South Africa in the 1990s

How was the transition from apartheid to democracy managed?

Between 1990 and 1994 South Africa experienced many fundamental changes. In 1990, the National Party was still in power, black people did not have the vote and the ANC remained banned with its leaders either in jail or exile. In 1994, however, South Africa was a democracy with a liberal constitution, and the ANC won the first democratic elections in the country.

Obstacles to Negotiation:

- The ANC had been banned and in hiding for 30 years:
  - It needed to transform itself from a liberation group to a political party, building up offices and stationery
  - There were differences of opinion among the leaders:
    - Some were willing to negotiate, others not
  - Possible clashes between the returning and exiles and the leaders in SA threatened
  - The party bore the expectations of millions of people impatient for change

- The National Party also had problems:
  - They were losing support to the Conservative Party, which broke away from them, and the militant AWB
  - Several members of the security forces were suspected of having right-wing sympathies
    - Some feared that the army might stage a coup
  - Some NP leaders wanted to form an alliance with Inkatha, and use it to retain power

- The situation in the townships:
  - Poverty and unemployment were widespread
  - Violent clashes between Inkatha and ANC supporters occurred, especially in Natal and the townships in the East Rand
  - There were suspicions of the police promoting the violence, as a ‘third force’

In May 1990, the ANC and NP met to discuss important issues, and released the ‘Groote Schuur Minute’, detailing the issues they intended to negotiate on:

- The ANC was concerned about:
  - Security legislation – the powers of the police force
  - The presence of troops in the townships
  - On-going violence and the state of emergency
  - The position of the homelands
    - Were they to remain ‘independent’ or be reintegrated into South Africa?
  - Would all political prisoners be released?
  - The return of exiles, especially ANC leaders
    - Would they be permitted to return, or would they simply be arrested if they tried?
The NP was concerned about:
  - The continuation of the armed struggle by the ANC
  - The ANC continuing to call for economic sanctions

Both sides showed a willingness to negotiate and, in August 1990, they released the ‘Pretoria Minute’, which stated that the ANC would suspend the armed struggle, and the NP would end the state of emergency and allow ANC exiles to return to participate in the talks.

However, some obstacles still remained:
  - Violence continued in Natal between Inkatha and ANC supporters
  - The activities of a ‘third force’ in townships
    - Police involvement in killings in township of Sebokeng
  - There were doubts about the sincerity of the government
    - Evidence emerged of secret funding of Inkatha

The Start of Negotiations:

There were differing opinions about the new constitution; the ANC wanted majority rule and for the constitution to be drawn up by a democratically elected constituent assembly. The NP wanted to protect their role and white interests through power sharing, and voiced their concerns about the ‘rights of minorities’.

Talks took place at the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) in December 1991 at the World Trade Centre building at Kempton Park. CODESA was a multi-part conference, representing 19 parties, with 3 parties boycotting it:
  - PAC and AZAPO on the left-wing
  - CP on the right-wing

The Convention agreed that:
  - An interim constitution would be drafted by the multi-party conference
  - The final constitution would be drawn up by the first elected parliament

However, the talks broke down after the Boipatong Massacre (see next page):
  - The ANC accused the government of stirring up violence in Natal
    - Called for a campaign of mass action to put pressure on the government
  - A peaceful solution seemed unlikely
Conflicts which threatened the negotiations:

In mid-1992, South Africa was in a difficult situation. The spirit of goodwill and optimism that had existed at the start of negotiations was gone and, with the violence increasing, fears of civil war began to grow.

Boipatong Massacre:

- In June 1992, an ANC funeral in the township near Vanderbijl Park was attacked by Inkatha supporters (aided by the police). Most of the victims were women and children.
  - ANC broke off negotiations, walked out of CODESA
  - ‘Rolling mass action’ and strikes were co-ordinated by the ANC, SACP and COSATU
  - The government faced international pressure
    - Western governments put pressure on de Klerk
    - United Nations sent observers to monitor the violence

Bisho Massacre:

- The ANC and government realised the need to continue negotiations
  - The escalating violence gave them a sense of urgency
  - Needed to act responsibly to prevent civil war from breaking out

Right-wing resistance:

The AWB (Afrikaner Weerstands Beweging – Afrikaner Resistance Movement) under Eugene Terre’blanche supported violence resistance to change.

