South Africa Anti-Apartheid Freedom Movement- Qualities and Participants

Humanities 9- Social Movements

Adapted

Summary of Movement to End Apartheid

Apartheid was the policy of keeping blacks and whites separate in South Africa. Apartheid means “separateness” in the Afrikaans language. The white population was smaller but was in control. The black population was much larger but had much less power.

The National Party started apartheid in 1948. It was the way South Africa’s government ran until the 1990’s. In apartheid there were three major groups: white, Bantu(black Africans), and Colored(people with mixed race). Later, Indians and Pakistanis were added as a fourth group. Laws controlled where people could live, what jobs they could have, and what education they could receive.

People were not allowed to socialize with other races. Public buildings were segregated. Only white people could serve in the government.

Biographies of Main People in the Movement

In 1985, black people began to protest against apartheid. Police tried to keep black people in certain places. This led to dangerous fights with police. Young people committed violence against the government. The leaders of the black people were put in prison and harassed by police.

Mikhuseli Jack was a charming 27 year old youth leader. He knew that violence could not beat the government’s power. Jack said that being united and organized was very important. Jacked formed street committees and recruited neighborhood leaders. They helped settle arguments and represented people. The United Democratic Front(UDF) organized rent boycotts, labor strikes, and school stay-aways.

Black parents like the idea of nonviolent action. Black people in Port Elizabeth boycotted white-owned businesses. They wanted white people to feel the suffering that black people felt. They thought businesses shouldn’t make money because of apartheid.

The government declared a state of emergency. The made a curfew for black people and started arresting black leaders for no reason. The government wanted black people to freak out. Jack and his supporters, however, did the opposite. They saw that apartheid was cracking.

The UDF kept making demands. They wanted police forces to leave. They wanted Nelson Mandela to be released. White business owners were losing money and wanted the boycotts to end. People around the world were also against apartheid. Big companies stopped doing business in South Africa. In 1986, the government called a second state of emergency.

In 1989, the leader of South Africa was Prime Minister deKlerk. He decided to allow the black people to have political organizations. He also freed Nelson Mandela. In 1994, South Africa had a democratic election. Nelson Mandela was elected president.

Mkhuseli Jack

Jack was raised on farmlands. He didn’t know anything about Nelson Mandela or fighting apartheid. When he moved to Port Elizabeth, he wanted to go to school but wasn’t allowed to because of apartheid laws. Soon, he wanted to fight apartheid. With help, he went to school and became a leader. He founded the Port Elizabeth Youth Congress. He was a leader for strikes and boycotts. Jack went to jail many times. He also did many hunger strikes. Black people and white people respected him. In the 1990’s, he graduated from college and is now a successful businessman in Port Elizabeth.

Janet Cherry

Janet Cherry was born and raised in Cape Town, South Africa. During college at the University of Cape Town, she started fighting apartheid. She supported work for black businesses. She wanted black people to be educated and learn to read. She ran the school newspaper and was on the student government. In 1982, she joined the African National Congress underground.

In 1984, she moved to Port Elizabeth. She started an adult education program. She also worked with youth, women, and trade organizations. She also worked with the UDF. She did support work for people who were put in prison. She was arrested many times.

In 1988, she received the Reebok Human Rights Award.

In 1996, she worked for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She is now getting a PhD in political participation.

Col. Lourens du Plessis

South African Defence Forces(ret.)

Col. Du Plessis grew up in the countryside. He was in the military for forty years. In 1985, he ordered that Mathew Goniwe and his group should be permanently remove from society. Goniwe was an educator and leader who led protests. He tried to organize in small towns. Later, the bodies of Goniwe and his group were found dead. Col. Plessis said that Goniwe had to be killed and not just put in prison.

Apartheid ended for many reasons. Black people opposed it very strongly. The government learned that they could not win through such horrible methods. Both sides learned that they could not destroy the other side. Nonviolence was a key to ending apartheid.

Stay-aways, strikes, and boycotts put pressure on white business owners and employers. They helped white people want to change. White governments and business lost money because of boycotts. The government reacted with violence and the use of force. Other countries saw this and punished South Africa economically. Nonviolent power showed the rest of the world how bad apartheid was.

Nonviolence power is important. Organizing people against unfair laws is also important.

Bishop Desmond Tutu said, “I suppose that human being looking at it would say that arms[weapons] are the most dangerous things that a dictator, a tyrant needs to fear. But in fact no- it is when people decide they want to be free. Once they have made up their minds to that, there is nothing that will stop them.”