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From apartheid to democracy: the emergence of ultraconservatives in Ermelo 1960-1994

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Abstract

This dissertation examines and explains the underlying social, ideological and economic reasons why the white population of Ermelo gravitated to a politics of the extreme in the years 1960-1994. In contrast to commonly held views that the growth of ultraconservatism correlates neatly with economic trends this dissertation argues that ultraconservatism in Ermelo emerged due to varying complex and at times contradictory reasons. By examining white society at the time of conquest in the 1860s, it is argued that whites in this area formed racist views from the time of settlement as the commercial success of their newly acquired farmland was dependant on the exploitation of cheap black labour. The focus of this study is however, on the emergence of new ultraconservative political parties from the late 1960s to the early 1990s which formed in reaction to National Party and local political dynamics. It is argued that the bedrock of conservative views was moulded during the time of initial settlement, however, for various reasons throughout the years these views were held and propagated. This study is a local history of ultraconservatism in Ermelo and illuminates particularities in the town's white politics within the context of profound changes in Afrikaner politics nationally. White working-class workers and farmers supported ultraconservatives while white business people supported the NP and their politics of reform. This dissertation made use of public and private archives as well as life history interviews with various long-time residents of the town. It is argued that although capitalism was the main motivator for ultraconservative views and politics in the mid 1800s, it was also capitalism that brought about reform and created a platform for negotiation in the 1990s when ultraconservative political parties threatened the peaceful transition into a democratic South Africa.