

**The Legacy of Anti-Apartheid Resistance History in
South Africa: A Precursor to the #Feesmustfall
Movement**

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Masila Joshua Masipa

University of Venda

Arts and Social Sciences (Development Studies Section)

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education,

masilajoshua.masipa@univen.ac.za; ngadi.rankakane@univen.ac.za



Ngadi Pertunia Rankakane

University of Venda

Arts and Social Sciences (Development Studies Section)

Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education,

masilajoshua.masipa@univen.ac.za; ngadi.rankakane@univen.ac.za

Abstract

This study aims to establish a historical framework for the events and sociopolitical tensions that culminated in South Africa's #FeesMustFall movement between 2015 and 2016. The subject is addressed in chronological sequence. Reviews of documentation on the evolution of the #FeesMustFall movement do not provide simple answers or point to causes. Rather, the evidence suggests that the movement resulted from a series of interconnected historical events, each built on the one before it. This paper discusses major historical milestones that are crucial to understanding the origins of

#FeesMustFall. These include the National Party's harsh and oppressive laws towards Black South Africans in the 1950s; the emergence and growth of the ANC Youth League culminating in the Defiance Campaign; the joint efforts of the ANC, the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), and the South African Communist Party (SACP) to make the country ungovernable, particularly by targeting Bantu Education; the adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955 and its implications for free education; the role of the PAC in resistance movements; the rise of trade unions and their contribution to the liberation struggle; the 1976 Soweto Uprising; the ANC's 52nd National Conference resolution on education; the rhetoric of ANC leaders regarding free education post-Conference; interpretations of the Freedom Charter and the South African Constitution concerning access to free education; the emergence of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and its Student Command; and the challenge of conflict management. This study assumes that all of these aspects are essential and interrelated. As a result, no one aspect takes precedence over the others.

Keywords: *Protest, Free Education, Public Good, Noble Cause, Resistance, Apartheid, Contradictions, Inequality.*

Introduction & Background

The #FeesMustFall movement, which began in South Africa in 2015, was much more than a student-led protest against rising university tuition prices. It was the climax of a lengthy history of resistance rooted in South Africa's liberation movements. The movement demanded free, decolonised education to address apartheid's unresolved injustices, notably those related to economic exclusion, educational inequality, and institutional racism (Nyundu, 2021). It showed the post-apartheid state's failure to address historical imbalances and keep emancipation pledges. While students ranged in methods, leadership, and political affiliations, their common demand was access to quality education without financial restrictions (Essack, 2020). The legislative framework of apartheid, adopted in 1948, serves as the root cause of persistent socioeconomic disparities that define South Africa's current development trajectory. Apartheid established a racially divided education system, institutionalised by laws such as the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which limited Black South Africans' educational possibilities (Kallaway & Peter, 2002). Historical resistance to this system included significant events such as the 1976 Soweto Uprising, in which students resisted the imposition of

Afrikaans as a language of instruction (Unterhalter et al., 2019). This rebellion was a watershed point in student activism and resistance culture.

Between the 1980s and the early 2000s, popular mobilisation increased through organisations such as the United Democratic Front (UDF), which brought together civic and political groups to oppose apartheid. Student organisations like the South African National Students Congress (SANSCO) and the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) were at the forefront of educational resistance, advocating for "People's Education for People's Power" and taking part in widespread school boycotts, rent strikes, and community protests (Teeger, 2015; Chapman, 2016). The National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), established in 1985, played a pivotal role in coordinating these demonstrations and advocating for a non-racial, democratic education system (Hendricks & Cheryl, 2018).

The 1994 democratic transition, while politically free, did not destroy the economic mechanisms that continued to marginalise the Black majority. Throughout the democratic era, many Black students have faced continued exclusion driven by high tuition fees, underfunded institutions, Eurocentric curricula, and systemic institutional racism (Nyundu, 2021; Albertus, 2019). By the time of the ANC's 52nd National Conference in 2007, the post-apartheid state's contradictions were becoming more apparent. Many members of the student movement perceived the ANC as co-opted by neoliberal policies and complicit in perpetuating inequality through the privatisation of education (Albertus, 2019).

