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APARTHIED- BLACK CONCIOUSNESS

Opposition – underground, in prison and in exile

For 10 years after the Rivonia Trial in 1964, the ANC, its leaders and symbols virtually disappeared inside South Africa.

Extreme security laws made it illegal to publish or talk about anything to do with the mass resistance of the 1950s. New laws gave the police powers to arrest and detain people without trial.

Hundreds of activists were issued with 'banning orders', which meant that they could not leave the areas where they lived.

Constant pass raids, arrests and imprisonment for breaking petty apartheid laws intimidated people.

There were THREE different types of opposition during this time:

Opposition in exile

The external leadership of the ANC began the slow process of rebuilding the ANC outside South Africa. In the West, ANC was seen as the legitimate voice of oppressed black South Africans.

ANC president Oliver Tambo built good relationships with liberal anti-apartheid groups in Britain and Western Europe. ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP) gained support from the Soviet Union to establish and train units of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in newly independent African countries, like Zambia and Tanzania.

Mirroring the armed liberation struggles of the 1960s in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, the ANC adopted a military strategy too.

1967 and 1968: Armed MK units fought alongside units of the Zimbabwe people's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) in a series of clashes with the Rhodesian security forces.

Although the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) supported both the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the PAC remained a small splintered organisation based in Tanzania.

While these battles were unsuccessful, they gave hope for the future of the opposition movement.

Opposition in prison

Most of the black leaders of the ANC, MK and the PAC were sentenced to long prison terms on Robben Island.

The harsh prison conditions included racist abuse, hard labour in rock quarries, severe punishments for breaking prison regulations, solitary confinement, deprivation of food and humiliating body searches.

But, it also led to strategies of survival amongst the prisoners that would inevitably bring greater cohesion.

Prisoners came together to organise hunger strikes and other acts of defiance that led to significant improvements, such as sports events, cultural activities, literacy training and political education programmes.

The ANC in particular was able to maintain a strong political organisation in prison, and upon their release, individuals were able to strongly influence the shape of the freedom struggle within their own communities.

Opposition underground inside South Africa:

The most significant black political movement to emerge in the late 1960s and early 1970s was the black consciousness movement (BCM).

Other developments were also taking place that would later give rise to the mass democratic movement of the 1980s.

The more the white government demonised the ANC and Communist Party, the more legitimacy they began to achieve in the eyes of black South Africans.

It was clear that the ANC had survived in exile and was beginning to mobilise again.

The turning point: Mid-1970s

1971: A few trained MK activists re-entered SA and began to set up underground political cells; ANC pamphlets started to circulate.

1973: Oil crisis and economic recession; a number of strikes unfolded in the same year.

1975: Victorious armed struggles led to independence in Mozambique and Angola.

1976: The Soweto Uprising was a watershed moment in the country's history.

Black Consciousness Movement (BCM)

In 1971 SASO organised a number of meetings with black community, church, youth and cultural organisations to see if they could launch a united black consciousness movement (BCM).

Some, including Steve Biko, felt that blacks needed more time to develop confidence before openly organising to challenge the state. But other BC leaders were impatient and in 1971 the Black People's Convention (BPC) was formed.

Meanwhile, Black Consciousness literature and journalism flourished. Steve Biko became editor of the BPC's Black Review in which the ideas of BC were publicly debated. Some newspapers, like the East London Daily Dispatch (edited by Donald Woods) carried a special column that was often written by Biko.

The BPC did not have the deep community roots of the banned ANC and it failed to mobilise mass support in black communities. Most of its members were students and members of SASO.

In contrast, the BCM was much more successful among black high school students who were attracted to the militant language and defiance of authority.

●●1974 SASO and the BPC organised a mass public rally to celebrate Frelimo's victory over Portuguese colonialism in Durban in defiance of a government ban on public meetings.

●●As a result, police attacked the crowd of over 5 000 people, beating and arresting hundreds. Nine SASO and BPC leaders were detained for many months without trial. Eventually they were charged under the Terrorism Act.

Government perceptions of Black Consciousness:

1973: Biko and 7 other BC leaders were served with banning orders that forced them to move to isolated locations across the country.

The state charged that expressing BC ideas in public was an act of terrorism. This was affirmed by Judge Boshoff in the SASO-BPC trial in 1975.

He felt that the ideas of BC, in emphasising group cohesion and solidarity, encouraged feelings of hostility between blacks and whites, and that this constituted an act of terrorism.

