

An MK Combatant Speaks on Sharpeville

Before March 21, 1960 Sharpeville had not much significance, except that it is a small ghetto where Africans daily struggle for survival a few kilometres from Vereeniging. True, the sharp contrast between the squalor of Sharpeville and the glitter of Vereeniging expressive of the deep-rooted inequality between oppressive and exploitative apartheid rulers on the one hand, and the millions of their victims on the other, between black and white throughout the country, still exists undisturbed. But over the past 22 years Sharpeville has acquired great significance.

To the Bothas and Treurnichts, the Oppenheimers and Louis Luyts the very mention of the word 'Sharpeville' strikes a note of uncertainty about the future of their decadent system of fascist colonial domination and exploitation - the false and sinister pride they once deprived from their massacre of our people at Sharpeville and Langa in defence of apartheid is fast diminishing. To oppressed but fighting people Sharpeville calls to mind all the grisly atrocities perpetrated by these racist colonialists since they set foot on our land; and reminds us of all our martyrs and heroes who have laid down their lives in the name of our just cause of liberation. Sharpeville sharpens our hatred for apartheid, this system which has brought only hunger, disease, broken families, ignorance, insecurity and death to our peoples in South Africa and Namibia and a constant threat to the peace-loving peoples of Angola, Mozambique, Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Seychelles. To the international democratic community Sharpeville emphasises the importance of unity in isolating the apartheid regime in the economic, political, military, cultural and all other spheres. Sharpeville must draw our attention to the urgent need to destroy apartheid fascism and build a new non-racial democratic and peaceful South Africa of the Freedom Charter.

The circumstances surrounding the Sharpeville massacre and the immediate consequent events are well-known. In 1959 at its

annual conference held in Durban the African National Congress which had by then won respect as the true leader and defender of our people had resolved to conduct a massive National Anti-Pass Campaign the following year. The campaign was to start on March 31, 1960. The preparations were well underway when the PAC, created with the promptings of the U.S. imperialists and their racist allies in Pretoria, to divide and weaken our national liberation forces, sought to sabotage it (the campaign) by launching its passive resistance only 10 days before the date set by the ANC, that is on the 21st. When the fascist police shot our people killing 69 and maiming many others and the PAC was in disarray, the ANC called a national one-day strike on March 28 and ordered massive burning of passes. The Pretoria fascist regime, alarmed by the powerful wave of mass action by our angered people, declared the ANC illegal. The ANC refused to surrender and decided to continue the struggle as an underground and illegal organisation to lead our people in their liberation struggle.

As we continue to commemorate the Sharpeville Massacre every March 21, a day which has become known throughout the world as the International Day for the Elimination of Racism, what must dominate our thinking as we daily strengthen our forces is this: How do we bring an end to the massacre of our people by the racist fascist rulers of Pretoria? Our experience has proved convincingly that the apartheid fascist regime is bent on pursuing a policy of genocide in order to keep us in domination. To Sharpeville has been added, Soweto, Gugulethu, Mamelodi, New Brighton, Bonteheuwel, Matola and Salisbury. Disregard of the racist bosses and law-makers for the lives of our people leads to the death of our people in their thousands in the mines while others still are left to die of diseases like cholera. Add to this those who are murdered in cold blood in prison farms like Bethal, in fascist gaols or in banishment and those who are executed - right now six of our patriots are condemned to death - Manana, Lubisi, Mashigo, Tsotsobe, Moise and Shabangu in addition to Mini, Mkaba and Khayinga who died at the hangman's noose in 1964 and Solomon Mahlangu in 1979 while the life of James Mange was saved by the militant actions of our people supported by the international democratic community.

As if this was not genocidal enough the Pretoria regime, working on the basis of 'total strategy' it had devised hardly two years ago, is now preparing to implement what it calls 'area defence' according to which white residential areas will be

turned into military deployment with every white man called upon not only to go about with arms but to shoot at any black man in sight at a moment's notice. At the same time the apartheid regime is spending billions of rands (the military budget was R2 465 billion in 1981) for military purposes including the recruiting of mercenaries. All this confirms a point made in an article 'Ten Years of Umkhonto We Sizwe' by Sol Dubula in the African Communist, Fourth Quarter, 1971. Looking back on Sharpeville the article points out in part that "...the massacre at Sharpeville was a turning point...because from that point onwards the white state geared itself for total mobilisation to smash the liberation movement".

MANIFESTO

Therefore, our answer to the massacre of our people by the Pretoria racists can be found in the Manifesto of Umkhonto We Sizwe, our people's army formed on December 16, 1961 at the initiative of some of our leaders of the ANC and SACP. The Manifesto declared: "We shall not submit and we have no choice but to hit back by all means within our power in defence of our people, our future and our freedom .

"We are striking out along a new road for the liberation of the people of this country. The government policy of force, repression and violence will no longer be met with non-violent resistance only. The choice is not ours; it has been made by the Nationalist Government which has rejected every peaceable demand by the people for rights and freedom and answered every such demand with force and yet more force!"

The answer lies in using every means at our disposal including arms to destroy the entire apartheid system which survives through brute force. Similarly the destruction of apartheid system and consequently of massacres, cannot be achieved through a single blow. This means we must strike a series of blows against the enemy to weaken and finally destroy him while strengthening our forces. Confident as we are of final victory, we must never lose sight of the fact that the enemy we are dealing with not only has a strong economic base for building his military might but can also rely on aid from the imperialist powers like the U.S.A., Britain, France, F.R.G. and Japan who have a big economic stake in South Africa.

Our strength lies in united action. We are the great majority and the economy of the racists depends on our labour and we can bring it to a standstill. But we can only succeed in doing this when we are united into strong and militant

trade unions controlled by the workers themselves. It is through these trade unions that we can mobilize the workers throughout the country to fight not only for higher wages and better working and living conditions but also against the racist policies of the Pretoria regime in general including the continued massacring of our people.

UNITY

Our unity must be broadened to include all the oppressed people, the rural population, church groups. This demands the strengthening of our existing civic organizations and the creation of new ones where necessary both in town and countryside. Our past experience has shown that our actions can advance our struggle when we are acting together organised into our local organizations which in turn co-ordinate their actions throughout the country and fighting for specific demands which concern the community in general. Fine examples of this experience are the campaigns we have waged like the 1981 May Anti-Fascist Republic Campaign, the Campaign against dummy South African Indian Council, our boycott against Bantu Education and the recent protest against the murder of our trade unionist Neil Aggett.

At the same time we must bear in mind that to maintain our unity throughout the country we must, in addition to strengthening our local civic and other organisations, rally around the African National Congress which has over the past 70 years proved itself capable of representing the interests of all the people of South Africa, black and white, on the basis of their basic demands outlined in the Freedom Charter. This also means that we must also actively contribute, individually and collectively, in strengthening our people's army, Umkhonto We Sizwe in every possible way. We must join Umkhonto We Sizwe and give assistance to its combatants who are within our midst. As the Sharpeville Massacre showed, we can only defeat the apartheid regime only when we are combining our mass united political action, which is very important, with organized military action.

It is only through united purposeful action that our hatred for the apartheid fascists who massacred our people at Sharpeville and elsewhere becomes meaningful. It is only through opposing every policy of the apartheid regime in every corner of our land with a purpose of finally destroying the enemy that the pledges we make to avenge the death of our innocent people become fruitful.