

TEACHING APARTHEID: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A RATIONAL APPROACH*

*Jimmy Verner
St Stithian's College*

I do not intend to talk about the details of lesson plans and schemes of work but to look at the philosophy behind the way I approach this sensitive subject. For years my classes have been multi-racial (or multi-cultural as this seems to be a more favoured term today) and many blacks have been both politically aware and emotionally sensitive. They have been more obviously affected by apartheid than their white counterparts, but as Bishop George Irvine commented in an address to our school a few years ago, no one can have lived in South Africa for any length of time without being tainted by apartheid ideology. It is our task as teachers to help pupils to reach beyond the limitations imposed by this and to seek to find an objectivity about apartheid.

Apartheid happened; and we are still living in its wake, feeling its effects. We need to defuse the emotional aspects of these effects (a difficult task) so as to try to create a distancing from it. Only when we can do that can we start to be at all objective. The problems associated with this is that there are some of the pupils (especially among the whites) who are largely unaware of the impact of apartheid on their lives. Humour of course is a great help in this defusing process and cartoons with their exaggerated emphasis, can be of great help here.

It is also worth spending a little time reminding the pupils of the earlier patterns of racial segregation, both legislated and spontaneous. From here we can move to the rigidity of apartheid and the emotions which led to it. To understand the issues some understanding of what was happening among the Afrikaner people is, I believe, necessary. Urbanisation was a major factor in changing the Afrikaner way of life and thinking. The years after the First World War through to the late 1940s saw a large scale movement of Afrikaners to the towns and this helped to foster a new Afrikaner political vision. This vision retained its sense of being a people (volk) to the extent that Dr Nico Diederichs, one of the new academic political minds, wrote that on the grounds of nationalist doctrine "the individual in itself is nothing, but only becomes itself in the nation as the highest (human) community."¹ This nationalism in the wider sense and this concern is echoed by others. Dr. G. Cronje argued in his *'n Tuiste vir die Nageslag* (1945) that apartheid's aims included "justice towards

the Bantu, whose survival as a separate race with their own culture, and whose development towards higher levels, would be ensured by it?"² It is obvious that to these people apartheid was not a negative concept, but a serious attempt to foster nation building. Cronje argued that the government as the "responsible guardian" of the people needed the courage to decide what was in the highest interests of both whites and blacks and it seemed to him and to others that the interests of both would be best served by first ensuring the survival of the white race. This meant power for the whites and it is here that the practice of apartheid started to go against the higher aspects of the theory. The road to "baasskap" was easily mistaken for the more idealistic theoretical apartheid road.

Once this background has been surveyed, however briefly, one can begin to look at the question of apartheid in practice. Pupils must also be shown how the practice differed from the theory in almost every aspect and perhaps something of the reason for these differences can be explained. The simplest way of looking at apartheid in practice is to use the major items of legislation as the stepping stones with which to cross the emotional morass. There are two reasons why I like this "legislative" approach: firstly because Acts of parliament are dry, dull and unemotional; secondly they provide a definite progression in the development of apartheid.

Looking at chronological development makes sense to pupils who should be encouraged to create a timeline for this period. I like to use a four column table: date; (mainly black); and world government actions; reactions affairs to give a wider context. Start with the election victory of 1948 and ask pupils to try to fill in something for every year in at least one column. Working through the legislation one can see a clear pattern emerging within the philosophical framework of the election promises. The first relatively easy steps were the scrapping of the voting rights offered to Indians by Smuts in 1946 but never put into effect, and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act: easy to

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enforce as all marriage officers are registered with the state and can easily be identified; and easy to pass because it was unlikely to provoke much opposition. (These acts did not represent any radical change and the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr E.G. Jansen, was a pragmatist not an ideologue while Department was still controlled by men appointed by the previous Smuts administration). But it did show that the National Party was **doing** something from the start.