The challenge of Black Consciousness to the state

In 1977, 18 black consciousness, media and church organisations were banned. These included SASO, BPC, the South African Council of Churches and the World newspaper, under its editor Percy Qoboza. August 1977 Biko was arrested in Walmer, Port Elizabeth after secretly visiting activists in Cape Town → detained under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act and brutally assaulted by police in prison and died of his injuries on 12 September in Pretoria.

The 1976 Soweto uprising and Black Consciousness:

In the mid-1970s, the South African Students Movement (SASM) was formed to protest against inferior black education in South Africa.

Clearly many leaders of SASM were influenced by black consciousness thinking and had contact with BC leaders.

SASM activists played a key role in organising the peaceful protest marches (against instruction in Afrikaans) in June 1976 in Soweto.

However, the intense state reaction to the marches turned a peaceful protest into a nationwide explosion of youth anger and frustration.

Police shot into crowds of school children killing hundreds. Students reacted by setting fire to schools and government buildings.

As the massacres continued, workers began to organise stay-at-homes in support of community demands and in protest at the savage repression of the state. By 1979 the struggles of the youth, the communities and workers in the factories were slowly coming together.

The legacy of Black Consciousness on South African politics

The legacy of BC does not lie in the organisations it created, but in the ideas it generated.

The bannings and detentions of 1977 meant the end of BC as an open political movement in South Africa. But the anger, the defiance and the symbols remained.

After 1977 the remaining BC leaders were divided over what strategies to follow next.

Many had begun to feel that BC had fulfilled its purpose and that the best way to proceed in the struggle against apartheid was to re-establish links with ANC structures both in exile and increasingly underground in SA.

During the 1980s, many of the leaders that emerged in the non-racial UDF, ANC and trade unions were activists that had cut their political teeth in the BCM. This list includes Mosioua Lekota, Nkosasana Dlamini-Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa.

However, not all BC leaders were happy about the revival of the ANC and the non-racialism of the mass democratic movement of the 1980s. In 1978 a group of BC leaders formed the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO).

By 1979 state repression had restored the appearance of calm. But this time they had only succeeded in pushing activists underground. Meanwhile, the forces of resistance were beginning to devise new strategies.

The contradictions of apartheid

Apartheid had been designed to keep black people out of 'white' South Africa BUT

By 1980 the shape of the economy had changed. rapid growth of the 1960s and early 1970s produced a modern industrial economy based on manufacturing and mechanised commercial farming.

big business began to put pressure on government to reform the harshest aspects of apartheid. It started to relax the pass laws and in 1986 abandoned them completely. The result was massive black migration into the urban areas. Between 1960–1980 the urban African population more than doubled and the number of black Africans living in towns and cities increased from 32% to 49%.

Changes in Afrikaner politics

Apartheid had enabled Afrikaner businessmen to establish themselves alongside English-speaking and foreign companies at the top of the economy.

PW Botha followed business-friendly policies that alienated Afrikaner workers and small farmers. In 1982, driven by fear of losing control and power, the white right wing Conservative Party split from the National Party because they opposed any reforms of apartheid.

International developments

By 1980, liberation movements had replaced colonial governments in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The ANC and MK were able to use these countries to infiltrate South Africa.

The ANC enjoyed the support of the communist bloc, especially the Soviet Union, East Germany and Cuba.

Fearing this communist influence, Western governments tended to support the white government in SA.

However, under pressure from international anti-apartheid movements, the West began to consider economic sanctions as a way to pressure the SA government to reform. While most governments refused to act firmly against the SA government and its policies, some international citizen-led movements were successful, particularly the sports boycotts of the 1960s and 1970s.

Under citizen pressure, most international sporting bodies expelled South Africa and would not recognise white-only teams. This began to have an effect on white South Africans for whom sport was an important part of their identity.

A policy designed by military generals who came to dominate Prime Minister PW Botha's government. Its purpose was to make apartheid more acceptable for some sections of the black population, while ensuring that political and military power remained firmly in white hands.

The plan was to weaken black resistance with a mixture of reform and repression.

After 1979, under Botha, the government developed a new policy called 'total strategy' to counter what they saw as the 'total onslaught' of revolutionaries from inside and outside SA.

This included:

Reforming labour policies to suit the needs of the industrial economy and improving conditions in black urban communities. The 1982 Black Local Authorities Act

The tri-cameral constitution of 1983

The 1982 Black Local Authorities Act

This act created elected Community Councils with administrative power over local community affairs and services.

