**POL 3013: South African Political Thought**

**Lecture 33: Apartheid and Decolonization**

**1..Apartheid before Verwoerd:** When the NP came to power in 1948, it had no clear conception of apartheid or its rationale. Its racial policies were often a piecemeal attempt to promote the interests of white workers and farmers (mainly Afrikaners) and expand the state’s economic role at the expense of the big corporations (owned by English-speaking whites). D.F. Malan’s letter of December 1953 to the Rev. John Piersma of Grand Rapids, U.S.A., gives a bewildering variety of justifications: according to Malan, apartheid respects tradition, makes it possible to bring Christianity to blacks, is necessary because of “a still primitive non-White population,” etc. Theoretically, apartheid could be achieved by dividing South Africa into two states—one for whites and one for blacks—but this was not “practical politics,” according to Malan, and the policy would have to proceed by “trial and error” (Malan’s letter is included in Leo Kuper, *Passive Resistance in South Africa* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957], pp. 217-26).

**2. Verwoerd’s blueprint:** Verwoerd became Minister of Native Affairs in Malan’s cabinet in 1950 and Prime Minister in 1958. By then, it was clear that Africa would be decolonized, and that white rule in South Africa would be without the support of existing Western colonialism. In this context, Verwoerd proposed that apartheid be extended to the creation of separate spheres of government and citizenship for different racial and ethnic groups. Many NP members resisted the idea that blacks could one day govern their own independent states within South Africa, but were reassured by white control of the process. Urban blacks would be assigned citizenship in such homelands, even if they had never lived in them. Border industries would enable blacks to live in these homelands and come into South Africa when their labour was needed. In time, blacks move or be moved to black territories or institutions. In practice, these policies could only be enforced through massive forced removals and ever harsher repression, creating huge suffering.

**3. Macmillan’s visit to Cape Town:** In 1960, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan toured various British colonies in Africa, as a prelude to granting some of them independence later in the same year. He concluded his tour in Cape Town, where he addressed both houses of parliament. Above all, he sought to convey to the South African parliament the “wind of change” blowing through Africa and the need for them to “accept it as a fact” and adapt to it (“Address by Harold Macmillan,” p. 475). Macmillan suggests that this is no more than a repetition of then process that gave rise to the creation of nation-states in Europe centuries before. He locates the process in the context of the Cold War, in which there is a contest for the allegiance of “those parts of the world whose people are at present uncommitted either to Communism or to our Western ideas” (p. 476). Macmillan speaks of South Africa as part of the “Western Powers” rooted in the “same soil” of Christianity and the rule of law (476, 4787). But at the same time he makes clear his disagreement with apartheid policies, which does not respect the rights of free individuals (477, 478). He speaks as if the British Empire had never enforced racial domination in its Empire, which was then about to be dismantled!

**4. Verwoerd’s decolonization:** In his reply, Verwoerd presents the disagreement as one that is limited the right means to win African support for the West in the context of the Cold War. Britain’s decolonization and South Africa’s apartheid are striving for the same ideals, he claims. “If our policies are rightly understood, it will be seen that what we are attempting to do is not at variance with the new direction in Africa but is in the fullest accord with it” (“Speech of Thanks,” p. 337). In varying degrees, both Verwoerd and Macmillan accept the fictions of decolonization, discussed in lecture 25 of this course. Verwoerd argued elsewhere for a form of modernization in Africa that differed from that offered by decolonization, in which white South Africans and former colonial powers played a more direct role in development and education, conceding democratic rule to African societies in stages.