

Anti-Apartheid Movement

Social **movements** are rarely born in isolation, and the **anti-apartheid movement** (AAM) in South Africa is no different. The AAM grew out of ongoing resistance **movements** and the efforts of many within South Africa and the international community to end racial inequality and the oppressive policies of enforced racial segregation in South Africa known as *apartheid*.

Resistance to long-standing racial inequality in South Africa was evident before the beginning of the 20th century. Organized resistance began with groups such as the Natal Indian Congress, African churches, labor and trade unions, the African National Congress (ANC), and the Communist Party. Subsequent organizations such as the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), founded in 1959 by Robert Sobukwe, the South African Student's Organization (SASO), founded in 1969 by Stephen Biko, and the United Democratic Front, founded in 1983 proved instrumental in ending apartheid. Early forms of resistance were primarily peaceful, including mass demonstrations, civil disobedience, boycotts, and strikes. These strategies, employed by various groups in an effort to achieve social justice and to bring an end to the oppressive white South African government, never quieted. However, as a result of ongoing racial segregation, subsequent generations of African leaders determined that violent measures were necessary in order to gain freedom.

The 1940s witnessed a number of important events that became crucial for the AAM, both in South Africa and abroad. Within South Africa, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and Oliver Tambo formed a youth league within the ANC to develop new strategies of resistance. Around the same time, the ever-growing oppression was forcing growing numbers of South Africans into exile in London. After the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, the banning of ANC and PAC, and the arrests of **movement** leaders in South Africa, the efforts of exiled leaders proved crucial for the AAM becoming a key means for banned liberation **movements** to continue their work. During this time, women also began to play a larger role in resistance **movements**.

Events That Fueled the Movement

In the 1940s, women moved into active resistance from passive support and social welfare activities. In 1943, women were allowed equal membership in the ANC, and a women's branch was formed to facilitate women's involvement in **anti-apartheid** efforts. The need for labor during World War II ushered many black women into the industrial workforce and the labor **movement**. Coming mainly from the Communist Party and the trade unions, women began to take active roles in resistance alongside men, and the federation of South African Women (FSAW) was founded in 1954 by Ray Simons, Helen Joseph, Lillian Ngoyi, and Amina Cachalia. The FSAW quickly became an active multiracial **anti-apartheid** force in alliance with other groups. In conjunction with the ANC, this woman's group directed campaigns against pass laws and quickly fell under government intimidation. However, strong and active women like Ruth First, Albertine Sisulu, and Winnie Mandela were not easily intimidated.

Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, the National Party government in South Africa strengthened the racist policies of the white government and enacted new apartheid legislation. The Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act became cornerstones of apartheid. All individuals were labeled black, white, or colored, and the labeling predetermined their place in society, determining where they lived, worked, and went to school. On the heels of this legislation, two other laws were passed: the Separate Representation of Voters Act,

which limited the rights of colored people to vote, and the Bantu Authorities Act, which abolished the Natives' Representative Council, the one indirect forum of national representation for Africans. The apartheid government also stepped up its attempts to prevent **anti-apartheid** actions; they arrested leaders, harassed civic groups, and intimidated individuals. In addition, the government passed the Suppression of Communism Act, which was used later to arrest most of the **movement's** leaders.

In the aftermath of World War II, the ANC adopted new plans to push for black freedom and equality. Walter Sisulu was appointed Secretary General of the ANC, and it adopted a more militant **anti-apartheid** strategy. This action transformed the ANC from a reactive group organizing protest **movements** to a proactive mass organization. Sisulu worked tirelessly to foment social, political, and economic change despite growing oppression from the white South African government. The ANC initiated a Defiance Campaign in 1952 to challenge the apartheid laws and overtax the legal system by violating the apartheid laws and forcing the arrest of violators. The plan was to fill the jails and keep the police force working at full force until it became ineffective.

Two additional campaigns during the 1950s helped to solidify the **anti-apartheid movement**. The ANC, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Colored People's Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats, and the South African Congress of Trade Unions joined forces to establish the Congress Alliance. This group was responsible for the Freedom Charter and convening a Congress of the People. Individuals and groups from all over South Africa submitted ideas to the Congress about the type of society in which they wanted to live. Ideas were adopted by acclamation by the more than 3,000 delegates at the Congress of the people on June 25, 1955 (often referred to as Freedom Day). These two campaigns united the **anti-apartheid** forces in South Africa.