They hoped that offering black urban communities some control over local affairs would satisfy their political aspirations and they would not demand democratic rights at national level.

●●To encourage confidence in these councils, the government also provided resources to upgrade townships for those legally living in the cities, including electrification and housing programmes.

PLUS The tri-cameral constitution of 1983

In 1983 the government changed the constitution of SA. PW Botha took the position of President with increased executive power over government and the military. In an attempt to win coloured and Indian minorities away from a united movement against apartheid, the 1983 constitution created three separate parliamentary assemblies.

= Tri-cameral parliament

The 'House of Assembly' → elected by whites

The 'House of Delegates' → elected by Indians

The 'House of Representatives' → elected by coloureds. Each assembly had control of the 'own affairs' of that group such as education, housing and health services. BUT

The white assembly retained power over everything else – the police, army, home and foreign affairs and the economy.

The 'tri-cameral' constitution created the illusion of sharing power without giving up control. It convinced no one except the government itself and those whites who supported it.

Growing power of Trade Union Movement

Black workers rediscover their power

In 1973, mainly in Durban, over 60 000 black workers took part in 160 strikes for better wages and working conditions.

The Durban strikes were a spontaneous outburst of worker anger at low wages, the rising cost of living and the racism of employers.

Some business leaders and government officials realised that they needed some kind of worker organisation that they could talk to. New laws were passed that allowed black workers to form trade unions as long as they registered with the government and focused only on workplace issues.

The reforms were intended to control trade unions, but they also created space for workers to learn new skills of independent organisation.

While black university campuses were mobilising around BC, some white democratic student organisations helped establish strong, independent and non-racial trade unions.

Most members of the independent unions were urban residents, but in 1982 the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) was re-established and soon had over 100 000 members, many of them migrant workers living in the 'homelands'.

Political alliances with communities and liberation movements:

Before 1984:

Striking workers called on all unions and communities to boycott the products of the companies.

Most of the new unions took care to focus mainly on negotiating improved wages and working conditions for their members, rather than political issues.

At times of violent police repression in communities, workers also protested by staying away from work. The state acted ruthlessly against union leaders who they thought were too 'political' and many were detained or served with banning orders.

1984 onwards:

Apartheid repression was at its height = bloody and ruthless.

→ Most unionists were feeling that the unions were strong enough and could not remain aloof from the political struggle going on in their communities.

New forms of organisation

In the repressive climate of the early 1980s, most forms of organisation that emerged were local community organisations with local leaders that were more difficult to suppress than national organisations, including:

Youth and student organisations: In 1979, the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) was formed, which became affiliated to the UDF in 1984. COSAS was different from earlier student organisations in that it consciously formed links with trade unions and civic associations.

Elected civic associations: Breakdowns in services led to communities forming alternative locally elected civic associations, which organised parents and township residents in campaigns around community issues like local government, rent, municipal services, evictions and removals.

Special interest and service organisations: These groups were united by a commitment to a non-racial democratic society that promoted human rights, including women's rights, education, children's rights, repression monitoring, environmental sustainability, legal aid and anti-conscription groups.

In this way the people of SA organised themselves into hundreds of democratic community-based bodies that the state could not destroy simply by arresting a few leaders.

The United Democratic Front (1983)

In August 1983 more than 600 youth, student, church, civic, women's groups and trade unions came together in Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town to launch the United Democratic Front (UDF). Aim: to unite all the existing community organisations into a broad movement for democracy.

It wasn't a political party, but a "front", working to establish a non-racial democratic government in SA. Advantages: it was non-racial and could organise openly while the ANC was underground.

New forms of protest action

Boycotts

New UDF affiliates mushroomed all over the country focusing on local issues. Through the UDF these protests were linked into national political campaigns.

These organisations' main weapon was the boycott, i.e. Communities often called consumer boycotts of particular products in support of workers on strike in factories that made these products.

The outcome of the boycotts was two-fold: they caused a breakdown in local government, exposing the tri-cameral system as a sham, and also seriously disrupted black education, with youth organisations staging boycotts of schools in protest against the system of inferior black education. As they gained in confidence the member organisations of the UDF began to adopt ANC policy documents, slogans and symbols of struggle. The Freedom Charter was adopted by hundreds of organisations and came to be seen as the basis for a new South Africa.

Insurrection

By 1984 a new language was being spoken among UDF affiliates, in that they would escalate all forms of resistance and make themselves ungovernable.

