs of disintegration of the policy beginning from the early 1980's and factors that led to its final collapse in April 1994.

Key Words: Apartheid, segregation, persistence, massacre, Bantustan.

Introduction

Apartheid refers to the policy of racial segregation formerly followed in South Africa. The word apartheid means “separateness” in the Afrikaans language and it described the rigid racial division between the governing white minority population and the nonwhite majority population. The National Party (NP) entrenched apartheid as part of its campaign in the 1948 elections. In 1948 when the all- white NP came to power with Daniel F Malan as Prime Minister, segregation and inequality that had existed between races as a matter of custom and practice in the country were enshrined in law (Davis, 2006: Ajala, 1990:19). The policy sought to maintain the domination of the minority whites over the majority black people of the territory and to promote Afrikaner concerns. It was also designed to use the blacks for the creation of wealth and then guarantee the exclusive benefits of the wealth to the whites (Ajala, 1990:19; Cobbin, 2010).

It should, however be noted that it was the Dutch that introduced the policy of apartheid by placing a ban on inter- marriage between the whites and the freed slave women in 1685. However, the first move towards segregation was made in 1959 when Jan van Riebeeck, leader of the Dutch settlers planted a wild almond edge as a boundary which no native South African would be permitted to cross. That was said to be” the first barrier against non- whites in South Africa (ibid). in 1809, the first law which sought to force the coloured population to seek and remain in white employment was promulgated in the cape. Another Act was made in 1857 which required black South Africans living in or entering the Cape Province to obtain pass and also stipulated that failure to do so would attract twelve months imprisonment with hard labour. Some of the basic features of South Africa at independence in 1910 were: pass laws, non enfranchisement of the black populace, and seizure of arable land by the whites and segregation of the backs into the most arid patches in the country; and economic strangulation of the blacks (ibid).

Beginning from 1948, the central theme of the NP’s legislative agenda was apartheid (Afrikaans for separateness) a doctrine of white supremacy promoted as a program of separated development. Once in power, the NP extended and legalized white economic exploitation, political domination, and social privilege. These tenets were reinforced with a harsh and intrusive security system, separate and unequal educations, job discrimination, and residential segregation. Such fundamental rights as protection against search without a warrant and the right to a trial were violated.

The Group Areas Act was passed in 1950. It specified that separate areas be reserved for each of the four main racial groups: whites, blacks coloured, and Asians, stringent pass laws that restricted and controlled black access to white areas were implemented across the nation in 1952. Blacks without passes who remained in urban areas for more than 72 hours were subject to imprisonment. Millions were arrested for such violations. Beginning in the 1950s the government divided the black's population into ethnic groups and assigned each groups to a so-called homeland, also referred to as a Bantustan. Ten of these territories were eventually established; Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Gazankulu, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, Kwazulu, Lebowa, Qwaqwa, Transkei, and Venda. The Development land and trust Act of 1936 had augmented the amount of land blacks could own from 7 percent to 13 percent, and these areas became the basis for the Bantustans.

Prime Minister Malan retired in 1954 and was succeeded by Johannes G. Strijdom, who removed legal obstacles to the further implementation of apartheid. To assure support for the program, the Supreme Court was filled with six judges sympathetic to apartheid who would hear constitutional questions, a step that received parliamentary approval in 1955. NP control of the senate was effected by their increased membership from 77 to 89 in elections that same year. Shortly after the 1958 elections for the house of assembly in which the NP members increased their seats from 94 to 103, Strijdom died.

Strijdom's replacement was Hendrik F. Verwoerd, an uncompromising supporter of apartheid who implemented the concept of separate development of the races through the Bantustan, or homeland, policy. Under him, controls over Africa labour mobility were tightened and the colour bar in employment was extended (Britannica).

In 1959 the government passed the promotion of Bantu self-Government Act, an unsuccessful attempt to diffuse international criticism of apartheid by offering blacks the right to participate in a political process within the Bantustans. The act, which ended black representation in the national parliament, defined blacks as citizens of Bantustans, although they retained their South African citizenship. The economic advantage of the policy from the government's point of view was that it would relieve the government of welfare obligations to millions of blacks without losing the benefits of an abundant supply of cheap black labour who saw it as a further erosion of their rights because it forced them to accept citizenship in remote,

underdeveloped Bantustans. By the end of the 1970s all of the Bantustans had become nominally self-governing though they were in fact entirely dependent on the national government.

