

# NEW ZEALAND'S RUGBY CONTACT WITH SOUTH AFRICA

## *Apartheid, National Protest and International Isolation* BY URBAN SEIFERT

### Apartheid in South Africa after 1948

The national election of South Africa in 1948 was a blow of fate for Africa. One million citizens were invited to vote. There are several reasons, why the National Party ("Herengide Nasionale Party") and the Afrikaner Party won, but basically they had success because they made racial statements, linked Black power to communism (which scared most of the white citizens) and because lots of the "Black" Africans were not allowed to vote. In the end there was a coalition of National Party and Afrikaner Party won a thin majority of five seats, which were enough to terrify the "Black" Africa for a long time.

They separated races in a policy called "Apartheid". This separation in different races, which were seen as different from each other, was legalized by lots of acts. During the years a system was developed which categorized South African's into four racial groups: Blacks, Whites, Indians/Asians and Coloureds, whereby the White Race was made superior. The separation was among others mainly supported by the "Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act", which was announced in 1970. This act required that the Black population of South Africa become citizens of one of the 10 "homelands", where four homelands were reserved for whites and five for blacks. Regarding the proportions of the different races in former South Africa, this was even more unjust. In 1950, the government passed a law that prohibited racial mixed marriages. Some years later, even sexual contact and relationships between different races were forbidden.

As in every country, there were critics on the current government, in South Africa, especially by the disadvantaged Black population. Characteristic for false democracies and autocracies is, that critics were forbidden



flour bombs being thrown on the field as a sign of protest



and that critics were silenced. In South Africa, this happened by violence. There were campaigns and actions, as well as laws, which prevented the Black population from offering criticism on the white government. In 1950, Act No. 44 was published under this purpose. The act was called "Suppression of Communism Act" and forbid the Communism Party. But not only the party was forbidden, every communism was illegal, whereby everyone who wants to change a law, especially laws regarding black civil rights, was defined as a communist.

So the government was enabled to silence critics. Besides laws, there were also campaigns and even massacres to show force and to terrify the non-white population. On the 21st March, 1960, there was a first outbreak of heavy violence by the South African police during a demonstration of about 6000 black people close to a police station in Sharpsville, near Johannesburg. As the police report says, unexperienced police officers started firing which set off a chain reaction. This caused, as official sources say, the deaths of 69 people. Other, independent observers still estimate more people being killed. The black South African student Nelson Mandela was member of the anti-Apartheid party called "ANC - African National Congress" when he was arrested in August 1962 and sentenced to five years of imprisonment due to illegal journeys to foreign countries and invitations to strikes. In 1964, he was sentenced to life-long imprisonment because of sabotage and armed conflicts. Even though this violence was not physical, he and all fellow critics suffered violence.

### The effects of the rugby contact with South Africa on New Zealand

Rugby is sort of a National Sport for New Zealand since the 1880s. The son of a speaker of the House of the Representative introduced Rugby into New Zealand when he came back from a journey to London. The first international game was played in 1882 when the national team of New South Wales toured through New Zealand. In every British colony rugby became popular in the first half of the 20th century. Matches between the national teams were source for national pride and a highlight for everyone who was interested in sports. In Australia, the national team was called the Wallabies. Even today games between the Wallabies and the All Blacks, the national team of New Zealand called because of their dress, are international highlights. The national team of South Africa is called "The Springboks".

When the National Party was elected in 1948, the apartheid policy even influenced the national and international sport by banning the races from playing sports. As a sign of protest, the British cricket team stopped playing tests with South Africa. In 1958 the Rugby Union began selecting a team for the 1960 tour to South Africa. The team had to be white, because it had to conform to the apartheid rules. Lots of the New Zealanders wanted to see rugby without any disturbance by politics, so the tour went on.

But there was opposition to the tour. Mainly Maori and Pakeha, who both were not allowed to play in South Africa, created a petition that was signed by about 156000 New Zealanders, because they saw New Zealand confirming and supporting South Africa in Apartheid laws. There was also a campaign called "No Maors, no tour". But the problem became even an international affair. Dr. Verwoerd, South African Prime Minister declared in 1964, that no Maoris would be acceptable in South Africa for the 1967 tour. Keith Holyoake, National Party member and Prime Minister of New Zealand, responded, that the people of New Zealand are not able to be represented by a team which has been chosen by racist laws.

