

Time Travel in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Ikageng, February 1986

Goals

Reflect on problems and actions in the 1980s and today
Understand the history of Ikageng

Facts, South Africa in the 1980s

During the 1940s and 1950s the core of apartheid was formed by implementing the Native Urban Areas Act and the Group Areas Act. The deliberate residential segregation of the different legally defined categories (by race classification) living in South Africa started and mostly powerless black people were forced to move to other areas. In 1976 a new and nation wide opposition to these laws arose although the issue then, for the first time, was education. The most well known confrontation regarding education was in Soweto, but there were protest marches and confrontations in many places, for instance also in Ikageng.

In 1983 the government introduced a new Constitution with three legislative chambers, but only for whites, coloureds and Indians. This tri-chamber-solution was however, something that no one really wanted, and the real power would still be in the hands of a privileged (white) minority. All of this was done despite immense pressure from both the surrounding world, where most nations agreed that the apartheid-system should change drastically, and also from a large part within the nation itself that were demanding fundamental political change.

The year 1983 also saw the launch of a new front – the UDF (United Democratic Front) a non-racial organisation that was an umbrella organization for more than 500 diverse groups. Most of these were congress-/mass organizations. The starting point for the UDF was not a coincidence as one of their aims was to protest against the new constitution and its effects on South African society, which now even became more divided, hence their motto “UDF unites – Apartheid divides”.

The reaction to oppression and particularly the new constitution were enormous and started uprisings in townships all around South Africa with boycotts, sit outs, students’ and workers’ stay-aways. Many of these protests were organized by the UDF whose ideas and policies were based on the Freedom Charter of 1955. The UDF was non-violent from the beginning but still there was violence, often as a result of actions from the police and the army. Different uprisings went on from 1984 to 1986 resulting in the national State of Emergency in 1986 – South Africa had moved into a state of siege.

Potchefstroom/Ikageng in the 1980s

From 1958-1963 the black people were moved from Makweteng to Ikageng. The following years Coloureds and Indians were moved to “their” townships, and the result was a more segregated Potchefstroom than before. In the early 1980s Ikageng consisted of about 4.500 houses and some 34,000 inhabitants. There were very poor services in Ikageng – only one public telephone, one small Clinic, some tuck shops and one high school, Tlokwe High School. The people of Ikageng had to go to town or elsewhere to work or to find work.

During 1984 – 1986 the UDF and the Ikageng Civic Organisations arranged many meetings to discuss and implement actions such as boycotts and sit-outs. Among the most efficient actions were the consumer boycotts. Instead of buying from the white shops in town the people in Ikageng purchased what they needed in Ikageng or went to the Indians’ stores. Also the students and the youth organized themselves nationally and locally, in organizations like the Congress of South African Students, the Student Representative Council and the Ikageng Youth Congress. The students of the Tlokwe High School were very engaged in the protests and actions.

As there were no big assembly halls in Ikageng most of the UDF and Ikageng Civic Organization's meetings were held in the different churches who cooperated and opened their doors for meetings of various kinds. The police monitored the meetings, and sometimes they intervened, since most meetings were illegal, and then ordered people to go home. At times they used teargas, rubber bullets and even real bullets. In the year 1986, 13 boys were killed by the police in Ikageng.

Scenario: A public meeting of the Ikageng Civic Organisation, focusing on student issues, in the AME Church in Ikageng, February 1986

People in Ikageng are suffering from the State of Emergency and the apartheid system. There is total frustration and anger in Ikageng as well as in other parts of the country and many people protest. The idea is to make the country ungovernable. The people in the township are dissatisfied with the poor municipal services, bad facilities for the schools, housing, high rents, low wages, bad electricity, etc. There are protest marches, rent boycotts and student boycotts. The police seem to be everywhere in the township and they could arrest anyone. They check illegal meetings, stop protest actions and often arrest people. The students at Tlokwe High School are very active. They are dissatisfied with the whole situation and have nightly meetings, organize sit-ins and boycotts. Protest marches often start from the school.

There has been several clashes in Ikageng when the police has used guns, teargas and rubber bullets. Earlier this year six boys were killed by the police outside the AME church after a political meeting. Times are tough in Ikageng. People plan for more actions to gain better living conditions and with the ultimate goal to overthrow the government and once and for all end the apartheid system.

The Ikageng Civic Organisation, one of the structures of the UDF, has called for meetings in several of the churches in Ikageng: The meetings are held to put pressure on the local and national government to take away the extensive powers for the police and the State of Emergency, to stop the hated apartheid systems and of course for better conditions in Ikageng like: good education, running water, functioning sewerage, electricity, lower rents etc. Today there will be an illegal meeting at the AME church, this time focusing on educational issues and the situation at Tlokwe High. Other issues will also be discussed.

What are we going to do? What will be our actions? Are we going to start yet another school boycott - a rent boycott, consumer boycott, work boycott? Are we going to do a protest march to underline our demands and ask for the release of political prisoners? There will be a lot of discussions at the meeting. We need to have a resolution before leaving the church building. And we know that the decisions we make will be followed by the students and the people in Ikageng. As usual there will be a lot of singing, dancing and we are going to write the placards. Probably there is no time to eat and drink.

The Freedom Charter is a big issue at the meetings. The Charter is often recited: "The people shall govern". "All national groups shall have equal rights". "All should enjoy equal human rights". "There shall be peace and friendship", etc.

The situation in Ikageng is very tense. Can we have the meeting without being interrupted by the police? Will there be more turbulence today? Will anyone be injured or arrested by the police? There will be one or two persons watching the door of the church to check if the police is coming...

Roles

The learners are students of Tlokwe High School of the same age as themselves

Two adults are leaders of the meeting.

The other adults are people from Ikageng.

Everybody keep their sex and age.

Key questions, Grievances and Actions

- How do the apartheid system and the State of Emergency affect us? As students, as adults? What are our grievances?
- What are our demands on the local level? Better facilities for the schools, affordable municipal services – water, transport, a fair rent, electricity, sewage, better houses....?
- What are our demands on the national level? Integrated schools? Release of political prisoners? Ending of the State of Emergency? End of the apartheid system? A nation for all...?
- What will be our actions? Boycott? Protest march? Leave school/work? Talk to the government.....?

Activities

- A public meeting with discussions and decisions
- Make slogans, freedom songs, dancing, poetry, Freedom Charter
- Make placards
- Make illustrations, posters
- Organize clothing for the needy

Time plan

- 07.00 Set up the site
- 08.30 Learners and adults arrive
- 09.00 Welcome, background, presentation, rules
- 09.25 Initiation, UDF T-shirts
Meeting starts in the church in the church (Nkosi Sikelel iAfrica)
- 09.40 Activities
- 10.30 Meeting, Resolution
End of Time Travel (pray, Nkosi Sikelele iAfrika)
- 11.05 Reflection
- 11.30 Lunch outside the church

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Ebbe Westergren and Helen Eklund, Kalmar läns museum, Sweden

The Time Travel Committee in Potchefstroom, Ikageng/ Bridging Ages North West