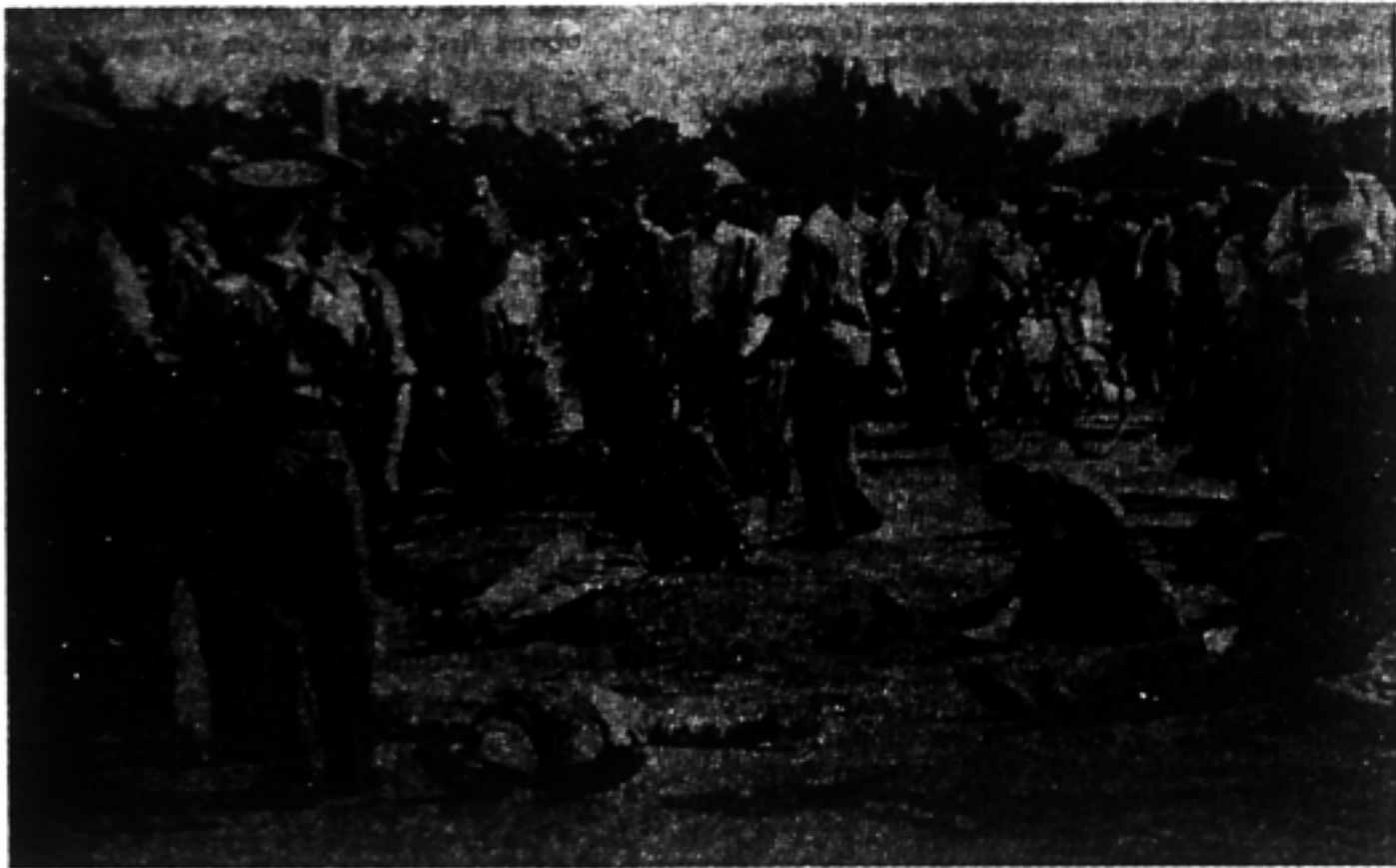


1701-03-87

SHARPEVILLE DAY

Commemoration meeting

NUSAS SANSCO



Fri 20.03.87

Beattie theatre 12h00



Elections in Apartheid's Emergency

Remember the victims of apartheid violence

Most of us were not even alive 27 years ago, on March 21 1960. Yet the events of that day and their aftermath have left their mark on all of our lives.