One possible problem was to know whether or not it was a mixed marriage. Not all people were easily identified in a racial sense. This problem was quickly tackled by the new Minister of Native Affairs, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd and his new Departmental Secretary, W.W.M. Eiselen and led logically to the 1950 Population Registration Act which classified us all racially. Perhaps some time can be spent on the problems this involved and pupils should be made aware of how arbitrary this could be in certain cases so that many people would "try for white" if they thought they could get away with it.

The national idea - the nation as the highest human community - implies a concept of racial purity and logically this would be more easily achieved if people were separated into their own national areas. The philosophy behind this thinking gave impetus for the passing of the 1950 Group Areas Act. These two Acts really formed the basis on which the apartheid doctrine could be implemented further. Verwoerd planned to create

a pyramid of Bantu Authorities in town and country, rooted in tribal custom. Starting from the Stallardian position that blacks in white towns could not have political rights, he argued that they could not complain if they were given adequate residential areas, adequate housing, and conditions for an orderly social life. It was therefore necessary to provide 'in every town and particularly in every industrial area, a potentially comprehensive location site, virtually a native group area', large enough to house all Africans in the area, so that peri-urban and backyard squatting could be eliminated.³

The problem arose over what was seen as adequate and the tendency was to allow too little space and too little housing to allow for the development of an orderly social life. Housing was on a site-and service basis with building being done by blacks thanks to the 1951 Native Building Workers Act and partly financed by their employers through the 1952 Native Services Levy Act. The tribal custom roots used in the 1951 Bantu

Authorities Act gave rise to opposition too as urbanisation was breaking down tribal structures and the government's insistence on tribal concepts was seen as part of a policy of divide and rule.

The main apartheid legislation of 1952 was the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act which tightened the whole issue of control over the movements of the black population and extended the carrying of reference books to women. Pupils are normally puzzled by the contrast between the title and the effect of this Act and I usually spend some time discussing this discrepancy which I feel can teach a useful lesson in political double talk.

Having tightened their control over the adult black, it is not surprising that the next major move was control over the youth in the form of the 1953 Bantu Education Act. Eiselen had chaired the Bantu Education Commission appointed in 1949 which reported in 1951. It recommended the creation of a separate, centrally controlled educational system for the blacks falling under the auspices of the Department of Native Affairs rather than the Department of Education. (This can lead to an interesting discussion in a bright class which can see the educational implications of this transfer of authority.) It also argued in favour of a different syllabus for blacks "designed to prepare them for their special place in society"⁴ which meant, in Eiselen's view, a greater emphasis on the vernacular and on manual training. The Act was also to specify that the instruction should be given in both official languages but the impracticability of this meant that it was not implemented (although an attempt to enforce this provision lay behind the unrest of June 1976).

1953 also saw the passing of the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act which ushered in the era of petty apartheid. Everything was segregated into white and black facilities, and often more with separate Chinese, Coloured and Indian facilities as well. While some of this was socially acceptable to many whites, other aspects were laughable such as separate entrances to a Post Offices where once inside you breathed the same air at different counters!

By this stage pupils should have a reasonable picture of what was happening in terms of apartheid in practice. That there were many honest men in government service who sincerely believed that they were doing what was best for all - white and black - is unquestionable; that many felt that it was not best for all is also beyond dispute. The social engineering that was happening created unhappiness at least partly because it was social engineering: the people had no say in what was happening to them. Blacks wished to be judged in terms of what they could become, not in terms of what they had been. Urban blacks in

particular did not wish to be regarded as tribal or to be told to look at their roots. They knew their past and were concerned about their present and future. This is well illustrated by the explanation Job Rathebe, an African undertaker and boxing promoter, gave for the poor sales of the first few issues of the new magazine for blacks, *Drum*:

"I can tell you what's wrong with *Drum*. You see, it's got the white hand on it - that's what I call it. *Drum's* what white men want Africans to be, not what they are. Now take this tribal history business, which you call 'Know Yourself': we all know ourselves quite well enough, Mr Bailey, I assure you. And we're trying to get away from our tribal history just as fast as we can. We don't want *Drum* to remind us. What we want, you see, is a paper which belongs to us - a real *black* paper. We want it to be our *Drum*, not a white man's *Drum*." ⁵

Drum was to move to the black hand and became a very successful magazine but was also to be the target of much police harassment. While blacks could influence some individuals like Bailey, the financier behind *Drum*, they were to find themselves virtually powerless against the state.