In 1952, Albert Luthuli became president of the ANC. In 1953, he was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act and unable to participate in public meetings. At least 41 other leaders of the ANC also were banned. In 1956, the white South African government arrested 156 members of the AAM and charged them with high treason. Whereas the majority of those arrested were African (104), 8 colored, 21 Indian, and 23 whites also were arrested. Ultimately, only 30 of the 156 faced charges, and finally in 1961, all charges were dropped. The arrests were attempts to harass and intimidate leaders and put an end to antiapartheid protests. This repression of **movement** leaders did not stop people's resistance efforts. On August 9, 1956, nearly 20,000 women took part in an antipass law march in Pretoria. In 1957, a bus boycott was organized in Alexandria to protest cost increases. Thousands of residents walked as many as 10 miles to work until prices were reduced. Other boycotts and work stoppages continued in these years.

In December 1959, the ANC called for a series of 1-day actions against the pass laws. PAC suggested an expansion of this campaign and called for a series of demonstrations at police stations. March 21, 1960, was the day chosen by the PAC to hold a protest march in Sharpeville. As demonstrators gathered, the police opened fire on the unarmed crowd, killing 69 protesters and injuring 180. The massacre of people in Sharpeville turned the tide again for the **anti-apartheid movement**, which initiated strikes and work stoppages. The government declared a state of emergency. International attention was focused on South Africa. A proposal to initiate economic sanctions against South Africa was put forward at the United Nations, but it was vetoed by the United States and Britain. Increasing criticism of the South African Nationalist Party led them to withdraw from the British Commonwealth. The Republic of South Africa was determined to continue its apartheid state.

Protests against apartheid did not stop. In 1961, Umkhonto we Sizwe (translated "Spear of the Nation" and also referred to as MK), a guerrilla army, was launched under the direction of Nelson Mandela and Joe Slovo. It began a program of sabotage and tactical violence against government installations. Armed struggle was deemed necessary, as all peaceful efforts for change had failed and the government was increasingly violent against demonstrators. On June 12, 1964, the ANC and PAC were banned and the leadership jailed. As a result of the Rivonia trial, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Ahmed Kathrada, Taymond Mhlaba, Elias

Motsoaledi, and Andrew Mlangeni were sentenced to life in prison on Robben Island. In jail, the men were sentenced to hard labor, and they were allowed only one family visit and one letter every 6 months. However, these men were neither forgotten nor abandoned. They protested their living and working conditions through hunger strikes and go-slow protests. Pressure brought by the international community gradually brought an end to their sentences of hard labor. They were also then given access to newspapers and were allowed to receive letters and visitors twice a week. Perhaps the most important accommodation was the right to study. Nelson Mandela studied Afrikaans, economics, and history. During Mandela's 27 years in prison at Robben Island, Pollsmore Prison, and then Victor Verster Prison, his determination never faltered, and his confidence in the future for majority rule in South Africa continued to grow.

The imprisonment, banning, and exile of **movement** leadership slowed the struggle against apartheid, but they did not stop it. On June 16, 1979, almost 25 years after the creation of the Freedom charter and the meeting of the People's Congress, 20,000 Soweto schoolchildren took to the streets in protest over a government order that Afrikaans was to be used as the language of instruction at all black secondary schools. The student uprisings are best contextualized within the SASO, founded in 1969 by Steven Biko, and his black consciousness **movement** (BCM). SASO and the BCM filled a void left by the banning of the ANC and PAC. Considered a danger to the apartheid system, Biko was murdered by the South African police while in custody in September 1977. In 1979, the South African student **movement** organized a protest against learning in the language of Afrikaans. This protest revealed ingrained resentment toward apartheid and its policies of pass control, forced removals, denial of political rights, police terror, housing shortages, and inferior education for blacks. The BCM asserted black pride in African culture and heritage and challenged black youth to step forward and take their rightful places in South African society. The antiapartheid **movement** was revitalized in the children of South Africa. As they marched, they called for the release from prison of Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and other ANC leaders. Rather than deny the leadership of the **movement**, they sang praises to them. The police shot and killed several students.

Winnie Mandela, Nelson Mandela's wife, was blamed for the Soweto uprising by the white South African government. To support the children, she founded the Black Parents Association. This organization helped build necessary bridges between PAC, BCM, and the ANC. In the aftermath of Soweto, Winnie Mandela was arrested with a dozen other women as political detainees.

The youth accepted Winnie Mandela as a leader in the struggle. Neither **movement** leadership nor arrest and detention were new to her. Her first arrest came in 1958 as a result of her involvement in the anti-pass campaign. She was chair of the ANC Women's League when the ANC was banned; she turned her energies to the FSAW to continue her work. She remained outspoken and active during Nelson Mandela's incarceration, and she was often arrested, detained, and harassed by the government. From 1962 to 1975, she was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act and twice charged with contravening her banning order. In 1970, she was acquitted of wrongdoing but had been held in solitary confinement for 17 months under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act. Throughout the 1970s, Winnie Mandela continued to ignore banning orders and to speak out against apartheid.

