

TITLE

Liberal Intellectuals and Resistance Politics after Sharpeville: The problem of Theory and Practice in the transformation of South African Society.

INTRODUCTION

The specific issues which this dissertation will try to address should be seen against the background of an analysis of the nature of a particular tradition in South African liberalism. According to this analysis, a central concept in this ideology was that of a civil society: a community of interests in which the enlightened self-interest of its members worked eventually to promote the good of all. According to liberalism, the logic of economic development would ensure the progressive assimilation of all South Africans into non-racial capitalism as irrational preoccupations with ethnicity etc. were increasingly undercut and more and more individuals were able to pass the "civilization test" needed to qualify as a member of civil society.

This liberalism could thus be described as a "redemptive" liberalism: in its policies it saw the forces that would liberate South African society from the irrational politics of ethnicity and sectional interest and enable it to earn it its place among the civilized nations of the world.

FIELD OF STUDY

The purpose of my present research is to study a moment in the collapse of this ideology. It is a contention of this dissertation that the years between the rise to power of the National Party in 1948 and the collapse of the Liberal party are of critical importance. It looks as if these were the years in which liberal organizations moved to a position in which they, for the first time, were able to criticize the assumptions that underpinned white supremacy, but were at the same time incapable of following through the implications of such a criticism. This dissertation is an attempt to come to an understanding of the social processes that accompanied and gave rise to this dilemma, as well as its implications for liberal thought.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Only one term needs to be defined for the purposes of this research proposal: that of "intellectual". I have decided to use this category, not according to the intrinsic nature of its members' activities, but according to social function. "Intellectual" is thus used in the Gramscian sense of the organizing segment of any social class. Newspaper editors, party members, lawyers, priests and even

businessmen would thus be included in this category.

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is primarily a work of critical intellectual history, investigating thought as it arises out of concrete historical processes. As such, much space will be devoted to the logical analysis of arguments and concepts. These concepts will, however never be considered in isolation, but will be related to the historical situations that are the condition of their existence.

SPECIFIC ISSUES TO BE ADRESSED

The above methodological and terminological points suggest several concrete projects for research. The first set relates to the correct understanding of the social group or groups of which the intellectuals in question were the organizing segment: Research will have to be undertaken to ascertain the nature of the forces that influenced the birth and development of big capital in South Africa. The character and interests of the bourgeoisie thus created should be investigated. The origins of liberal ideology in this context should be studied, as well as the ways in which this ideology was disseminated. The functioning and role of liberal institutions such as the mission schools, the Joint Councils and the SAIRR should also be studied.

The second set of problems relates to the crisis and collapse of liberalism in the years after the rise to power of the National Party. Besides a study of liberal discourse during this period, an investigation into social processes at work in these years should be embarked on. An understanding of changes in the nature of postwar capitalism is vital here, as is a study of the changing attitudes of the black petty bourgeoisie to civil society.

SOURCES

The nature of the literature used would be more or less determined by the various projects engaged in. For the background study regarding the processes of capital accumulation in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as well as the economic history of the fifties and sixties, secondary material will be relied on. For the study of liberal discourse the writings of liberal intellectuals in South Africa (e.g. Hoernle, Duncan, Ballinger, Paton, Huddleston, Brookes, Molteno, etc.) will be used. Trial records, newspaper reports and personal interviews will also be relied on.

My training in political philosophy will also enable me to analyse sources not explicitly having a social and political content. Attention could, for instance, be paid to literary production in the 1960's, (Gordimer's novels being an obvious example), changes in the way history textbooks are being written etc., in order to gain an understanding of broader "intellectual life" in that period.