South Africa Anti-Apartheid Freedom Struggle- Effects(3+)

Humanities 9- Social Movements

Adapted by Stassen

Reconciliation After Violent Conflict

A Handbook

Apologies without Accountability

What do we do after someone has hurt someone else? Some people say apologies are very important. Others ask if saying “sorry” is enough. They argue that an apology without admitting responsibility to the victims will not truly fix the damage done. Bringing people back together to fix their relationships is called **reconciliation.**

This question has been debated very strongly in South Africa. Former President deKlerk apologized for apartheid this way: “Apartheid was wrong. I apologize in my [role] as leader of the National Party to the millions of South Africans who suffered the [awful reality of being forced to leave their homes, their businesses, and their lands]. I apologize to people who were arrested for pass law offences. I apologize for the decades and centuries of horrible racial discrimination.” But he also told the TRC that he did not feel responsible because, “ I have not been involved in anything which can…be considered me guilty of any crime.”

While apologies can help the **reconciliation** process, at the same time many victims find incomplete apologies insulting. This creates more obstacles to **reconciliation.**

**South Africa**

South Africa had apartheid for 45 years. The African National Congress(ANC) fought against it for almost 30 years. Thousands of South Africans suffered serious human rights violations and war crimes. The biggest number of deaths took place in the conflict between the ANC and the South African government-backed Inkatha Freedom Party.

People began thinking about a truth commission after Nelson Mandela was elected president in 1994. In 1995, the South African government created Truth and Reconciliation Commission(TRC). The TRC was the most complex and sophisticated truth commission ever. The TRC had the power to pardon people from crimes, search property and take evidence, call on witnesses, and run a witness protection program. They had a staff of 350 people and a budget of 18 million dollars.

The TRC was designed to work in 3 committees. The Human Rights Violations Committee was responsible for collecting statements from victims and witnesses and recording how bad the violations were. The Amnesty Committee took applications and decided who should get amnesty(**amnesty** is an official pardon for political crimes). The Reparations and Rehabilitation Committee(RRC) designed and made recommendations for reparations(**reparations** are paying money or helping people who have been wronged).

The TRC heard from 23,000 victims and witnesses. 2,000 of them appeared in public hearings. Media coverage was intense. Most newspapers ran several stories on it a day. Radio and television news started off with a story on the latest hearings. The TRC had special hearings for important institutions. They wanted to know if they did abusive things or if they did anything about it. Others focused on important events in the country’s history.

TRC’s greatest power was its ability to give people amnesty for political crimes. Some people did not believe they should have this power and tried to stop it. Over 7,000 people applied for amnesty. Most of these did not receive it. Amnesty was only given to people who fully confessed and who proved their crimes to were because of politics. For very serious crimes, the person had to appear at a public hearing to answer questions from the TRC, from lawyers, and from the victims and their families. There were a lot of factors used to decide if they person deserved amnesty. For example, “Was the crime equal to the political objective?” You did not have to apologize to get amnesty. You could not get amnesty if you did something because of racism or hatred.

Because the amnesty process was so public, only people who were really afraid of going to jail applied. Some trials ended with long prison sentences. This led to many people applying for amnesty. But another important trial(former minister Magnus Malan), ended up in a not guilty decision. This made many top-level people feel like they were going to get away what they did during apartheid. The TRC then decided to investigate people in private hearings. Still, many top-level people who had done bad things decided not to apply for amnesty.

The TRC released its final report in 1998. It was very controversial. The report recommended giving victims **reparations**, but the government did not make a commitment to do this.

It is amazing how original the TRC was how much it tried to do. The TRC was a turning point for South African history. It had an international impact. Apartheid was terrible for South Africa and it will take a long time before all the damage can be fixed. People who committed crimes during apartheid should be prosecuted; this will lead to a better democracy and human rights in South Africa.