

SHARPEVILLE

In spite of the intensified repression of the State of Emergency, people throughout the country commemorated Heroes Day on March 21st. We commemorate Heroes Day in recognition of all those who have fallen in our struggle against racism and capitalism.

On March 21st 1960, 21 years ago, 69 people were killed and 180 wounded when police gunned down large groups of unarmed demonstrators in Sharpeville, when they offered themselves up for arrest in protest against the hated Pass Laws. The call for a peaceful anti Pass campaign came from the P.A.C. Exactly 25 years later in 1985, Sharpeville Day was etched more bloodily into our history of resistance when mourners on their way to a funeral in Langa in the Eastern Cape were gunned down, resulting in 49 deaths.

After the Sharpeville massacre, thousands of people from all progressive organisations were arrested and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the African National Congress (ANC) banned. Only after their banning did these liberatory movements take up the armed struggle.

influx control and pass laws.

Influx control and pass laws were introduced after the indigenous people were dispossessed of their land. These laws allowed the state control over workers' lives and laid the basis for capitalist development.

For the past century, successive governments have been trying to keep the black working class under their thumb by keeping and modifying the apartheid controls that exist.

The capitalists control the South African economy; they benefit from the Influx control and Pass-laws since these laws ensure them of massive profits through the maintenance and control of a vast pool of cheap black labour in the bantustans. Although the Pass laws



have been abolished, the state is using other laws to maintain influx control. The state through its reform policies try to soften its more overt racist tendencies, but the underlying racist and exploitative structures remain, and there is no change of substance.

forced removal

Workers forced into the dry, dusty homelands where their families die of starvation, will accept low wages and unhealthy working conditions which keep the bosses' profits high. The Botha regime says that pass laws have been scrapped—we know that this is a lie: people are still being asked to show their ID's by police. The state still forcibly removes people into rural ghettos. They still control



the movement of workers. The system still removes people far away from their work places.

state violence

The Sharpeville event marked a turning point in our history. It marked the end of a long period of non-violent struggle and brought in a period of direct confrontation with the state machinery. The majority of exploited and oppressed people believed for a long time that full political rights would be given to them through protestations, negotiations and petitions. This belief has been shattered by government violence and state repression. By the start of the 1960's thousands of our comrades had been imprisoned, exiled, murdered and banned. Today in

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1987, thousands more are facing worse repression.

In this climate of direct violence against our people, the blood-stained events of Sharpeville, Langa, Uitenhage and many others have proved to the oppressed and exploited black working class that principled unity and nothing less

than a decisive victory over the racist, capitalist regime and its collaborators, can bring the working class economic and political freedom.

Let us struggle for a socialist society where we will be in control of our own lives, where we will make decisions for ourselves.



An eyewitness report by journalist Humphrey Tyler:

"The crowd seemed to be loosely gathered around the Saracens (armoured cars) and on the fringes people were walking in and out. The kids were playing. In all there were about 3,000 people. They seemed amiable. Suddenly there was a sharp report from the direction of the police station. There were cries of 'izwelethu' (our land) - women's voices, I thought. The cries came from the police station and I could see a small section of the crowd swirl around the Saracens.

Hands went up in the Africanist salute. Then the shooting started. We heard the chatter of a machine gun, then another, then another. There were hundreds of women, some of them laughing. They must have thought the police were firing blanks. One woman was hit about ten yards from our car. Her companion, a young man, went back when she fell. He thought she had stumbled. Then he turned her over and saw that her chest had been shot away. He looked at the blood on his hand and said: 'My God, she's gone!'

"Hundreds of kids were running, too. One little boy had an old blanket coat, which he held up behind his head, thinking, perhaps, that it might save him from the bullets. Some of the children, hardly as tall as the grass, were leaping like rabbits. Some were shot, too. Still the shooting went on. One of the policemen were standing on top of a Saracen, and it looked as though he was firing his sten gun into the crowd. He was swinging it around in a wide arc from his hip as though he was panning a movie camera. Two other police officers were on the track with him, and it looked as if they were firing pistols."

"Most of the bodies were strewn on the road running through the field in which we were. One man who had been lying still, dazedly got to his feet, staggered a few metres then fell in a heap. A woman sat with her head cupped in her hands. One by one the guns stopped. Before the shooting, I heard no warning to the crowd to

Anniversary of Sharpeville



Action Youth hosted a cultural evening on the 20th March in commemoration of Sharpeville Day. Close to 150 people attended. A video, tape and slide show, music and poetry was received by an appreciative audience. Speakers from youth organisations, trade unions and sports organisations all contributed to making the evening a success.

disperse. There was no warning volley. When the shooting started it did not stop until there was no living thing in the huge compound in front of the police station. The police have claimed they were in desperate danger because the crowd was stoning them. Yet only three policemen were reported to have been hit by stones - and more than 200 people were shot down. The police also have said that the crowd was armed with 'ferocious weapons' which littered the yard after they fled.

"I saw no weapons, although I looked very carefully, and afterwards studied the photographs of the death scene. While I was there I saw only shoes, hats and a few bicycles left among the bodies. The crowd gave me no reason to feel scared, though I moved among them without any distinguishing mark to protect me, quite obvious with my white skin. I think the police were scared though, and I think the crowd knew it."