In September 1984, one year after the UDF was formed, the police fired on a rent protest march in the Vaal triangle township of Sebokeng. The Vaal townships erupted. The government declared a state of emergency over all unrest-affected areas. Troops occupied the townships and South Africa was on fire again.

In January 1985, in his New Year message, ANC president Oliver Tambo echoed the call to make South Africa ungovernable.

In June 1986 the emergency was extended across the whole country to stop 'Soweto Day' celebrations that were planned everywhere. 25 000 activists were detained.

In 1987 the UDF and many other organisations were banned. Under the emergency laws, the police and army had extraordinary powers to do virtually anything to deal with the perceived crisis, without any accountability.

The Mass Democratic Movement

After the UDF was banned people started referring to the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM). Jay Naidoo, the General Secretary of COSATU, described the MDM in these terms in 1989:

The MDM is a movement, not an organisation, comprising mass-based organisations (such as youth, workers, students, women and civics).

It is the strategic alliance between COSATU and the UDF.

It is committed to non-racialism, democratic practices and grassroots accountability, the primacy of African leadership and leadership of the working class.

It recognises the centrality of the ANC in reaching any solution in the country and is also united by a programme of mass action, aimed at smashing apartheid and rebuilding South Africa along the lines of the Freedom Charter

The cost of ungovernability

While progress was being made in terms of building a non-racial opposition to the state, there were negative outcomes too.

All this was achieved at great cost to the black communities and to the country. The education boycotts left almost a whole generation of black youth with little or no education and little chance of finding meaningful employment.

The rent boycotts led to a breakdown of local services that civics and street committees could not adequately maintain. Boycotts also created a culture of resistance to any kind of payment for social services such as electricity, water, refuse collection, etc.

While conflict within communities intensified (with people perceived as collaborating with the state either attacked or killed), so did police violence as well as youth violence against collaborators. As the police started arming and supporting groups of migrant workers to attack youth groups and trade unionists, the conflict grew into a virtual civil war.

Reform was only one side of total strategy. As its reforms were rejected, the state was forced more and more to rely on repression to suppress the democratic movement.

Repression and destabilisation

In 1985 after the Vaal uprising, the state declared the first of three states of emergency. All public meetings were banned, activists detained, troops occupied townships and many organisations such as COSAS were banned as well.

The most used and most effective weapon in the state's repressive arsenal was detention without trial, which was often the reaction to civil society protests. Some activists were detained for as long as 33 months without access to friends, family or even legal representatives – much of it in solitary confinement.

A pattern was emerging that included a 'systematic assassination of the middle level of leadership, not only of the United Democratic Front, but of other organisations as well'.

The militarisation of society During the 1980s white society became militarised. All white men were conscripted for two years military service. This meant the government could mobilise up to 400 000 trained soldiers when it needed them.

Inside SA the government and army set up joint management centres in almost every black community, which often took over the failed community councils to provide services and to try to win support by upgrading townships. But they also co-ordinated police and army activities, resulting in violence.

More sinister were the state's conscious efforts to exploit divisions within black communities, by setting up armed vigilante groups made up mostly of conservative migrant workers, who terrorised townships and rural areas with beatings, murders and destruction of communities they perceived as loyal to the UDF or ANC.

International response – International anti-apartheid movements

The struggle against apartheid was also an international struggle for justice and was greatly influenced by:

Anti-apartheid movements in Western countries who put pressure on their governments and private corporations to, in turn, put pressure on the SA government to negotiate an end to apartheid. Sport boycotts
Sanctions
Disinvestment.

The people and governments in the frontline states neighbouring SA, who provided support and protection for liberation movements, and some of whom paid an extremely heavy price for giving this support. The Organisation of African Unity recognised ANC and PAC as the legitimate representatives of SA people. Independent states like Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Zambia allowed ANC to open offices in their countries.

MK was able to establish military bases closer to home, while their incursions into SA increased steadily during the 1980s, although never posing a serious military threat.

The beginning of the end

A number of factors led to the end of apartheid

1 Military defeat at Cuito Cuanavale, Angola In 1988 the SA army was fighting deep in Angola in support of UNITA and to weaken SWAPO.

But a combined force of Angolan and Cuban forces supported by the Cuban Air Force inflicted a major military defeat at the town of Cuito Cuanavale.

The SA military command was shaken and hurriedly withdrew from Angola. South Africans realised they were not as invincible as they thought and the war so far from its borders was costing millions every day.