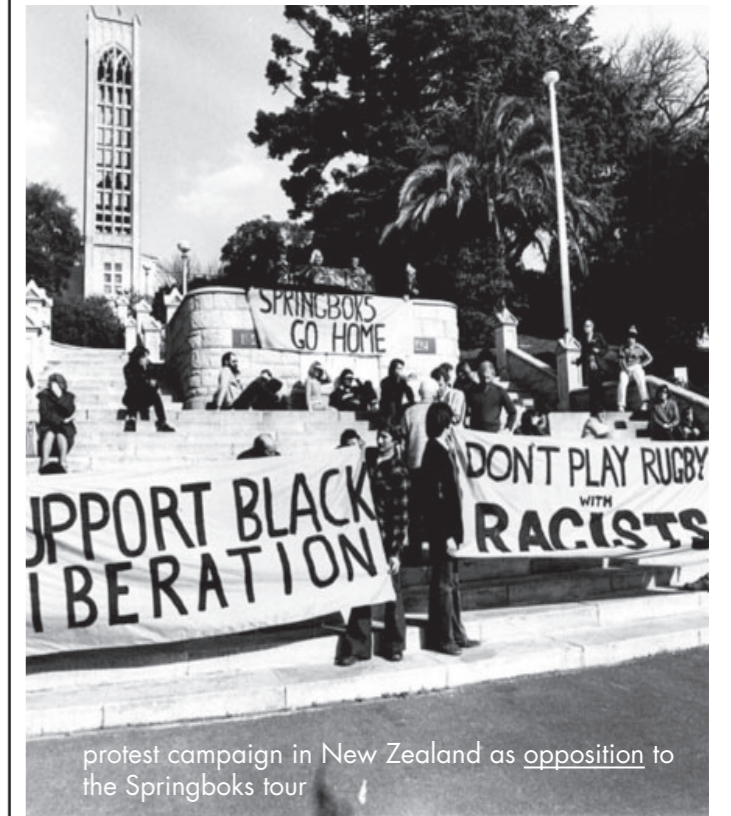
So the tour was put off and there was lots of disappointment. People wanted to see rugby. The South African government allowed in 1970 four Maori players to play with the All Blacks. A organization called "Halt All Racist Tours" claimed that New Zealand should not play in South Africa until the racial policies are changed. The Rugby Union began preparing a tour for 1974, but the Labour Party member Prime Minister Norman Kirk announced in 1973 that he would not issue visas to a racially selected team. Police warned that violence would break out between those who wanted to watch rugby and them who opposed Apartheid. This helped to make the Commonwealth Conference in August 1973 a success, relations to Black Africa and Asia were improved. New Zealand presented a good image to the world.

So there was also sort of a support for a rugby contact by South Africa. People wanted to see rugby, the national sport without any political interference. They said, that politics are not allowed to argue on a level of national sports. Here everyone has to ask himself, whether people who pass racist laws are allowed to tell another country which people may play. After Robert Muldoon won the vote in New Zealand in 1975, he kept his word in saying that nobody may stop New Zealand in their freedom of sports and power: The All Blacks went to South Africa. Three years before that, 80 per cent of the people polled they would give support to a tour to South Africa.

In 1981, the Springboks were invited to New Zealand, which caused one of the biggest civil disruptions in history of New Zealand. George Bowen, historian, said, that it was a fortune that nobody had been killed. While rugby fans, which gave support to the tour, filled the stadiums, the streets around them were filled by the opposition. Matches were cancelled, and in Auckland flour bombs were dropped during the final test match. The members of the opposition saw New Zealand to be a paradise for racial unity.

### The reaction of other countries to New Zealand rugby contact with South Africa

But there was not only national-wide protest against the Rugby contact with South Africa. New Zealand's international image was strongly influenced by their behaviour in the case of the rugby contact. There was isolation on an international level. Due to the fact, that New Zealand was seen as supporting apartheid, it was isolated in international affairs. After the tour to South Africa in 1976, 12 African states boycotted the Olympic Games in Montreal due to New Zealand's presence. African states voted against New Zealand being in the United Nation's security council in 1984, because they saw New Zealand giving way to racist laws.



protest campaign in New Zealand as opposition to the Springboks tour

New Zealand's rugby contact with South Africa had also effect on the Commonwealth Meeting in 1977 at Gleneagles. As the New Zealand's Rugby contact was inspiration, they promised to "vigorously combat the evil of apartheid ... government to determine, in accordance with its laws, the methods by which it might best discharge these commitments."

But the protest inside and outside New Zealand made countries and people think about there acting towards South Africa, so that New Zealand was sort of a source of inspiration for them. One example for that was that Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, who refused permission for the Springboks' airplane to land in Australia for refuelling on route to New Zealand during the tour in 1981.

As the Labour Party won the elections in 1984, the rugby contact ended. South Africa even closed their embassy in Wellington. In 1990, the Apartheid collapsed, which was a fortune for black Africa and for the All Blacks, who now were able to play against the Springboks without having to conform any racist laws.