

1995

AN EVALUATION OF THE LEGACY OF 46 YEARS OF NP RULE
26 MAY 1948 – A DAY TO REMEMBER, A DAY TO REGRET

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Fifty years ago – on 26 May 1948 the General Election took place that brought the NP to power. It remained in power for 46 years!

[Next Thursday will offer a good opportunity for those who voted for the NP to contemplate on its achievements and misdeeds. For those who benefited economically undeservedly from NP policies, Thursday will offer an ideal opportunity to be honest about it and to show the necessary remorse. It also offers an opportunity for those who have been corrupted by the power of NP rule and for those that have been damaged by its repression, to reflect on their respective unfortunate experiences.

It is also a day to rejoice in the knowledge that what happened from 26 May 1948 until 27 April 1994, will never happen again.] [*Can be deleted or shortened*]

Under the colossal illusion that the Afrikaners were a God-chosen people with the dual task – prescribed by Providence – of promoting the Christian civilisation in South Africa and of installing high moral values in all the other population groups (including the white English speakers), the NP implemented their misguided policies with evangelical zeal for almost five decades.

During all these years the NP used the rather awkward argument that, given the Afrikaner's lofty religious and moral tasks, it was unacceptable that Afrikaners should be economically so deprived and culturally so endangered. Consequently, the NP regarded almost any policy measure – irrespective of its exploitative and humiliating consequences for people other than Afrikaners – as justified as long as it was instrumental towards the fulfilment of the Afrikaners, alleged providential destiny.

The NP victory in 1948 was very small. But within the first 10 years the NP government tampered with the constitution in a ruthless and immoral manner to guarantee future NP election victories.

During election times, the NP employed its proven methods to incite limitless fear in the hearts of mainly Afrikaner voters about the deadly dangers of one or other scapegoat – be it the English, the Coloureds, the Africans or the Reds.

With the wisdom of hindsight we have ample reasons to deplore the ideological deceptions to which the electorate were exposed. It seems as if the NP – even to this day – cannot free itself from its “syndrome of victimisation” and its inclination towards deep-seated self-delusions.

It would be wrong to state that the NP government created the racist system of discrimination and exploitation. Important discriminatory and exploitative legislation were enacted in the first half of the century when the English Establishment controlled South Africa politically and economically. The NP, however, changed the native policy of “segregation” into the policy of “apartheid”. This implied a huge intensification of black exploitation.

The NP built a mammoth organisational structure in order to control not only the movements of blacks, but also their living and working patterns in a very strict manner. A plethora of apartheid legislation was put on the law books. The existing arsenal of discriminatory legislation was extended and also made applicable on the Coloureds and Indians.

While the Coloureds and Indians were second grade citizens before 1948, they were degraded by the NP to become third grade citizens. The Africans were degraded to become fourth and even fifth degree citizens in their country of birth!

The multitude of apartheid measures and the relentless manner in which they were implemented humiliated the blacks and violated their human dignity quite seriously. It is a pity that the width and depth of these humiliations cannot be measured and put in concrete terms on the account of the white beneficiaries.

There is, of course, another side of the coin. The exploitative structures of apartheid enabled white farmers and white corporations to make large profits. These profits and the taxation on it were used for capital accumulation and for building the infrastructure of the most modern economy in Africa. When boasting about the economic achievement we should, however, never forget about the high price – in terms of human sacrifice – a large part of the population was forced to pay for it!

During the apartheid period society was artificially divided and fragmented into hostile groups. The deprivation, repression and injustices inherent to the system of apartheid not only impoverished the black population, but also brutalised large numbers of them. It is not reasonable to expect that those sections of the population that have been impoverished and brutalised by the inhuman structures of apartheid, should suddenly act in a civilised and pro-society manner now that the structures of apartheid have been removed. The “wounds” afflicted to society and to

numerous individuals by apartheid will, unfortunately, remain part of the South African situation for a considerable period of time.

After decades of apartheid, the South African society is a very disrupted and divided one, not only along racial and ethnic lines, but also due to seemingly irreconcilable values and attitudes. If we have to identify the most serious problem facing South Africa today – after decades of apartheid – then it is the absence of a proper *social structure*. The South African population does not presently constitute a society. We do not have the shared values, the cross cutting interest groups and the common history necessary to cement the population into some kind of community.

Although the NP succeeded to maintain “law and order” for long periods in our divided society, they did it in a rather brutal manner and with inhuman measures.

Although apartheid cannot be blamed for all the inequalities and poverty in South Africa, a large part can – and should – be blamed on the structures of discrimination and exploitation created and maintained by the NP government. The poorest 50 per cent of households – 64 per cent of the total population and mainly black – received only 11 per cent of total income in 1995 while the most affluent 20 per cent of households (about 15 per cent of the population and to a large extent white) received as much as 65 per cent of household income in 1995!