Independence negotiations with SWAPO followed quickly and in 1989 SWAPO won Namibia's first democratic election.

The defeat at Cuito Cuanavale strengthened those members of the SA government who were beginning to look at negotiation as a possible solution in South Africa itself.

2 South African economy in trouble By 1989 the economy was in deep trouble: disinvestment and inflation were slowly growing; increasing unemployment led to greater hardship and unrest. The state could only cover the cost of apartheid and repression by borrowing massively.

Reckless government spending, mismanagement, corruption, costly military campaigns, strikes and other disruptions in the economy were all leading SA towards an economic disaster.

3 Internal mass resistance A nationwide Defiance Campaign called on people everywhere to defy apartheid segregation of living areas, services, beaches, buses and trains.

In spite of the bannings, in 1989 the MDM organised a hunger strike of detainees in prisons across SA that led to many being released.

Banned individuals and organisations simply ignored their bans and openly organised again.

Mass non-racial demonstrations moved out of the townships and into the white cities.

By the end of the year, there was a sense that things were changing. FW de Klerk recognised that the homeland system was outdated and accepted the principle of power-sharing with blacks in SA.

4 The Harare Declaration In December 1989 The Harare Declaration was adopted by a conference of 4 600 MDM affiliates in Johannesburg called the Conference for a Democratic Future.

Key question: What was the nature of the apartheid state in the 1970s and 1980s? 1.1 Why did the apartheid government create the bantustans? Provide three reasons.

1.2 Explain how the creation of the bantustans contradicted apartheid, and helped to bring about the end of apartheid.

2 Key question: How did the apartheid government try to reform apartheid in order to maintain it? 2.1

The apartheid government tried to reform apartheid in the early 1980s. 2.1.1 Why did they do this?

2.1.2 Give two examples of these attempts at reform.

2.1.3 Were these attempts at reform successful? Provide reasons for your answer.

3 Key question: What types of internal and external resistance to apartheid helped lead to the end of apartheid?3.1 After 1984 the trade unions became more involved in the struggle against apartheid. Briefly explain why.

3.2 From the mid-1980s, new forms of protest against apartheid emerged.3.2.1 List four of these new forms.

3.2.2 Explain why these new forms of protest were successful.

3.3 Who were the last two presidents of the apartheid government in South Africa?

3.4 What was the Harare Declaration?

3.5 Outline the role the following played in helping to end apartheid:3.5.1 International sanctions

3.5.2 The Mass Democratic Movement

3.5.3 The Battle of Cuito Cuanavale in Angola.

Exam practice

Key question: In what ways did Black Consciousness challenge the apartheid state?1.1 When Steve Biko said in 1971 “The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed”, he meant that ... (1 × 3) (3)

1.2 Read the Source on the next page and answer the following questions.1.2.1 What was the main cause for the Soweto Uprising? (1 × 2) (2)

1.2.2 Outline the impact that Black Consciousness had on the Soweto Uprising. (2 × 2) (4)

1.2.3 Give two reasons why West Rand Bantu Administration Board, liquor stores and beer halls were “symbols of racial discrimination and oppression” for these students. (2 × 2) (4)

1.2.4 From this Source, suggest what the attitude of the apartheid police was towards the Soweto students. (2 × 2) (4)

1.2.5 Do you think this source is biased? Provide two reasons to support your point of view. (1 × 3) (3)

[20 marks]

Source A

On 16 June 1976, 10 000 African students in Soweto, the segregated African township of Johannesburg, joined a peaceful demonstration ... The police opened fire at the demonstrators, killing several children. A special police squad trained to combat urban terrorism was brought into Soweto by helicopters, which were also used to drop teargas canisters. In the ensuing confrontations between the police and Africans, mainly students, large numbers of persons were killed and wounded. The Africans destroyed a number of buildings – notably the offices of the West Rand Bantu Administration Board, liquor stores and beer halls – which, to them, were symbols of racial discrimination and oppression.

Eyewitness accounts ... indicated that the police had shot and killed school children indiscriminately. A senior police officer told the press: ‘We fired into them. It is no good firing over their heads’ ...

According to official figures, 176 persons were killed and 1 139 wounded, many of whom were small children. Over 1 300 persons were arrested. There is reason to believe that the total was actually much higher.

(Source: From the Special Report of the Special Committee against Apartheid on the Soweto massacre and its aftermath, submitted to the United Nations General Assembly on 3 August 1976.)

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