#FeesMustFall has renewed this tradition of student resistance. Although students led the protests, the movement also addressed broader issues such as economic justice, decolonisation, LGBTQ+ rights, gender equity, and disability inclusion (Luescher et al., 2022). Activists criticised patriarchal leadership and the failure to address gender-based violence in colleges (Vosloo, 2020). Students with disabilities have expressed worry about inaccessible infrastructure and learning environments (Godsell, Chikane, & Mpofo-Walsh, 2016). Protest strategies included mass mobilisation, campus closures, social media campaigns, and direct communication with state and university leaders (Hodes, 2017). Twitter and Facebook were important in maintaining momentum and solidarity.

Though the government responded by increasing financial aid and providing free higher education to low-income students, its coercive actions radicalised many participants and exposed flaws in post-apartheid administration (Ntombana et al., 2023). The movement sparked national

debates about the decolonisation of knowledge production and impacted the future of student activism in South Africa.

Therefore, the #FeesMustFall movement cannot be understood in isolation. It represents a generational protest rooted in a history of resistance that dates back to apartheid's establishment in 1948, through the mobilisation of the 1980s, and the democratic disillusionments of the 2000s. Grasping this historical trajectory is essential to comprehending the movement's objectives, strategic evolution, and revolutionary potential within the ongoing South African struggle for equity and justice.

Materials and Methods

Secondary data were collected by reviewing relevant books, theses, conference presentations, periodicals, and other online documents. The resources were located through searches using a combination of apartheid-related terms and phrases. These included the 1948 student rebellion, the Fees Must Fall movement, apartheid laws, and resistance movements. Since the materials' importance was valued more highly than their age in terms of their noteworthy contribution to the current discourse on the book chapter's subject, the search was conducted without date restrictions. However, to reflect the topic's growing relevance and value, an attempt was made to incorporate as much contemporary work as feasible. The three primary criteria for inclusion were currency, authority, and relevance (Browning and Alessandro, 2019). The authority of a text is defined by whether a reputable source published it, underwent rigorous peer review, or was subject to professional editing. Relevance was assessed based on the item's contribution to the discussion topic. Citations, on the other hand, were used to assess currency, indicating if the information was still pertinent to the book chapter's subject (Mensah and Justice, 2019).

The National Party's Oppressive Laws towards Blacks

Apartheid is the result of colonial activities that established a racial hierarchy in South Africa. Academics such as Leonard Thompson in *A History of South Africa* argue that apartheid's formalisation was made feasible by the sociopolitical framework that existed before 1948 (Dhalla et al., 2000). According to Brian Lapping's *Apartheid: A History*, the rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the National Party's political manoeuvring

paved the way for the establishment of a system designed to maintain white supremacy while oppressing non-Whites (Morris, 2004).

The National Party, formed from a combination of Afrikaner nationalist parties, capitalised on post-World War II anger among Afrikaners who felt culturally and politically excluded by British colonial rule. Economic hardship and a lack of political representation fuelled their ambition for power (Sanders & Houghton, 2017). Before the 1948 election, the party capitalised on rhetoric surrounding Afrikaner nationalism and racial purity to court white voters anxious about the growing empowerment of the Black population. The electorate was enticed by pledges to preserve white political authority, notably in education (Beale, 1998).

Strategically, the National Party used propaganda to depict non-whites as a danger to social and economic security. This story echoed existing anxieties and biases among white South Africans. Despite receiving a minority of the popular vote, the party won thanks to an electoral system structured to favour white voters (Schaller and Waldman, 2025). This intellectual success laid the groundwork for legalised racial discrimination and the development of apartheid.