- They attempted to sabotage the constitutional talks:
  - 200 AWB members crashed an armoured vehicle into the World Trade Centre building, causing damage and intimidating those involved in talks
  - Attempt failed and CODESA continued
- In 1992, the government held a referendum among white voters to gauge the level of support for the reform process
  - Many did not want to participate in what they saw as just another undemocratic process, but were urged by ANC and other reformists to take part
  - 70% voted in favour of reforms
  - This showed that the right-wing did not have the support that they claimed to
Compromises and Concessions:

Both sides made concessions during negotiations:

- The government released more political prisoners and agreed to curb the violence of Inkatha
  - Traditional weapons, which were often carried by Inkatha supporters, were banned
- The ANC agreed to a government of ‘national unity’ for 5 years following first election
  - “Sunset Clause”, proposed by Joe Slovo, stated that any party with more than 5% of votes would be part of the government
  - This clause broke the deadlock in the negotiations

In 1993, talks were almost derailed once again by the assassination of Chris Hani, leader of the ANC and SACP, by a right-wing white extremist with links to the Conservative Party

- Angry demonstrations and an increase in tension renewed the urgency of negotiations

By April of 1993, negotiations resumed at the Multi-Party Negotiating Forum (sometimes referred to as CODESA II), which included the PAC and Freedom Front, an alliance of right-wing Afrikaners including the old Conservative Party.

The Settlement that was reached:

An agreement was made on the interim constitution:

- A National Assembly of 400 representatives would be elected by proportional representation
- There would be 9 provinces
  - The 4 old provinces and incorporation of the homelands
- A senate of 10 representatives from each province, called the National Council of Provinces
- The President would be elected by National Assembly
- National Assembly and Senate would form a constitutional assembly to draft the final constitution
- Government of National Unity would rule for the first 5 years
- Constitutional Court established

Plans were made for the first democratic elections:

- Everyone over the age of 18 would have a vote
- Date set for 27 April 1994
  - Extended for 3 days to allow everyone to vote
Attempts to disrupt the negotiations:

The election process was threatened by several groups:

- APLA (Azanian Peoples Liberation Army, the armed wing of the PAC) launched attacks on civilians
  - E.g. St James Church Massacre, killing of Amy Biehl
  - PAC finally agreed to end armed struggle
- Right-wing Afrikaners:
  - Launched bombing campaign in Johannesburg
    - Detonated bomb at Johannesburg Airport on day of elections
    - Campaign killed 21 and injured 200 more
  - Opened fire on black civilians
  - AWB ‘invaded’ Bophuthatswana
    - Fired on by Bophuthatswana army
    - Attempted coup prevented
- An Inkatha march in Johannesburg took place very close to the ANC headquarters
  - Violent clashes between ANC and Inkatha
    - 53 killed in Johannesburg
    - 300 killed countrywide
  - Buthelezi (Inkatha leader) threatened to boycott the elections
    - Agreed to participate only a week before
    - Persuaded during emergency meeting with de Klerk and Mandela

South Africa’s first democratic election:

Attempts to disrupt the elections failed and between the 27th and 29th of April, 1994, 20 million South Africans voted in the first democratic election in the country.

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) was set up to ensure that the election was free and fair, and foreign governments and organisation also sent observers to the country.

Ballot papers were designed to ensure that all could participate:

- Name of the party, colour logo and photograph of leader
- Accommodated illiterate voters

Counting of the votes took over a week and, in the end, the Government of National Unity was formed by the ANC (63%), NP (20%) and IFP (11%). No other parties received over 5% of the votes.