

THE POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF THE STRUGGLE
AGAINST APARTHEID IN THE PERIOD SINCE 1980

The period of the 1980s witnessed the most unprecedented effort to end a system of racial oppression in South Africa. It is a period of struggle which, to the ardent supporters of apartheid, marked liberalisation of the orthodox aspects of that system through a reform programme initiated by the then President P W Botha. To those in the oppressed community, it was a period in which white supremacy was being entrenched through further division and co-optation of Blacks in a system in which they did not enjoy full political rights.

Emanating from these two perspectives was polarisation and conflict of unprecedented proportions resulting, on the one hand in widening of divisions in the White community evidenced by the formation of the Conservative Party and proliferation of para-military and vigilante formations like the AWB. On the other hand, there was consolidation of the political base of the oppressed evidenced by the formation of the UDF in 1983, COSATU in 1985 and the Conference for a Democratic Future (CDF) in 1989.

Simultaneously, there was the spread of vigilante formations in the Black townships, INKATHA violence which intensified after 1987; there was also the weakening of and ultimately the death of the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) and the formation of the Democratic Party. It is a period which witnessed the proliferation of social movements in the form of strong Civics, Women and Youth groups, educational, health and other similar formations.

It culminated in the lifting of all the previously proscribed organisations, release of political prisoners, return of exiles, the suspension of armed struggle and the initiation of negotiations aimed at ending the system of apartheid and the establishment of a just and equitable order.

RESEARCH METHQDOLOGY

As this is a study of the recent period, it is suggested that the following research methodology is considered:-

1. Archival msgggh -
3. Seminars -

RESEARCH QUESTIONZS

a lot has been written analysing various events, e.g. forced removals, consumer boycotts, school protests, labour etc. On the other hand reliable press cuttings can be obtained with journalistic reports recording these important events. These would form an important part of the background research.

Indepth interviews will have to be conducted with some of the people who played an important role in various aspects of this period.

There may be need to convene seminars to mobilise scholarly intervention in the findings of the research work.

" What were the social forces mobilised behind the programme of resistance against apartheid in the period of the 1980s?

it What was the purpose of the reformist policy of the government of President P W Botha and what social forces were mobilised behind it?

t What factors accounted for the proliferation of South Afn'cais social movements?

1' : How were their programmes and activities related to each other and the wider liberation movement?

it What was the central strategic perspective governing these forces during this period?

i How did the strategy of repression, developed by the state, affect these formations at different stages of this period?

t Were the events of 1989 inevitable, or did the fall of Botha present an opportunity for a different course to be pursued?

i At this turning point (1989) what was the balance of the forces and to what extent did a change of strategy from both sides offer real possibilities for genuine change?

5' What is the significance of the 1980s compared to other periods of history for it to have such a unique history?

t' What impact did the unbanning of organisations have on other social movements?

All these are research questions that should give us a useful overview of the period under study. As this will only be a macro-perspective, it will give us a very superficial understanding of the period. However, the questions give us a useful appreciation of the kind of research that is involved in the project.

A comprehensive questionnaire or research instrument would contain sub-questions around the main questions identified above. However, a useful starting point would be a literature survey that would ensure that the questionnaire is informed by a proper understanding of the period.

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