



Language

Nonviolent resistance has a long history in South Africa, where Gandhi developed his methods of 'satyagraha' to assert the civil rights of the Indian community, and where the 'nonracial' (i.e. inclusive) African National Congress (ANC) was officially committed to nonviolence in its struggle against apartheid from 1912 until 1961. After 1945, as apartheid was strengthened, there were impressive strikes (for example the 1946 miners' strike), and acts of civil disobedience against apartheid measures, for examples Indians opposing discriminatory legislation in 1946. The 1952 'defiance campaign' demanded the repeal of unjust laws and called for nationwide non-cooperation. In 1954-55 there was resistance to the removal of squatters and boycotts of the newly-introduced 'Bantu' education system. The ANC sent 50,000 volunteers throughout the country to listen to people's grievances and their aspirations. These were then compiled into the set of demands for change – the Freedom Charter – which was adopted in 1955 and provided a platform for subsequent anti-apartheid movements. Nonviolent protest continued in the late 1950s. In 1960-61 resistance to the pass laws coincided with other demonstrations and a general strike.

Increasingly brutal government repression and the banning of opposition organizations convinced the ANC leadership to create an armed wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (the 'Spear of the Nation'). Initially, the emphasis was on sabotage rather than targeting people, and the ANC also remained committed to mass struggle. Mandela's speeches during the 1960 Treason Trial and his later 1962 trial, when he was condemned to life imprisonment, stressed commitment to a 'nonracial future'. The smaller rival Pan African Congress (PAC) – which differed from the ANC over association with the Communist Party and organized the fateful 1961 Sharpeville demonstration (when the police fired repeatedly and lethally into a peaceful crowd) – also created a military wing, which targeted both whites and African collaborators.

Mass popular protest did not occur again until 1976, when about 15,000 Soweto school pupils demonstrated against being taught in Afrikaans, a protest which extended to opposing the Bantu education system and the regime itself. Bloody police repression triggered school boycotts and mass protests throughout the country. Although the demonstrators adopted the tactics of civil resistance, they often fought the police with sticks and stones. Many children were killed or injured and the protests ended after six months. Funerals of those killed by the security forces remained a repeated focus for public defiance.

During the 1980s, protest revived in the form of consumer and school boycotts and student activism, independent grass roots 'civic' organizations and community activism spread. This gave rise to the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) – a coordination with 600 affiliates which grew out of the resistance to the apartheid constitution of 1983. Centrally involved were community, youth and women's organizations, although churches and unions were also affiliated. The UDF promoted 'people power', both in terms of making South Africa 'ungovernable' under apartheid and in terms of 'prefigurative democracy'. The trade unions consolidated their organization and their ability to conduct disciplined strikes, as in the 1979 Ford strike against relocation. In 1989 COSATU (the trade union federation) together with the UDF created the Mass Democratic Movement to organize nationwide defiance. During the protracted negotiations to end apartheid in the early 1990s, symbolized by Mandela's release in February 1990 and the ending of the bans on the ANC, PAC, Communist Party and other political organizations, 'people power' in the form of mass strikes and demonstrations backed the ANC negotiators. However, despite considerable achievements in the transition, various analysts trace subsequent problems (such as the failure to redistribute wealth, corruption, and inadequate police reform – as indicated with the 2012 Marikana mine massacre) to the agreement to disband the UDF and to the ANC's general marginalisation of those who had stayed inside the country and their more decentralised and participatory modes of organising.

Internal resistance combined with international pressure. Apartheid was frequently denounced at the United Nations, and the isolation of South Africa was a central goal for the international anti-apartheid movement – symbolically through the exclusion of South African sports teams from international events. The Unesco-approved cultural boycott and a multi-level campaign against economic links grew over 30 years, gaining support from municipalities and some national governments. As well as boycotts, nonviolent actions – such as a wave of sit-ins at US universities in the 1980s – encouraged institutions to disinvest from banks and corporations engaged in South Africa.



There is a large literature on the long struggle against apartheid, with oral history and documentation programmes inside South Africa itself. The list below is highly selective, but covers major aspects of the struggle and key individuals. Special mention should be made of two ambitious history projects:

Karis, Thomas ; Carter, Gwendolen M. ; Gerhart, Gail M. ; Glaser, Clive L., [From Protest to Challenge: Documents of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1990](#) [1], [1973], 2010 , 6 volumes

– a six-volume series. Notably vol. 2, 'Hope and Challenge, 1935-1952', Thomas Karis, ed., 1973, pp. 550; vol 3, 'Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964', 1987, pp. 845; vol. 5, 'Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979', Thomas G. Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, eds., 1997, pp. 840; vol 6, 'Challenge and Victory', Gail M. Gerhart and Clive L. Glaser, 2010, pp. 816. 'Combines narrative with a wealth of primary source material.'

Websites recommended

[South African History Online: towards a people's history](#) [2] - <http://www.sahistory.org.za/> [3] ,
Has sections on people, places and timelines, plus links to SAHO Special Projects on Passive resistance, including Passive Resistance 1946: a selection of documents, compiled by E.S. Reddy and Fatima Meer.

Source URL (retrieved on 24/04/2024 - 06:47):<https://civilresistance.info/section/e-resisting-oppressive-dictatorial-military-or-authoritarian-rule/e-i-africa-sub-saharan/e>

Links

[1] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2010/protest-challenge-documents-african-politics-south-africa-1882-1990>
[2] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/0/south-african-history-online-towards-peoples-history> [3]
<http://www.sahistory.org.za/>