This powerlessness was made obvious by the events of 1956. Two major events in apartheid history happened that year: the destruction of multi-cultural Sophiatown to make way for the white suburb of Triomf; and the publication of the Tomlinson Report on the socio-economic problems of the reserves.

Father Huddleston, one of the leaders of the fight to save Sophiatown, accepted that it was technically a slum but believed that "Essentially Sophiatown is a gay place and, for all the occasional moments of violence and excitement, a kindly one too." ⁶ Its value though seemed to him to lie in the harmony and variety of those who lived there - it was the antithesis of the apartheid ideology and for that it had also to go. The destruction of Sophiatown began in 1956 with the first forced removals and finished in 1958. Bloke Modisane summed it up for many fellow blacks when he wrote:

"Something in me died, a piece of me died, with the dying of Sophiatown: it was in the winter of 1958, the sky was a cold blue veil which had been immersed in a bleaching solution and then spread out against a concave, the blue filtering through, and tinted by, a powder screen of grey; the sun, like the moon of the day, gave off more light than heat,

mocking me with its promise of warmth - a fixture against the grey-blue sky - a mirror deflecting the heat and concentrating upon me in my Sophiatown only a reflection." ⁷

The black spot in the white area had to be removed and so it was. Here one can argue was an example of the baasskap aspect of apartheid overriding the concern for black development that Cronje had included in his writings.

The Tomlinson Commission had been appointed by Jansen, Verwoerd's predecessor, and took the widest possible view of its brief to "report on a scheme for the rehabilitation of the Native Areas with a view to developing within them a social structure in keeping with the culture of the Native and based on effective socio-economic planning." ⁸ Much of the Commission's report was rejected by Verwoerd and it became obvious that the government was not prepared to pay the price necessary for Grand Apartheid to work. Here again the inference was made that the black was not worth the effort or the money it would take to make the reserves, soon to be called Homelands, viable entities. In class one tends to spend a fair amount of time looking at the Tomlinson Report and speculating on whether it could have proved a viable and acceptable form of apartheid had its recommendations been upheld. The biggest flaw was probably its over conservative estimate of population growth which meant that the figures for the necessary job creation, etc. are all too low.

The government did create the Bantu Investment Corporation in 1959 to try to help stimulate investment in the Homeland areas but it was too little to satisfy the people. Too little was also the reaction to the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of the same year, although Verwoerd hinted in his introduction of the Bill at the possible eventual full independence of the Homelands. Perhaps as a sign that the government really wished to further the position of the Homelands, tribal universities were introduced the same year by the Extension of University Education Act. The Act also closed the traditional white universities to black students so can be argued to reduce rather than extend university education.

By the mid-1950s it seemed that the apartheid concept had become simply a method of trying to ensure white political power despite the hint of independence for the Homelands. Apartheid became more influential over our thinking as a result and fewer whites seemed to question its basic idea of separation. Generally whites approved of separate bus and train facilities; separate public toilets; and group areas for these things kept the uneducated mass separate from us. The fact that they had deliberately been made subservient and less

educated was overlooked by most whites who were happy to enjoy the benefits their colour gave them. Among blacks the picture was different because the ever restricting legislation led to an increasingly cohesive opposition. This cohesion was well demonstrated in the Congress of the People held in Kliptown in 1955. Z.K. Matthews commented on the Congress as follows:

"The Congress was held in an open square in the non-European township of Kliptown. There for two days, delegates from all over the country deliberated the Freedom Charter which was eventually adopted. There were several wonderful things about the Congress of the People. The first was the fact that it was held at all. Here for the first time in the history of the country was a Congress which brought together people drawn from all sections of the population to consider and give expression to their vision of the South Africa of the future. The second significant thing was that it was able to produce the Freedom Charter which set forth the desires and aspirations of the people. But the most significant, both to those who were direct observers and those who heard about it afterwards, was the dignified behaviour of the people in the face of what any less disciplined group might have regarded as extreme provocation, interruption of the proceedings by a vast number of police who seized documents and took the names and addresses of those present. ... This was the peoples's finest hour."⁹

Apartheid created a culture in opposition to it among the blacks, and especially among the urban blacks - a group which caused the planners headaches for they did not fit neatly into the pattern the architects of apartheid had created. Perhaps the most important single reason for the failure of the ideology of apartheid lies in its failure to accommodate in its theories the urban black. The governments were inclined to see all blacks as equal and similar and essentially tribal; the urban black was none of these things and often had little in common with his rural tribal relative. It was among these people that the opposition to apartheid first became a threat to the regime: the Defiance campaign of 1952, the Freedom Charter of 1955, the pass protest that led to the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, the economic strikes

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1. Quoted in W.A. de Klerk: *The Puritans in Africa: A history of Afrikanerdom*, p. 204. Penguin Books, 1976.

of the early 1970s that led to new labour laws, and of course the riots of Soweto 1976. The protests at home and abroad forced a rethink and slowly reform became an accepted part of government policy. Slowly at first but with ever increasing speed since 1990, reform and the dismantling of apartheid have become the major work of the government. It is, however, a long and difficult task to re-educate the population and especially those who spent their lives upholding and developing the apartheid system, into a belief in the equality of race, creed, sex and religion.

What then is a rational approach to the teaching of apartheid? Firstly to put it into its context of traditional segregation of racial groups and a growing fear of being swamped politically and in every other way by sheer numbers. A fear fostered by the growth of an urban black class with which the government was to prove unable to come to terms or to understand. Secondly one needs to look at the scaffolding which erected the building of apartheid - the actual legislation. This shows how there was a definite progression and a pattern and a complexity that is often ignored. Verwoerd tried to explain this complexity when he said in 1954:

"Apartheid comprises a whole multiplicity of phenomena. It comprises the political sphere; it is necessary in the social sphere; it is aimed at in Church matters; it is relevant to every sphere of life. Even within the economic sphere it is not just a question of numbers. What is of more importance there is whether one maintain the colour bar or not."¹⁰

Thirdly it is necessary to look at the effect of apartheid on South Africa: economically, socially and politically; both in general terms and in terms of its peoples. Fourthly I believe one needs to look at the impact of apartheid on our external relations and how it led to the growing isolation of South Africa from the world community. Finally a look at the impact of opposition on the policies of government: first opposition led to increased *kragdadigheid* and stubbornness; later to reform and finally to the abandonment of apartheid. To minimise the emotional aspects, I use humour especially in cartoons, but also from books and other sources. With this approach I enjoy teaching the section especially when the class is enlivened by politically aware blacks.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

3. T.R.H. Davenport: South Africa. A Modern History, p. 373. Macmillan (third edition), Johannesburg, 1987.

4. **Ibid.**, p. 372.

5. A. Sampson: Drum. A Venture into the New Africa, pp. 20-21. Collins, London, 1956.

6. T. Huddleston: Naught for your comfort, p. 122. Collins, London, 1956.

7. B. Modisane: Blame me on History, p. 5. A.D. Donker, Johannesburg, 1986.

8. T.R.H. Davenport: **Op. cit.**, p. 375.

9. Z.K. Matthews: Freedom for my People. The autobiography of Z.K. Matthews: Southern Africa 1901 to 1968, pp. 181-182. David Philip, Cape Town, 1981.

10. Quoted in Davenport: **Op. cit.**, p. 375.