Scholars like Magee and Thompson (2010) emphasise the link between economic issues and Afrikaners' psychological drive to restore lost status in a fast-changing environment (Kriel, 2013). These characteristics created an environment conducive to the National Party's ascent. As a result, the party's growth was fuelled by historical grievances, socioeconomic stresses, and racial animosity, all of which shaped South African society for decades. The legal framework developed during this era institutionalised deep-seated racial prejudices and systemic structural inequalities. Understanding the rise of the National Party sheds light on apartheid's policies and consequences.

Legislative Acts that Institutionalised Racial Segregation

Discrimination existed before 1950, but apartheid formalised it. The Population Registration Act of 1950 classified all citizens by race, thereby facilitating institutionalised exclusion. The Group Areas Act of 1950 created segregated residential zones, displacing Black populations and limiting their rights. The Pass Laws restricted Black South Africans' freedom of travel and economic opportunity.

The Bantu Education Act (1953) guaranteed that Black South Africans received a subpar education (Moore, 2015). The Suppression of Communism Act (1950) criminalised dissent, resulting in the arrest of numerous Black leaders (Friedman, 2024). The Tricameral Parliament Act of 1983 excluded the Black majority, which fuelled unrest among Indian and Coloured populations (van Vuuren, 2019)—the Immorality (Amendment) Act (1950) outlawed interracial relationships, cementing racial barriers.

The *Rise and Fall of Apartheid* by David Welsh investigates how these laws resulted in a harsh system of policing non-white life, with severe social and economic consequences (Gqola, 2010). Structural barriers to education, employment, and property ownership perpetuated persistent poverty in these contexts. Crush's and Preston's *The Politics of Race and Class in South Africa* investigates how apartheid policies exacerbated underdevelopment in Black communities (Soske and Walsh, 2016), fuelling inequality and social instability.

Resistance and Opposition to the Apartheid System

The Emergence of the ANC Youth League and the Defiance Campaign

The Defiance Campaign and the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League were instrumental in defining South Africa's anti-apartheid movement. The ANC Youth League was formed in 1944 in response to rising unhappiness among young South Africans. According to Winant (2004), this time saw an upsurge in nationalism as well as consciousness of racial injustice. Youth League leaders such as Walter Sisulu and Anton Lembede preached African nationalism and called for more assertive opposition. According to Haron and Muhammad (2004), the League sought to resist both apartheid and other forms of colonial oppression. The Youth League's radical impact altered ANC tactics. Gumede (2008) contends that the League's attitude drove the ANC towards a more militant posture in the 1950s. This sparked the 1952 Defiance Campaign, which employed nonviolent protest to challenge restrictive legislation. Soske and Jon (2004) discuss how this campaign mobilised many racial groups through acts of civil disobedience, such as refusing to carry passbooks. According to van Vuuren (2010), the campaign's approach of nonviolence and mass mobilisation helped it secure international support and lay the groundwork for future protests such as Fees Must Fall.

The struggle also prompted the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the ANC's armed wing, in 1961. Gilbert and Shirli (2007) discuss how the campaign transformed resistance into more extreme manifestations. The creation of the ANC Youth League and the Defiance Campaign were two watershed moments that boosted anti-apartheid measures. They shaped South Africa's long-term political identity and informed subsequent movements, such as Fees Must Fall.

The South African Communist Party's Campaign against Bantu Education

The South African Communist Party (SACP), founded in 1921, was a key player in the anti-Apartheid struggle, fighting for revolutionary transformation. It emerged as a key participant within the Congress Alliance, operating in close coordination with the ANC. Jeffrey (2023) examines how the SACP's Marxist-Leninist principles influenced its actions and strategies. Goodman (2010) emphasises the party's role in connecting anti-colonial efforts to working-class and class-based movements.

In the 1980s, the SACP collaborated with the ANC to make South Africa unruly by organising massive rallies, strikes, and community mobilisation (Alexander et al., 2018). It supported armed resistance via Umkhonto we Sizwe. Kondlo, Kwandiwe, and Saunders (2014) claim that the goal was to undermine state authority and legitimacy. The regime's harsh response sparked growing resistance and international censure. Martin (2018) investigates how the state's harshness toward demonstrators fostered additional dissent.

The SACP's main focus was its resistance to Bantu education, which was intended to limit Black South Africans' educational prospects. Brooks (2015) discusses the SACP's proposal for dramatic educational reforms. The party backed revolutions such as the 1976 Soweto Uprising, which targeted the restrictive education system. Hassim (2006) describes how the SACP used educational initiatives to highlight systemic disparities. Johnson and Meckley (2005) argue that education reform was part of the SACP's broader socioeconomic objective. The party's action helped to undermine Bantu education and contributed to the larger anti-apartheid campaign.

South African Indian Congress (SAIC) as a Resistance Movement

The South African Indian Congress (SAIC), established in 1914, became a powerful force opposing racial discrimination. The organisation was established in response to discriminatory legislation, such as the 1913 Natives Land Act, which severely restricted Indian land ownership and broader civic liberties. Desai, Ashwin, and Goolam Vahed (2010) situate the SAIC within the broader context of South Africa's multiethnic anti-apartheid movement. The SAIC was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and advocated nonviolent resistance, specifically the ideology of satyagraha (truth force). Bose and Neilesh (2020) highlight Gandhi's early influence on SAIC techniques, which helped develop solidarity and resist injustice.

The South African Indian Congress (SAIC) used protests, legal challenges, and lobbying to oppose discriminatory policies, most notably the Indian Citizenship Bill of 1946. It worked with groups such as the ANC and trade unions to overcome ethnic differences (Yusuf, 2018; Everatt & David, 2009). Despite internal obstacles, the SAIC made major contributions to the anti-apartheid movement. Pillay (2018) claims that its importance has been neglected in favour of African-led narratives. The SAIC promoted Indian rights while also supporting broader liberation initiatives. Its distinct methods, relationships, and legacy are critical to understanding South Africa's democratic transition, and they provide crucial lessons for modern resistance organisations.

The Freedom Charter of 1955 and its Impact on Free Education

The Freedom Charter, adopted at Kliptown in 1955, is a cornerstone of the anti-apartheid campaign and is extensively supported by liberation parties such as the ANC. One of its guiding ideas is the need for free, comprehensive education. This principle arose during apartheid, which was characterised by systemic racial segregation and injustice. According to Vejby (2015), the Charter was created in reaction to legislation that discriminated against non-white South Africans, emphasising education as a means of achieving equality and independence.

A fundamental provision reads, "The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened," indicating a dedication to universal access to quality education. According to Van der Vyver, Fuller, and Khumalo (2023), this section intends to remove educational hurdles erected under apartheid. According to Mokoena (2023), the Charter supports not only access but also critical, culturally relevant education, empowering citizens to fight injustice.

Post-apartheid measures have reflected these principles. The South African Schools Act of 1996 ensures free basic education and promotes inclusive schooling. According to Fagbadebo and Faluyi (2022), these measures target entrenched inequities, which are consistent with the Charter's objective. However, Zickafoose et al. (2024) emphasise ongoing implementation issues, including resource scarcity, variable quality, and socioeconomic inequality, that continue to limit access.

By citing the Freedom Charter's vision of education as a basic right, initiatives like #FeesMustFall (2015) have successfully re-centred historical aspirations within contemporary South African political discourse. The As Claude (2005) observes, protestors demand that the government respect these objectives by expanding access to higher education. Overall, the Charter remains an effective emblem and foundation for educational fairness. While legislative accomplishments reflect its ambition, persistent gaps necessitate constant activism and innovation to fulfil the promise of free, high-quality education for all.

The Role of the PAC (Pan-African Congress) as a Resistance Movement

The Pan African Congress (PAC), established in 1959 as a breakaway from the ANC, was a major force in South Africa's anti-apartheid movement. The break was motivated by unhappiness with the ANC's perceived failure to represent the Black majority. The Pan-Africanism-based PAC emphasised African solidarity and self-determination (Adefila et al., 2022). Its Africanist worldview emphasised Black leadership and opposed multiracial coalitions that excluded Black South Africans (Khumalo & Thembinkosi, 2021).

The 1960 Sharpeville Massacre was a watershed moment for the PAC, forcing it to adopt more militant methods, including the founding of Poqo, its armed wing (Turton, 2024). Leaders such as Robert Sobukwe advocated for grassroots mobilisation and cultural empowerment, providing a unique perspective within the larger resistance movement (Padayachee & Van Niekerk, 2019).

The PAC used armed resistance, protests, and community engagement. Unlike the ANC's centralised strategy, the PAC's decentralised grassroots approach actively engaged local communities (Flores and Jeannie, 2019). Although sometimes eclipsed by the ANC,

researchers say that the PAC's emphasis on African nationalism and land reform continues to impact social justice movements today (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Ndhlovu, 2013).

The PAC's impact, while multifaceted, is nonetheless significant and deserves increased scholarly attention in South African political history.

Trade Union Movements and Resistance Struggles

The trade union movement has had a significant impact on South Africa's socioeconomic and political landscape, particularly during and after the anti-apartheid struggle. This literature review examines the historical context, key themes, and substantial contributions of trade unions to the South African anti-apartheid movement.

Trade unionism in South Africa began in the early 1900s, when unions formed in response to racial discrimination and exploitative labour practices. Early Black-led unions, such as the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), founded in 1919, were among the first to connect labour rights to broader political struggle (Lewis, 1984). Despite the state's repression, these early unions set the groundwork for future mobilisation. Academics such as Sebei (2019) and Kapp (2013) demonstrate how colonial and apartheid policies created a racially segmented labour market, resulting in racially divided unions. Nonetheless, unions were important platforms for promoting social justice and worker rights. The African National Congress (ANC) and other liberation forces collaborated with labour organisations to oppose apartheid (Nieftagodien, 2017).

The 1973 Durban strikes were a watershed moment, igniting a rebirth in Black labour action. These wildcat strikes prompted the foundation of new, autonomous trade unions, including the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in 1979 (Webster, 1985). FOSATU's dedication to worker democracy and non-racialism helped to unite fractured labour movements, paving the way for the establishment of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) in 1985. Masiya (2014) describes how COSATU became a key player in mobilising mass action, spearheading strikes, and collaborating with political movements to resist apartheid.

Politics and Labour: The Intersection

The interplay between trade unions and political movements has been a key issue in the literature. According to Munakamwe (2018), unions shaped national policy while also safeguarding workers' rights. Their affiliation with the ANC and membership in the Tripartite Affiliation represented labour's absorption into formal political processes. Understanding the political-labour interface is critical for analysing the unions' impact on post-apartheid policy development.

Challenges and Fragmentation

Despite their past achievements, South African trade unions face contemporary challenges, including internal conflicts, declining membership, and competition from newly formed independent unions. Neoliberal economic reforms have intensified these systemic issues by prioritising market-led efficiency over equitable public service delivery, and Brady (2019) observes that unions must change strategically to remain relevant in an evolving economic environment.

Current Concerns

Recent research stresses the long-term necessity of trade unions in addressing concerns such as globalisation, the gig economy, and precarious employment. Bischoff (2020) contends that, despite the decline of traditional union authority, unions continue to advocate for disadvantaged and marginalised workers.

The South African trade union movement has progressed from battling apartheid to confronting complicated post-apartheid labour and political concerns. Although COSATU has been at the forefront of labour resistance since 1985, prior organisations such as ICU and FOSATU helped set the groundwork for the movement. Future research should investigate the dynamic interplay between labour, politics, and socioeconomic change in the context of globalisation.

The 1976 Soweto riots were a resistance to Bantu education and Apartheid in general.

The 1976 Soweto riots were a watershed moment in South Africa's struggle against apartheid and the restrictive Bantu educational system. Bantu education, adopted in the 1950s, aims to deliver substandard education to Black South Africans, limiting their economic potential and entrenching segregation (Kallaway, 2002). According to Maluleka (2023), the curriculum was designed to train Black pupils for subordinate roles, whereas white students received a superior education.

The initial cause of the riots was the 1974 policy instruction. This approach, interpreted as oppressive language, sparked significant outcry (Jackson, 2023). Students arranged a peaceful march on June 16, 1976, but it turned violent when they clashed with police. Youth leadership was critical to the struggle; student organisations like the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) were crucial in mobilising and publicising anti-apartheid views (Demerson, 2020).

The riots had wide-ranging ramifications. They drew worldwide attention to apartheid, fueled local resistance, and brought together oppressed people (Anisin et al., 2021). The Soweto uprising is a strong symbol of grassroots resistance, demonstrating how institutional injustice can spark large-scale movements for justice and liberation.

Resistances after the 1976 Riots to 1994

The #FeesMustFall movement of 2015-2016 must be viewed in the context of anti-apartheid resistance, particularly mass mobilisation efforts in the 1980s. Following the 1976 Soweto Uprising, the 1980s saw increased youth and civic action, driven by organisations such as the United Democratic Front (UDF), formed in 1983 as a broad-based anti-apartheid alliance. The UDF was instrumental in coordinating mass resistance to governmental structures through civil disobedience, community organising, and mobilisation (Seekings, 2000).

Student-led organisations such as the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) and the South African National Students Congress (SANSCO) rose to prominence in challenging Bantu education and promoting "People's Education for People's Power," which aimed to transform education into a tool for liberation (Unterhalter, 1991). The National Education Crisis Committee (NECC), established in 1985, strengthened community-based and student-led education battles by promoting democratic engagement in schools and opposing state-imposed curricula (Chisholm & Fuller, 1996).

Mass protests, including rent, transport, and school boycotts, demonstrated a widespread rejection of apartheid-aligned governance and intensified public frustration with structural social inequality (Badat, 1999). These grassroots campaigns left a legacy of coordinated defiance and participatory democracy. The principles, strategies, and demands of the 1980s resistance had a direct impact on the intellectual underpinnings and mobilisation tactics of the #FeesMustFall movement, which echoed earlier calls for accessible, decolonised, and transformative education.

The 52nd ANC conference resolution on education and the rhetoric of ANC members about free education after the 52nd ANC National Conference

The African National Congress's (ANC) 52nd National Conference in 2017 was a watershed point in determining South Africa's educational policy. The conference's central resolution was to establish free tertiary education, which was motivated by increased public demand and the impact of student protests, particularly the #FeesMustFall movement (Saunders & Limb, 2020). This resolution emphasised education as a human right and a means for redressing historical injustices and fostering social equity. Scholars such as Badat and Yusuf (2014) argue that the resolution meant not just to eliminate financial barriers but also to improve educational quality at all levels. However, the post-conference discussion highlighted fissures within the ANC. While some members argued for the urgent introduction of free education as a moral imperative, others questioned its financial viability (Molokwane, 2019). This internal conflict mirrors broader concerns about South Africa's economic constraints and competing budget priorities.

Critics contend that the ANC's rhetoric is outpacing its implementation. Nkosi (2024) adds that the lack of a precise execution plan casts doubts on the party's commitment. In contrast, Kenyon and Madlingozi (2022) highlight the disparity between government pledges and students' lived realities, particularly regarding resource allocation and institutional support.

Nonetheless, the meeting sparked renewed agitation among civil society and student organisations demanding free, high-quality education (Ndlovu, 2019). Although these resolutions represented a dramatic shift, persistent intra-party disagreements and funding limitations indicate that

achieving egalitarian education remains a complex, contentious challenge in post-apartheid South Africa.

The Interpretation of the Freedom Charter and the South African Constitution on Free Education

Both the 1955 Freedom Charter and the South African Constitution of 1996 emphasise the right to free and equal education. The Charter, which emerged from the anti-apartheid movement, said that "the doors of learning and culture shall be opened," representing a vision of inclusive, democratic education (Lissoni, 2008; Chalklen, 2015). Following apartheid, this concept was included in Section 29 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to "free and compulsory" basic education (Macakati, 2019).