Black Resistance to Apartheid

In 1912 the South African National Congress was founded by a group of black urban and traditional leaders who opposed the policies of the first Union of South Africa government, especially laws that appropriated African land. In 1923 the organization was renamed the African National Congress (ANC). At first its main agenda was to protect voting rights for blacks in the Cape province and for nearly 50 years it pursued a policy of peaceful protest and petitions. (Marks, 2010)

During the 1950s, while the South African government passed and implemented oppressive apartheid laws, black South Africans responded by intensifying their political opposition. After decades of receiving no response to demands for justice and equality, the ANC launched the *Defiance Against Unjust Laws* Campaign in 1952 in cooperation with the South African Indian Congress, an Asian anti-apartheid political organization. The campaign was a nonviolent one in which apartheid laws were deliberately broken. After several months of civil disobedience and 8,000 arrests, rioting broke out in a number of cities, which resulted in considerable property damage and about forty deaths. Blacks protest and white repression continued. In 1956, three black women were killed when thousands of them confronted the police because of their inclusion under amended pass laws, which had previously applied only to black men.

Despite the ANC's increasing militancy, its aims were still reformist, seeking to change the existing system, rather than revolutionary. In 1955 the ANC brought together nearly 3,000 delegates of all races in Kliptown in the Transvaal to adopt the Freedom Charter (Parsons, 1985: 296; Davis, 2006). This remarkable document, which affirms that South Africa belongs to its entire people, remains to this day the clearest statement of the guiding principles of the ANC. It emphasizes that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people and the people in South Africa has been robbed of their birthrights to land, liberty, and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality. It stated that, "Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and stand as candidates for all bodies which make laws" (Davis, 2006).

In 1961, in response to the government's actions, the ANC organized Umkhonto we Sizwe (Zulu for "Spear of the Nation") to conduct an armed struggle against the regime. On 16 December 1961, when Afrikaners were commemorating the Battle of Blood River, Umkhonto's first act of sabotage took place. From its inception, however, the underground organization refused to engage in terrorism against civilians and only attacked symbolic targets, police stations, military offices, and other government buildings. In 1962, Nelson Mandela arranged for ANC recruits to undergo military training abroad. The South African government, concerned with the potential of Umkhonto to cause increased unrest, passed new legislation that gave the police broad powers of arrest without warrant. In July 1963 police raided Umkhonto's secret headquarters in the Johannesburg suburb of Rivonia and arrested most of its leadership. Mandela, who was already in prison at the time, was put on trial with the other Umkhonto leaders, all of whom were sentenced to life imprisonment (Karns, 2010). With the imprisonment of the nationalist leadership and the earlier banning of the ANC and PAC, South Africa entered a decade of enforced calm.

In the late 1960s Stephen Biko and other black students founded the Black power movement in the United States. In South Africa it emphasized black leadership and non-cooperation with the government or with Bantustan leaders who were considered collaborators with the government. The BCM was involved in establishing the South African Students' Organization (SASO) for black students. In 1969 SASO split from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), a white-led but nonracial liberal organization, and from the University Christian Movement. Biko, the president of SASO, believed blacks had to provide their own leadership in the liberation process. SASO and the Black Peoples Convention (BPC), a coalition of black organizations, held rallies in September 1974 to mark the independence of Mozambique, despite a government ban on such meetings. Many were arrested, including several of the leaders who were then prosecuted and sentenced. The BCM had a formative influence on students and young South Africans, who played a crucial role in the liberation process. In September 1977 Stephen Biko died after being mistreated while in police custody (Legassick, 2010).

The 1970s witnessed the emergence of a Zulu based ethnic organization called Inkatha, which later became the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). The South African government had given covert training and financial support to Inkatha in an effort to foster division among black organizations in the

country. The 1970s were also marked by a new and revitalized phase of black trade unionism even though government restrictions continued to limit unions' political effectiveness. The dependence of the South African economy on black workers created a powerful political and economic force, and from the 1970s onward this growing power was demonstrated by a series of illegal boycotts and strikes. The growth of militant workers and youth organizations in this period was a clear indication that banning the nationalist movements had not ended black resistance. It was not until 1981 that black workers were given the right to strike. The power of the black trade union movement continued to grow and eventually played a central role in ending apartheid and in the transition to black majority rule.

Sharpeville Massacre of 1960

The incident took place in March 1960 when South African police opened fire on a crowd of black protesters. The confrontation occurred in the township of Sharpeville, in what is now Gauteng province, in northeastern South Africa. As noted earlier, following the election of the National Party to office in South Africa in 1948, a policy of racial segregation known as apartheid was introduced. Apartheid was designed to regulate the lives of the black majority and to maintain white minority rule. Legislation was passed governing where blacks could live and work, and massive restrictions were placed on the exercise of civil liberties. During the 1950s black protest against apartheid mounted. This was organized by the Africa National Congress (ANC, founded in 1912) and by its rival, the Pan- Africanist Congress (PAC, founded in 1959). The PAC called for a nationwide demonstration on 21 March, 1960, against South Africa's pass laws which controlled the movement and employment of blacks and forced them to carry "reference books" of identity papers. As part of this mass demonstration, a large crowd gathered outside a police station in Sharpeville, some people burning their reference books. The police, fearing the crowd was becoming hostile, panicked and opened fire. They continued to shoot as the protesters tried to run away. In its aftermath, 69 blacks were killed, including women and children. More than 180 people were reportedly injured (Reddy, 1986:7; Britannica 2010).

The uproar among South African blacks was immediate, and the following weeks saw demonstrations, protest marches, strikes, and riots around the country. On 30 March 1960, the government declared a state of emergency, detaining more than 180,000 people. The ANC and the PAC were banned and forced to go underground or into exile. Thereafter, both movements

abandoned the traditional strategy of nonviolent protest and turned increasingly to armed struggle. A storm of international protest followed the Sharpeville shootings, including condemnation by the United Nations. Sharpeville marked a turning point in South Africa's history; the country found itself increasingly isolated in the international community for the next 30 years.

PASS LAWS: This refers to South African legislation controlling the movements of blacks and Coloureds (people of mixed racial descent) under the system of apartheid, or racial segregation. The earliest pass controls were developed in the 18th century by the whites in South Africa in order to control black labour and to keep black and Coloureds in inferior positions. A regulation of 1760 passed in the Cape colony (what is now western South Africa) required slaves moving between town and country to carry passes signed by their owners authorizing their journeys. By implication, when the British purchased the Cape Colony from the Dutch in 1814 a system of passes already existed for coloureds and blacks. Beginning in 1809 pass laws were introduced and amended frequently across South Africa. The purpose of these laws was to control the movement of blacks and to obtain their labour in both rural and urban areas. The mining industry became a major force behind demands for pass laws controls.

Beginning in 1932, pass regulations were constantly tightened and amended. Between 1939 and 1941 as many as 273, 790 people were convicted of pass law offences in the Transvaal alone. Major unrest from 1944 to 1946 in opposition to the pass laws led the government to tighten them still further. By 1948, 265 urban areas had been proclaimed, which meant that black movement was rigidly controlled. In 1952 the Native, (Abolition of Passes Coordination of Documents) Act substituted a single reference book for the eleven existing pass laws. It was a crime for black men and women from the age of 16 upwards to be without their books, which gave their personal information and also their employment record. At the same time an amendment to the Natives (Urban Areas) Act applied strict regulations to all urban areas. A black person entering such an area had only 72 hours to find employment before being subject to arrest. Amendments to the laws in 1955, 1957, and 1964 made it increasingly difficult for blacks to qualify for permanent residence in any urban area. The aim was to control the population in such a way that only single male contract labourers could go to work in urban areas, and they could work for no more than a year before returning to the rural areas. What became known as "endorsing out" took place, which

meant that Africans without work in urban areas had their passes stamped to show that they had to return to the rural areas.

Many demonstrations, acts of passive resistance, and uprisings were directed at the pass system. In 1930, for example, the Communist Party organized a mass burning of passes on Dingane's Day- a day celebrated in honour of the Zulu Chief Dingane. In March 1960, countrywide demonstrations against the pass laws culminated in the Sharpeville Massacre of March 21, when the police opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators, killing 69 blacks. Between 1952 and 1986 the courts punished millions of blacks for failing to carry their passes. By the early 1970s, about one million blacks were arrested every year under the pass laws. The pass laws and influx control were finally abolished in 1986 when the process of dismantling the apartheid system began.

Soweto Massacre of 1976

A major confrontation between protesters and South African police occurred in the black township of Soweto, near Johannesburg, on 16 June 1976. Thousands of black high school students demonstrated against a government ruling that required certain high school subjects to be taught in Afrikaans, which was seen as the language of oppression. Afrikaans was the primary language of Afrikaners, the white minority who controlled South Africa and had imposed the system of apartheid. The riots subsequently spread to other townships. At least 575 people were killed, almost half of them in Soweto alone (Reddy, 1986:7) An almost total school and rent boycott in Soweto accompanied a period of prolonged, politically inspired violence in the townships between 1984 and 1986. These events strengthened the resolve of black youths in Africa to increase pressure on the national government to dismantle apartheid. The rent boycott ended in 1990 only when the government wrote off large amounts of unpaid rent owed by Sowetans.

Dismantling of Apartheid Policy in South Africa

Beginning from the 1980s, signs of disintegration of apartheid started to emerge in South Africa. Some of these as identified by Davis (2006) are highlighted below.

1. **Constitutional Amendment:-** In May 1983, in an effort at limited reforms, Prime Minister P.W Botha introduced a constitutional amendment that created a tricameral parliament with three racially separate chambers: one for whites, one for Asians, and one for Coloureds. The amendment was approved the same year by a referendum open to white voters only. Elections to the Coloured and

Asian legislative bodies were held in August 1984. But 77 percent of the eligible Coloured voters and 80 percent of the Asian voters boycotted the elections because the new plan continued to exclude blacks.

The structure of the new tricameral parliament gave the appearance of power-sharing, but white control of the presidency and the predetermined numerical superiority of the white chamber ensured that real power would remain in white hands. Most important, the new arrangement continued to elude South Africa's black majority, who were not allowed to vote or stand as candidates for election. Reaction to the constitutional government intended. Beginning in September 1984 there were violent confrontations throughout the country and the government declared successive states of emergency.

2. **Legalization of interracial marriages and political parties:** Between 1984 and 1986 prohibitions against interracial marriages and racially mixed political parties were repealed and rights to conduct business and own property in designated urban areas were extended to blacks. Government's limited reforms were however rejected by blacks who wanted apartheid abolished, while conservative whites felt that the reforms had already gone too far.
3. **Permission of anti-apartheid protest march and release of many black political prisoners:** F.W. de Klerk succeeded P.W Botha as Head of the National Party in 1989 and later that year as president of South Africa. Soon after taking office, de Klerk permitted large multiracial crowds in Cape Town and Johannesburg to march against apartheid. He met with Archbishop Desmond M Tutu and other black leaders, ordered the release of many black political prisoners, and lifted the ban on antiapartheid organizations such as the ANC with the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990, while serious negotiations began over the transition to a post apartheid South Africa.
4. **Compromise between the National Party and the African National Congress:** The Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), which opened in December 1991, finally led to a compromise between the NP and the ANC, Eventually, as a result of compromises on both sides, an agreement was reached on 13 November 1993 which pledged to institute a nonracial, nonsexist, unified, and democratic South Africa based on the principle of " one

person one vote” A transitional Executive Council was formed to supervise national elections and install new national and provincial governments.

- 5. Holding of non- racial election:** South Africa’s first truly nonracial democratic election was held on April 27, 1994, and was declared “substantially free and fair” by the Independent Electoral Commission. Nearly 20 million voters were cast and the ANV received an impressive 63 percent, just short of the two- thirds majority that would have given it the power to write the new constitution on its own without negotiating with other parties. The ANC won substantial majorities in seven of the nine newly established provinces. Nelson Mandela was elected president of a coalition government by the National Assembly, and he chose Thabo Mbeki as one of two deputy presidents. Former president F.W de Klerk was chosen by the NP as the other deputy president. In June 1994 South Africa rejoined the Commonwealth of Nations.

Factors that Aided the Dismantling of Apartheid Policy in South Africa

A number of factors contributed in no small measure to the fall of the apartheid policy in South Africa. Some of these are discussed below.

- 1. The Role of African National Congress (ANC) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC)**

The ANC was founded in 1912 as a nonviolent civil rights organization that worked to promote the interests of black Africans. With a middle- class constituency, the ANC stressed constitutional means of changes through the use of delegations, petitions, and peaceful protests. The ANC actively opposed apartheid and engaged in increasing political combat with the government. In 1955 the ANC issued the “Freedom Charter”, which stated that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white (Parsons, 1985:296). This led to an ideological conflict between blacks who supported the declaration of the Freedom Charter and those who held a contrary view that South Africa belonged blacks alone. Hence, ANC members who believed South Africa belonged only to black Africans formed a rival party, the Pan- Africanist Congress (PAC) in 1959.

Seeking to displace the ANC, the PAC organized mass demonstrations that led to the massacre of black protesters in Sharpeville in March 1960. In response to the demonstrations, government declared a state of emergency and banned all black political organizations, including the ANC and PAC. In

1961 the ANC formed a military wing called Umkhonto we Sizwe (“Spear of the Nation) which began a campaign of sabotage against the government. During the unrest of the next several years, Mandela and Sisulu were sentenced to life imprisonment for their nationalist activities while Tambo Mbeki left South Africa on self-exile.

For the next 30 years the ANC operated as an underground organization, with its principal leaders imprisoned or living outside South Africa. In 1990 however, the government lifted its ban on the ANC and other black African organizations. In that same year Nelson Mandela was released from prison after more than 27 years incarceration. No longer forced to work underground, the ANC evolved into a political party seeking power through the ballot. In February 1993 the ANC and the government agreed to a plan to form a transitional government to rule for five years prior the country’s first multi-racial elections scheduled for April 1994. Between 27 and 30 April 1994, millions of South Africans of all races participated in the country’s first democratic elections. On May 2, after the ANC’s victory, President F.W de Klerk conceded the presidency to Mandela who became the first black president of South Africa and led the country’s first multiracial government.

2. Activities of F.W. de KLERK

De Klerk was a lawyer born in Johannesburg in 1936. He was elected to the South African parliament in 1972 on the platform of the National Party and later held a number of cabinet posts. When P.W. Botha resigned as the country’s president in August 1989 because of ill health, de Klerk, as the leader of the National Party, succeeded him as president in September 1989 and ruled till 1994. In 1990 he lifted the ban on the African National Congress (ANC), a largely black South African nationalist group, and other opposition parties. In a decisive effort to solve South Africa’s racial and political problems, de Klerk ordered the release of some political prisoners, including ANC leader, Nelson Mandela, who had been in prison since 1962 and who was later to become the country’s first black president.

Under his leadership, the government repealed the last of the laws that formed the legal basis of apartheid in 1992. In March 1992, more than two – thirds of the voters in a whites- only referendum endorsed his policy of negotiating a new constitution to extend political rights to blacks. After extensive talks between black and white political leaders, the country’s first multiracial elections were held in April 1994. The ANC emerged with an overwhelming majority, and in May 1994 Mandela succeeded de Klerk as

president. De Klerk, however, continued to serve in the government as one of the two deputy presidents until 1996. De Klerk stepped down as leader of the National Party and retired from active politics in September 1997.

3. Deteriorating Economy

Beginning from the 1980s, International financial institutions began to regard South Africa unsafe for investment. This led more than 200 U.S. companies to pull out of South Africa during the 1980s. The rand was devalued, and foreign investment virtually dried up. White South African emigration increased dramatically. Some whites recognized that the country's deteriorating economy and increasing international isolation could not be reversed without far-reaching changes. Hence by 1989 when De Klerk replaced Botha as President, he quickly initiated a negotiation process with the blacks in order to secure a removal of U.N imposed economic sanction on South Africa.

4. Growing International Condemnation of Apartheid Policy

In 1975, the United Nations formally declared apartheid as illegitimate. Resolution 3411 G adopted in 1975 declared that "the racist regime of South Africa is illegitimate and has no right to represent the people of South Africa". It also reaffirmed the "legitimacy of the total eradication of apartheid" (Vyshinsky, 1987:10). It should be recalled that since 1952 the General Assembly of the United Nations has taken up the issue of South Africa's racial policies annually. The tone of early UN resolutions and declarations was civil, and conciliatory, reflecting the hope that South Africa might be convinced to reform. The General Assembly at first simply called upon South Africa to recognize its obligations to end racial discrimination in line with the UN Charter. The Assembly subsequently "regretted" South Africa's refusal to end apartheid.

Following the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, a UN Security Council Resolution blamed South Africa for the shootings and the UN General Assembly's first successful sanctions vote against South Africa occurred two years later. South Africa's unwavering policy of whites-only representation on sports teams resulted in her expulsion from the Olympic Games and a dozen other international sports federations in the 1960s. By the Declaration (1963) and the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the U.N. declared the need to abolish apartheid and other forms of racial segregation in all parts of the world. Subsequently in 1974, South Africa was suspended from the UN General Assembly, and by

the 1980s, General Assembly resolutions referred to apartheid as a crime against humanity. During the 1980s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain and President Ronald Reagan of the United States imposed sanctions against South Africa. Later in 1986, American public resentment of South Africa's racial policies was strong enough for the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, which banned new investments and loans, ended air links, and prohibited the importation of many commodities. Other governments took similar actions. All these developments represented a stiff international opposition to apartheid (Davis, 2006). This contributed immensely to the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa in 1994.

Conclusion

This paper examined the process of introduction and implementation of the apartheid policy in South Africa between 1948 and 1994. It also highlights the nature of black resistance as well as the success achieved by the international community in eradicating one of the greatest evils in human history. It is hoped that blacks in South Africa will finally get over the economic, civil and political degradation suffered in the hands of the white minority under the obnoxious policy and chart a new life in freedom and equality.

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