

SOUTH AFRICA AFTER APARTHEID

2. High aspirations, dismal results

Leaders of the African National Congress party like Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa were freedom-fighters in their day. Their mission to overcome the

apartheid system was a success. However, South Africa's leaders changed after getting their hands on the reins of power. The one major exception was Nelson Mandela, who lived an exemplary life on his government salary — even donated part of it to charity. However he, too, was tarnished by his efforts to cover up for his wife, the corrupt and thuggish Winnie Mandela.

For the rest of the Big Men of South Africa, are the spoils of victory too tempting to resist? Is it payback for all those years fighting apartheid? Is it because they blurred the line between the interests of their African National Congress party (ANC) and the state? Whatever the reasons, their behavior has been disappointing.

Disappointing but sadly, not surprising. Beyond South Africa's



Jacob Zuma, president, 2009-2018



Cyril Ramaphosa is celebrated on a stamp and souvenir sheet at his inauguration in 2018.



This cover from 1994 shows stamps with President Mandela, South Africa's new anthem in English and Afrikaans, the redrawn flag and government buildings in Pretoria.



High aspirations continued to receive lip service — at least on this inspirational stamp from 1995.

borders, African liberators of past decades routinely became leaders of autocratic regimes, amassing fortunes for themselves, their cliques and tribes, while the rest of the people were shut out. In what has become a multi-generational, continent-wide slide, the elites have profited from the ever-continuing extraction of precious metals and other resources by global interests. The elites have sustained their corrupt practices by co-opting opponents, or subduing them by legal harassment, threats and violence. Why should South Africa be any different?

Alas, predictions of new dawns and fresh starts have been part of the heartbreaking legacy of post-independence Africa, going back more than half a century. Instead of yielding to bright young leaders ready to take their places as public servants, the old guard clings to power. When one Big Man passes from the scene, another is ready and waiting. Their proteges follow their example.

There are fortunes to be made. Those who block the path to the trough could end up dead.

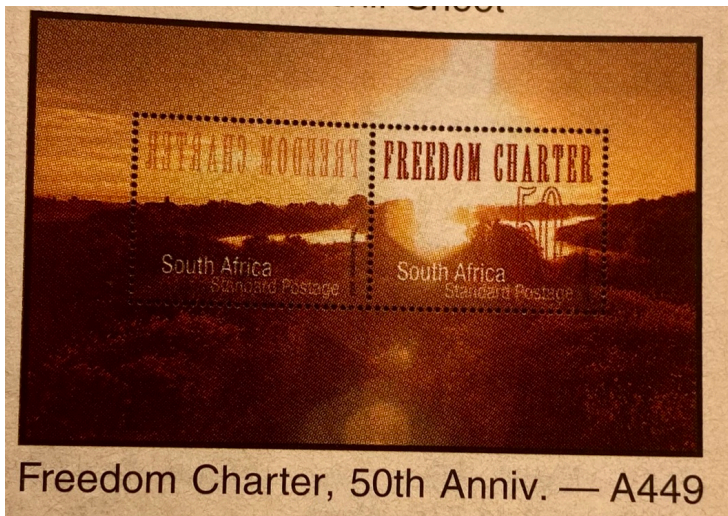
On taking over in South Africa in 1994, the ANC pledged to fulfill the promises of the Freedom Charter of 1955, which offered a series of exhortations followed by exclamation marks, such as: “The People Shall Govern! ... All Shall Be Equal Before the Law! ... There Shall Be Peace and Friendship!”

Among the other guarantees: “There Shall Be Houses, Security and Comfort!” ... and “The Doors of Learning and

Culture Shall Be Opened!”

High aspirations, indeed. The reality, 30 years later, is appalling.

Unemployment has risen since the end of apartheid, hovering between 25 and 35 percent. As for “doors of learning,” a report published in 2022 found that 81 percent of Grade 4 students could not understand what they were reading. South Africa’s schools used to be excellent — for whites at least. Now some educators say even Black students were better off under apartheid than in today’s



Freedom Charter, 50th Anniv. — A449



South Africa’s new constitution, commemorated by this series of stamps in 1996, embodied the aspirations of the Freedom Charter. Good luck with that.



At least the vote, commemorated here in a strip of stamps from 1997, has survived as a democratic bulwark — so far.

crumbling, underfunded schools. Housing is still scarce: Some families have been waiting for decades. Construction is often shoddy, and there are frequent power blackouts and water outages because utilities have been hollowed out by corruption.

In 2023, only 22 percent of South Africans polled approved of the functioning of South Africa's democracy — down from 63 percent in 2004.

The ANC was handed its first electoral defeat this June. A worried party veteran watched voters lining up to cast their ballots. "You know, these people are not queuing to vote to say thank you to the ANC for taking the lights away," he said.

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