Following the Soweto uprising, she was banished to Brandfort in the Orange Free State. Her house was bombed, but she continued to actively oppose apartheid and ignore posted segregation signs and orders. In 1985, she began a media campaign to inform the public about Nelson Mandela's life in prison. She vocally criticized the government and became as much of an icon of the **anti-apartheid movement** as her husband. Despite her legal difficulties, her sometimes abrasive behavior, and her eventual divorce from Mandela, Winnie Mandela continued to serve the people and the ANC. In 1993, she became president of the ANC Women's League, and in 1994, she became Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology in the new Unity government. She eventually left government service but continued to campaign for the poor and disaffected in South Africa.

The South African Council of Churches, under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, helped to facilitate

the **anti-apartheid** struggle within black churches. This council supported civil disobedience as a proper response against racist laws. Churches delivered the message of the BCM. The church was banned in 1977. Tutu attempted to meet with P. W. Botha to discuss deteriorating conditions. When these talks collapsed, Tutu called for international economic sanctions against South Africa and criticized apartheid vociferously. He was an outspoken advocate for African freedom and encouraged boycotts and other forms of resistance. He criticized U.S. president Ronald Reagan and British prime minister Margaret Thatcher for their failure to uphold sanctions against South Africa. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. Other religious leaders also worked to end apartheid. For example, C. F. Beyers Nande, an Afrikaner clergyman, founded the Christian Institute and began the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society. Nande and his institute were banned in 1977 for providing a multiracial platform for challenging the official view of the Dutch Reformed Church.

In 1983, the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed to continue the **anti-apartheid** struggle. The coalition of nearly 600 churches, civic associations, trade unions, women's groups, student organizations, community groups, and sports clubs joined forces to fight oppression. Albertina Sisulu became copresident. With broad appeal and populist support, UDF reenergized the black rejection of apartheid and fueled mass participation in a boycott against the newly proposed tricameral government. At the same time the National Forum emerged from the former Black Consciousness members of the Azanian People's Organization and the Cape Unity **Movement**. This group based its work on principles of noncooperation with whites and rejected the broad mass appeal of UDF. From 1984 to 1986, there was an increase in widespread rebellion and mass protests. Eventually workers, students, and other groups were able to overcome differences, and despite heavy state oppression, they coalesced into a strong **movement**. Once again ANC banners appeared, and Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo were upheld as leaders of the **movement**. Despite their strength and numbers, the resistance was still not sufficiently organized to take over.

The International Anti-Apartheid Movement

Nelson Mandela and others active in the AAM in South Africa have credited the pressure put on South Africa by the international community for helping to bring about the end of apartheid. With **movement** leaders within South Africa imprisoned and others forced to live in exile, an international AAM grew up in Britain and spread elsewhere. During a meeting of South African exiles and their supporters in London in 1959, Chief Albert Luthuli suggested the formation of an AAM in Britain.

The organization organized boycotts, published the newspaper *Boycott News*, organized public meetings in support of the ANC and PAC, and worked diligently to enlist the active involvement of the United Nations, the British Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned **Movement**, the Organization of African Unity, and many other international organizations in their struggle. AAM began by promoting the establishment of antiapartheid groups in other West European countries, lobbying the Commonwealth in 1960–1961 and the International Olympic Committee in 1962, launching the World Campaign for the Release of South African Political Prisoners in 1963, and organizing the International Conference on Sanctions against South Africa in 1964. Its campaigns for people's boycotts, government sanctions, and the arms embargo soon spread far beyond the borders of Britain. AAM was responsible for a broad range of actions from public boycotts to U.N. sanctions, from the provision of humanitarian assistance to refugees to military and nonmilitary assistance to the liberation **movement**.

Oliver Tambo was the ANC president-in-exile from 1967 to 1991, and he was charged with mobilizing international opinion. In exile, Tambo's efforts supported the combined armed struggle and mass political actions in South Africa as he mobilized international support. He organized and raised funds for an armed struggle, negotiated with other governments to house and train liberation forces, maintained contact with ANC forces within South Africa and developed diplomatic missions with other countries. He eventually established missions in 27 countries. Oliver Tambo returned to South Africa in December 1990, Nelson Mandela was released from prison on February 10, 1990, and South Africa's first democratically held elections, signifying the end of apartheid were held on April 27, 1994. The **movement** finally succeeded.

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