Scholars say that the Constitution turned the Charter's principles into legally binding rights. Fuo (2014) demonstrates how the Bill of Rights can be used to challenge systematic educational inequities. Court decisions such as *Minister of Basic Education v. Basic Education for All* highlight the judiciary's involvement in interpreting and upholding these rights (Arendse, 2020).

Despite this structure, implementation remains challenging. Woolman and Fleisch (2009) critique the state's failure to completely realise free education, citing ongoing challenges with funding, resource disparity, and infrastructure. Activist intellectuals such as Simon and Sikoyo (2021) highlight the importance of grassroots movements in holding the government accountable and advancing educational justice.

Debates increasingly centre on the conflict between free education and educational quality. Pritchett (2014) and others highlight persistent gaps between urban and rural schools, while Chikwe et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of continually adapting legislative interpretations to address digital and socioeconomic challenges. While the right to education is firmly established, realising its full potential necessitates a combination of legal action, policy reform, and persistent civil society engagement.

SASCO and EFFSC as Pressure Groups in Higher Education Institutions

The Economic Freedom Fighters Student Command (EFFSC) and the South African Students' Congress (SASCO) are two prominent advocacy

organisations in South African higher education. Both organisations prioritise student rights, educational access, and overall sociopolitical reform.

Formed in 1991 and affiliated with the ANC, SASCO emerged from the anti-apartheid struggle to advocate for a more equitable educational system. Scholars such as Godsell, Chikane, and Mpofu-Walsh (2016) underline its importance in building student political consciousness after apartheid. The EFFSC, formed following the EFF's founding in 2013, seeks radical economic reform and opposes structural disparities in education (Soldaat, 2022).

Both groups use protests and mobilisation to shape institutional and governmental choices. Notably, they were key drivers of the #FeesMustFall movement, which fuelled calls for free education (Leong et al., 2019). SASCO also negotiates with university administrations through a combination of protest and institutional engagement (Hlongwa, 2021).

Their efforts have resulted in increased financing for underprivileged kids and national discussions on education reform (Radcliffe et al., 2018). They also target institutional racism, gender injustice, and corruption, boosting political awareness among students (Khumalo 2019).

However, fragmentation within the student movement, caused by ideological disagreements between groups such as SASCO and EFFSC, might hinder collective aspirations (Shingange, 2021). Furthermore, increasing student weariness jeopardises the viability of activism (Ntombana et al., 2023). Despite obstacles, SASCO and the EFFSC remain crucial players in the fight for fair, accessible, and transformational higher education in South Africa.

Conclusion

The Fees Must Fall movement is deeply rooted in a history of resistance against educational inequities in South Africa. By examining the precursor movements since 1948, we can better understand the complexities and motivations driving contemporary student activism. Current efforts to secure equitable higher education in South Africa are deeply rooted in previous struggles, which define the urgency of systemic transformation needed to address ongoing disparities. Previous resistance efforts provide

a blueprint for future campaigns, and the tactics and strategies employed during the Defiance Campaign serve as a model for the current action.

Resistance movements raised political consciousness by engaging the grassroots through mass mobilisation and by forming alliances among different groups. Resistance movements provided political education by raising awareness of injustices and promoting African identity to decolonise the mind. Continued Inspiration: Its legacy continues to inspire contemporary movements for social justice, human rights, and equality, both in South Africa and globally. The Defiance Campaign left a profound legacy that transformed the landscape of resistance in South Africa. Beyond advancing the anti-apartheid struggle, this movement established foundational principles of activism and solidarity that continue to inform contemporary efforts for justice and equality.

The Fees Must Fall movement drew on historical legacies of resistance, utilising tactics of protest, civil disobedience, and solidarity that had been cultivated over decades. The events resulted from a culmination of past events, with one factor forming a building block for the next, and all factors interrelated and interacting.

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