For more than 100 years, black South Africans had been forced to carry "pass-books". These "badges of slavery" ruled over people's lives, dictated where they could work and live and who they could marry.

The anger and frustration of African people increased as the Apartheid government tightened up the pass laws, enforced segregation and forced millions of Africans into the already overcrowded Bantustans.

In March 1960, the Pan Africanist Congress (a group that broke from the ANC in 1959) called for a nationwide peaceful protest against the pass laws. More than 50 000 black South Africans responded to their call, and marched on police stations to hand their passes in and be arrested.

In Sharpeville, the police panicked at the sight of the thousands of people around them, and opened fire on the unarmed protesters with their Sten guns.

69 people died and 187 were wounded, shot in the back by the police. Mr. Humphrey Tyler, at present editor of the Argus, witnessed the shootings and recalled that the crowds were totally unarmed and peaceful, "as if they were at a carnival". A further 21 demonstrators were killed at Langa, in Cape Town.

Days after the massacre, the government invoked the Public Safety Act for the first time and declared a State of Emergency. The ANC and the PAC were banned on March 28 and in the six months after Sharpeville more than 20 000 ANC supporters were detained and many jailed for long periods on Robben Island.

The ANC leadership, now in hiding or in exile, came together to decide how they should respond.

They realised that 48 years of patient pleading, petitions and deputations to the government could show no concrete results, only the broken bodies of Africans shot by Apartheid's security forces.

This prompted the ANC into two historic decisions:

* Firstly that non-violence and peaceful protest alone would not bring the government to its senses - the ANC decided to form Umkhonto We Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC;

* Secondly that the outside world needed to be informed of the evils of apartheid, and persuaded to fight what they likened to a form of Nazism. For this purpose, the ANC mission-in-exile was established under the leadership of Oliver Tambo, at that time an attorney in Johannesburg.

SHARPEVILLE WAS NO FREAK OCCURRENCE.

Since the days of colonial conquest and extermination, life for Black South Africans has been an ongoing series of deaths, funerals and ongoing resistance.

More recently the spiral of violence has steepened. 21 people were shot dead by police in Uitenhage on March 21 1985, exactly 25 years after Sharpeville. 14 people died in Mamelodi in February 1986, 11 died in Queenstown in May.

More than 2400 black South Africans have died since October 1984 when white SADF troops first went into the African townships.

At the same time we white South Africans have grown more distant and detached from the concerns of Black South Africans.

This is how the government wants us: ignorant of the growing civil war in our country, and prepared to accept their version of reality.

If the Sharpeville massacre had happened yesterday, this is how we would read about it, courtesy of the Bureau for Information:

"A mob of several hundred black radicals attacked a police station with stones and petrol bombs. After requesting them to disperse, police fired warning shot shots and then dispersed the rioters with birdshot. Several of the mob were killed."

We whites are expected to be sitting tight, doing as Botha and Cliff Saunders want:

Botha wants us to:

- * Play the "elections game", forget the Emergency and believe his promises of reform;
- * Go to the SADF (or support our boyfriends who do go), climb without question onto his Casspirs and go into the townships with loaded R1 rifles, to 'take action' against fellow South Africans fighting for their liberty.

But there is another way. We can remember Sharpeville and Uitenhage by:

* **JOINING ORGANISATIONS** working for a just peace - NUSAS, the End Conscription Campaign and the United Democratic Front are some of the many.

BOTHA HAS NOTHING TO OFFER EXCEPT MORE AND MORE SHARPEVILLES.

THE FREEDOM CHARTER LEADS US TO A NON-RACIAL AND DEMOCRATIC SA.

THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN!

THERE SHALL BE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP!