

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Chapter 1, written by **Phil Bonner, Bernard Magubane and Noor Nieftagodien**, sets the scene for the subsequent analyses of the liberation movements in the 1960s by explaining how the Nationalist Party achieved power in 1948 and how it ruled through the 1950s and 1960s, particularly during the premiership of H.F. Verwoerd (1958-66). It also charts the evolution of the resistance from the early 1940s and focuses attention on the mass struggles of the 1950s that culminated in the massacre at Sharpeville.

Excerpts

“In the run up to the 1948 election the term apartheid served more as a rallying political slogan than as a clear policy blueprint. Perhaps because of the unexpectedness of victory apartheid’s programme remained rather vague and unelaborated when the NP assumed power. Policy guidelines committed the party to a future in which ‘the most important ethnic groups and sub-groups should be segregated in their own areas where every sub-group will be enabled to develop into a self-sufficient unit’, and that Africans in urban areas be regarded ‘as migratory citizens not entitled to political and social rights equal to those of whites’.”

“More typical was a less intellectual desire to restore unqualified white domination and black subservience which was being eroded or unbalanced by the *need* to economically exploit African labour which could not be separated from the bearer of that labour - the African himself. The 1913 Land Act had reserved thirteen percent for the sole occupation of the ‘Native’, from whom the white economy could draw whatever labour it needed. Nearly everywhere else black existence was unlawful. So-called white South Africa had 87 % of the landmass to themselves, including all major cities, permitting Africans, who comprised 68 percent of the population in 1951, only the small parcels of arid reserves. In terms of the Urban Areas Act of 1923 it was illegal for Africans to enter, let alone reside in cities. The reserves were constituted in such a way that those who resided there would be compelled by pangs of hunger to sell their labour where it was needed in the ‘white economy’, which counted on them.”

“Malan’s new regime did not take long to change the whole character and perspective of the South African State. And for the first time in the history of Union government only the Afrikaans language was heard at cabinet meetings. That nothing would be allowed to stand in the way of the Malan regime to redesign the South African society from top to bottom was soon to be made evident by a slew of laws aimed at separating the blacks from whites. Between 1948 and 1950 a steel-net of legislation was passed to frustrate any possibility of building a common front among those denied the franchise. These laws included the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act which banned interracial marriages, the Immorality Act, which barred interracial sex, the Population Registration Act classified every individual in South Africa by race, the Group Areas Act mandated strict residential segregation, and the Separate Amenities Act extended segregation to public places and transportation.”

“In 1949 the ANC adopted the Programme of Action (PA) which paved the way for a new era of organised mass militant action. The Programme was both a declaration of principles and a formulation of the methods that should be adopted to achieve them. On both subjects it broke new ground. It affirmed that the fundamental principle of the ANC was ‘to achieve national freedom from White domination and the attainment of political independence. This’, it went on, ‘implies the rejection of the conception of segregation, apartheid, Trusteeship or white leadership which are all in one way or another motivated by the idea of white domination’. To achieve these goals it urged the adoption of more aggressive tactics such as boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience and non-co-operation. The PA was widely hailed as a triumph of the militancy of the ANC Youth League, which had been campaigning against the methods of the old leadership as outdated and inadequate to meet the challenge presented by the ruthlessness of the Nationalist Party Government.”