

Candidate 1 evidence

Advanced Higher History
South Africa 1902-1984 (8)

How important was the contribution of Dr DF Malan to the growth of Afrikaner nationalism by 1948?

Introduction

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By 1948, Dr DF Malan and his *Herenigde (Reunited) Nasionale Party* (HNP) had harnessed the political power of Afrikaner nationalism – a movement which saw South Africa dominated by the white successors of the original Dutch settlers. Their right to power, as Malan advocated, was God-given and bitter-won. On just 36% of the popular vote, the party's message of Apartheid saw it to victory against the Smuts administration, whose appeal had been eroded by the constitutional crisis of entering the Second World War, consequent surges in black urbanisation and a perceived neglect of the white middle- and working-classes.

Koorts has argued that the rise of Malan as a political figure is inextricably linked to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism, having led the main Afrikaner political party into South Africa's first purely nationalist government, and having been the most prominent figurehead for the movement until then.

The complex dynamics of this nationalism cannot be assessed in reference to a single man, of course. Most historians acknowledge the presence of larger socio-economic forces, and indeed the contribution of other individuals and polities. Marks, Trapido and other revisionists, for example, argue that Afrikaner nationalism is “best understood as a response to the social dislocations... of capitalism”¹, in its deterioration of the Afrikaner economic position. Patterson has also highlighted the legacy of the Boer War, and the popularisation of history, as part of a larger cultural-religious nationalism endorsed by organisations like the FAK.

In assessing Malan's contribution to the growth of Afrikaner nationalism up until his 1948 election victory his influence in three spheres will be assessed – in the rise of Afrikaner culture; in the socio-economic development of Afrikaner nationalism; and in politics. While Malan was certainly “an Afrikaner nationalist in the fullest sense of the word”², his personal influence must be viewed in the context of events and circumstances out with his control.

With that said, Malan brought together the cultural and socio-economic undercurrents of nationalism to form a clear political package, standing in contrast to an opposition whose

¹ Trapido, S. and Marks, S. (1987) *The Politics of Race: Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa*. 1st edn. New York: Longman; pp.10

² Koorts, L. (2014) *D.F. Malan and the rise of Afrikaner nationalism*. Cape Town: Tafelberg; introduction, pp.xi

message was obscure and divided. Without his unique and vigorous brand of Christian-nationalist rhetoric to articulate and enhance Afrikaner national sentiments, Afrikaner nationalism's appeal would have remained an intellectualism, and not the vehicle for popular political support it had become by 1948.

Thoroughness/ Relevance of Information and Approach Analysis, Evaluation and Line of Argument Historical Sources/ Interpretations

Koorts agrees that his leadership was of a “symbolic nature”⁶, using his charisma among the circles of the Afrikaner elite to give language a nationalist drive – he spoke a year later of the ATV as an “awakening of our nation... to take up a more dignified place in the world’s civilisations.”⁷ In 1915, he furthered his association with Afrikaans by establishing *Die Burger*, against the backdrop of other Afrikaner periodicals such as *Die Huisgenoot* and *Die Transvaler*. It provided a direct mouthpiece for his nationalist agenda - Giliomee agrees that the paper “carried by far the most weight of the Afrikaans or Dutch newspapers.”⁸

Malan’s recognition of the importance of Afrikaans to the cultural movement went further. He proposed and led the bill for recognition of Afrikaans as an official language in 1925 as Minister for the Interior, allowing its use in the civil service and education. With growing numbers of poor whites in schools, the legislation prevented Anglicisation among young Afrikaners and allowed them to use their common tongue more widely. By 1946 Afrikaans was spoken by 3.6 million people.

Malan combined the increasing ubiquity of the language with the religious rationalisation of the Dutch Reformed Church (of which 90% of Afrikaners were adherents), to harness cultural sentiment on a wider scale than anyone else in Afrikanerdom. In 1915 he recognised the DRC’s purpose to “cultivate among the Afrikaner people the awareness of a national calling”⁹. Dunbar-Moodie stresses the popular appeal of this ‘neo-Calvinism’, which formed the rationale for an ideology in which the Afrikaner had divine and exclusive right to South Africa, a narrative emphasised by Malan in 1934 and thereafter:

“Afrikanerdom is not the work of Man [sic] but the Creation of God.”¹⁰

To this end Malan’s cultural appeal peaked with his Voortrekker speech in 1938, which “stirred the dormant national ardour of most Afrikaners”¹¹ and drew in an estimated 100,000 people. Malan fused a powerful spiritual argument with a popularisation of Boer history to garner national pride and divine righteousness which justified Afrikaner hegemony:

⁶ Koorts, *op. cit.*, pp.62

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.

⁸ Giliomee, *op. cit.*, pp.374

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.385

¹⁰ Elphick, R.H. and Davenport, R. (eds.) (1998) *Christianity in South Africa: A political, social, and cultural history*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp.370

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.37

Conclusion

Conclusion

Analysing the influence of an individual in a social movement as large and as complex as nationalism threatens to bend to the ‘Great Man’ theory of history at the expense of a more nuanced explanation. But, as was to be seen often throughout the 20th century, charismatic men like Malan could tip the political balance in favour of one political or ideological course over another, especially in a society where parliamentary democracy gives a single representative mandate over a large social group. For Afrikaner nationalism, Malan inevitably became that representative on the political stage when opponents were forced to compromise.

The common National Party image owes much credit to Malan. He carefully marketed it to ensure he remained the sole figurehead of Afrikanerdom despite the threats posed by other groups like the *Ossewabrandwag*. In breaking away from mainstream politics to ensure Afrikanerdom had a voice, then consolidating and strengthening that voice by eliminating competitors and adapting to electoral demands, he gave Afrikaner nationalism more political power than it had ever previously had. His popular image, amplified through his cultural exposure, broadened and simplified the nationalist message, while his influence in stoking socio-economic fears earned it the backing of a large, mostly working-class Afrikaner alliance, using careful backing of Afrikaner-oriented institutions – of language, media and business – to broaden his exposure.

These contributions were of course only possible after the cultural and socio-economic roots of nationalism had germinated, and Malan’s contribution was founded on these. The role of the Broederbond, of which Malan was a member, in influencing Afrikaner economics and culture was often substantial, in creating the FAK and promoting Afrikaner business; while the importance of the language reforms and Afrikaner media, to which Malan later attached himself, was a key stepping stone in developing his populist rhetoric. The influence of previous governments also helped lay the foundations for a nationalist victory – the alienations of the SAP; the partial victory under Hertzog’s Pact Government; the controversial entrance into the Great War and Second World War providing examples. The constitutional construction of the nation itself even precipitated a nationalist upsurge by giving greater weight to rural Afrikaner votes. Indeed, without a large Afrikaner underclass available to mobilise through fear and

group solidarity, Malan's popular appeal would not have translated into such electoral success.

But Malan's charisma and obstinacy came at the right place and the right time for a cause which had his personal and ideological attachment. Malan thus became an 'umbrella figure' for Afrikaner nationalism: "he used his status to draw people to a cause, but did not become involved in its tedious administration."⁴⁵ In doing so he led South Africa into its first purely nationalist government, defining its history for decades to come.

⁴⁵ Koorts, *op. cit.*, pp.157