From an economic and cultural point of view the white English speakers in 1948 were in a much more privileged situation than the Afrikaners. Still inspired with the Victorian illusion that British people were elected to govern people of a lesser breed, the English speakers found it extremely difficult to accept the political hegemony of the Afrikaners after 1948. In their fury they raised serious moral and theoretical qualms against NP policies. But in spite thereof they continued to profit quite handsomely from the exploitative structures of the apartheid system. The discrepancy between their words and deeds exposed them to the accusation of hypocrisy.

The English speakers cannot distance themselves from the misdeeds of the NP as if the NP was an exclusive Afrikaner party during its 46 years in office. It is quite probable that a larger percentage of English speakers than Afrikaners voted for the NP in the 1987 and 1989 elections.

From a moral and spiritual point of view, the 46 years of apartheid were a disastrous period for many Afrikaners. In 1948 the Afrikaners were a relatively poor but uncorrupted population group. The lucrative employment opportunities created for them in the public sector and other redistributive measures, made a considerable contribution to the quick (and perhaps too quick) *embourgeoisement* of the Afrikaners during the period of high economic growth from 1948 to 1973.

During the period of creeping poverty (1973-1994) – that ran concurrently with the Struggle and the NP government's expensive Resistance against it – the income of the poorer 70 per cent of Afrikaners declined with more than 30 per cent.

To be enriched too quickly and too easily in one generation, and to be impoverished in relative terms rather quickly in the next generation, is one of the most disruptive things that any population group can experience. Such an experience cannot but destroy social and moral standards and cause serious cultural displacement.

The bitterness and even hate displayed by the poorer part of the Afrikaners against the ANC government should be understood against the background of twenty years of pampering by the NP government and twenty five years of neglect by the same government. During the 1970s and 1980s the NP was more concerned about the Total Strategy to counteract the alleged Total Onslaught than about the economic well-being of the poorer 70 per cent of Afrikaners. When the NP government had no choice (due to the Struggle) to give full trade-union rights to the Africans in the early 1980s – within an African political vacuum – the income of the top 20 per cent of Africans started to increase at the expense of whites. This kind of trade-off became institutionalised at Kempton Park when the NP was quite dramatically outmanouvered by the ANC.

Unfortunately, it seems as if social memory of the poorer 70 per cent of Afrikaners has been blunted by their racial prejudices. Instead of blaming the NP for their tragic destiny from poor-to-rich-to-poor-again, they are inclined to blame their grievances on the new government. Strangely enough, one cannot but feel sympathetic about the heavy fate of a large part of the poorer Afrikaners.

The richer 30 per cent of the Afrikaners were in the early 1970s rich and smart enough to entrench themselves against the process of impoverishment. In an awkward twist of destiny the emphasis of the NP shifted early in the 1960s away from its ideological aim of uplifting the poorest Afrikaners towards assisting the richer Afrikaners. The generous types of favouritism in the first 25 years and rather lucrative (and even corrupt) patronage in the next 20 years was conducive for the rise of an Afrikaner *haute bourgeoisie* or an Afrikaner elite.

A certain part of the Afrikaner elite – say half of them – today is quite positively orientated towards the new South Africa. Although they are critical of many actions of the new government and justifiably concerned about certain trends, they are committed to make a positive contribution towards the success of the new South Africa.

In sharp contrast, it seems as if the other half of the Afrikaner elite cannot make peace with the fact that they have lost their power, their influence and their favours. This part of the Afrikaners was so terribly spoiled by the artificial advantages they enjoyed under the apartheid system that it is seemingly impossible for them to accept the new South Africa. They are not raising valid criticism against the new government, but busy themselves from morning till night with poisonous hate-speak. They unfortunately receive the enthusiastic support of the NP and a large part of the Afrikaner media. This strengthens their negative orientation towards the new government!

During the last four years this group has become more recalcitrant, more *kragdadig*, more pedantic, more boisterous and more self-righteous. These people are neither prepared to acknowledge guilt for the injustices of the past, nor prepared to make any sacrifices to restore the damage. Whenever they are reminded about the dismal legacy of apartheid, they reject the claim with indignation. For them neither apartheid nor its legacy have anything to do with morality whatsoever!

By deliberately closing the book about the NP's immoral past, this part of the Afrikaner elite is depriving themselves of the opportunity to liberate themselves from the false consciousness inculcated into them by the relentless propaganda and deceptions of the NP and its propaganda machine.

Although this part of the elite benefited abundantly from the NP economic policies, they are in effect the real victims of apartheid, looking at it from a moral and spiritual point of view. Although they are completely unaware of it, they are seriously contaminated by the viciousness inherent to apartheid. They are still permeated by racist prejudices of the worst nature. They have become a serious stumbling block towards a better future for all.

Looking at the dismal legacy of the NP from the vantage point of today – 50 years after the NP attained power – it seems as if the NP does not deserve political legitimacy any longer. It is, therefore, not surprising that its continued existence has become a highly contentious matter.