

Middleburg remembers March 21

Middleburg was a hive of political activity over a weekend near the end of March

Local residents flocked to an Eastern Cape Students Council workshop — mistaking it for a mass meeting.

The following day, there was a commemoration service to remember the victims of 21 March Sharpeville and Uitenhage killings.

Hundreds of members of the Middleburg Youth Congress (Miyco), Middleburg Residents Association (Mira), Middleburg Womens Organisation (Miwo), the Middleburg Students Council (Misco) and local churches were at the meeting.

The only people not there were members of the local South African Police.

A Misco leader received loud applause when he announced that the Misco general council had "unanimously agreed to change the name of the local secondary school from St Boniface Secondary School to Govan Mbeki Secondary School".

"It is high time that the people's leaders must be known and not forgotten. At least when a person passes near this school something political will be registered in their mind



"The church stands by the people's leaders" - Rev Visagie

and he/she will know that there are some people who are in jail for the sake of others", he said.

"For this area to be effectively organised, house to house visits must be conducted to mobilize those who are not here with us today. In the old days when a meeting was called to discuss troubles such as the loss of somebody's cow — all people attended.

"The one who did not attend was the one likely to be suspected as the thief of that cow.

"After the house to house campaign we will expect everyone to be here and the one who is not here is against the will of the majority", said a woman from Miwo.

"The good work of Mathew Goniwe will and must be taken for-

ward by all of us here", said the Miyco president.

Rev Visagie of the local Nederduitse Gereformede Kerk pledged solidarity with the families of the Langa shootings on behalf of the Midlands Council of Churches.

"The plight of the people has long been said in the bible but the church has distanced itself from the people.

"But today we in the church endorse what the leaders of the people stand for and therefore join in the campaign for the unconditional release of all the prisoners.

"We remember those leaders, particularly on March 21, because it is due to the events of those times that they were sentenced to life imprisonment".



Langa commemoration service in Middleburg.

Kwathema stays away

AFTER a long break, the stayaway is back in the East Rand township of Kwathema.

Thousands abandoned work and school and flocked to the funeral of police victim Siphso Dlodla in mid-March. Local residents were joined by people from all over the East Rand and other Transvaal townships.

They were responding to a joint stayaway call from the Kwathema Students Congress (Kwasco), Kwathema Youth Congress (Kwayco), Congress of South African Trade Unions local affiliates (SFAWU, TGWU, CWIU, MAWU, UMMAWOSA and CCAWUSA), the East Rand People's Organisation (Erapo) and the Crisis Committee which represents different organisations in the township.

Shops closed, taxis and especially

Putco buses weren't going anywhere but to the funeral. The bus-drivers are members of the Transport and General Workers Union, a Cosatu affiliate, and they were part of the stayaway to attend the funeral.

In the past there has been some tension between the drivers and the community. So the drivers and Erapo met to sort things out.

The drivers said they were part and parcel of the community. With proper notice they could tell management when they wanted to attend funerals to honour unrest victims. The drivers said they too could be victims someday.

This time drivers knew about the funeral and stayaway before the time. They told management they were going to take 20 buses, 19 for mourners and one full of Putco workers. At the last minute man-



agement tried to restrict it to three buses. But the drivers ignored this and just took the 20 buses.

Students were called on not to attack buses. "The busdrivers are members of a progressive organisation which is working with students. And the people in the buses are our parents", said Kwasco.

Kwasco has been implementing democratic SRC's. At four schools students have SRC's and the support of principals and teachers. But two schools still have problems

with reactionary principals. The unpopular local head of Inkatha, Steven Mbatha, is chairman of the one school committee. Students defied his order that they shouldn't go to Dlodla's funeral and sing 'freedom songs'.

At one school students who were reluctant to join in the community activities have started changing their minds. This was after other students in Kwathema and other East Rand townships decided to cut contact, including sport ties, with them.

Stuyco organising the community

THE STUTTERHEIM Youth Congress (Stuyco) was launched in April 1985, to organise youth and students.

A few months later, students at Mzoxolo High saw posters calling on them to boycott classes. At first not everybody did, as "we were not well organised", said Stuyco leaders, but when police action and arrests began to anger people, students went on total boycott.

Students began to involve themselves in community projects to create better conditions in the townships. They shut down the beerhall and encouraged people to stop drinking, and to rather get organised. Membership of Stuyco grew.

They involved the parents in meetings, and people stopped paying high rents.

"One day, when youth were singing and shouting slogans, the police came and answered the songs with bullets. Jongile Nompondo was shot dead."

After seeing their children shot at by the police, large numbers of parents were determined to become more active. Vigilantes invited senior parents to join them, but the parents refused.

The people had many meetings to decide how to stop the growing problem of vigilantes.

In November, the youth decided to attend a vigilante meeting. When they pleaded with the vigilante

group to disband, they were attacked. Thirteen-year-old Them-bisa Botha was axed to death.

"The youth were angry and burnt one of the vigilantes in revenge. Many people were arrested.

The next day, police used teargas to disperse youth singing in the street. The police opened fire, killing nine-year-old Mbulelo Ndondo.

People dug trenches in the road to prevent caspurs from entering the township, forcing police to enter on foot.

"There were pitched battles. Someone was shot dead when some of the youth formed small units and

attacked police vans. Funerals became bigger and bigger.

"The police labelled Stuyco founder member, Pupu Mgangqa, as the cause of all the trouble, and arrested him. But nothing stopped. When people gathered to discuss the funerals, police arrested 280, and detained 160 for four months."

"Organisation spread, especially among wives, mothers and sisters. Residents organised a rents boycott and a consumer boycott. Workers staged work stayaways."

Previously, workers had collected R300 to pay a lawyer to improve their conditions. But when nothing happened they decided to form their own trade union and are hoping to link it with Cosatu.

Liquor was forbidden as part of the consumer boycott, but a policeman in the township was selling it. He had a police guard, because he knew he was not in favour with his community. When a delegation went to ask him to stop selling liquor, he answered by shooting. Three people were killed.

"The SADF set up a military camp inside the township, and their actions have angered the people.

The Stutterheim community is demanding that police and the SADF withdraw from their township.

"Like a war..."

ALL HELL broke loose in Tafelkop recently.

The area was occupied by police and soldiers from the nearby Maleoskop training camp.

The Tafelkop Youth Congress (Tayco) said mourners were peacefully returning from a funeral on March 29 when police intervened.

Three people were shot dead and many were injured as they fled from sjambokking police.

Three days later scores of youth in the township were arrested. A 12 year old boy was shot outside his home and taken into custody. Youth responded by burning two Lebowa transport buses and a truck — apparently because they had transported police.

The whole township was occupied by security forces. Said one activist, "it was like a war zone and people are afraid to walk in the streets".

Many people in the area work in Groblersdal. With the police invasion workers stayed away from work, apparently fearing police action. So the ending of the stayaway depends on the police, said activists.

"Police harassment doesn't discriminate. Young and old get beaten. When all hell breaks loose everyone has to run, no matter how old or sick you are".

Tayco condemned the actions of the SA and Lebowa police. They said it had reached alarming proportions in the Lebowa bantustan. "As long as the bantustans exist these acts are bound to continue", they said.

Chiefs in the area — including Lebowa Minister of Health and Welfare — have kept quiet so far.

Earlier in the month police pounced on mourners at police victim Solomon Matshamane's funeral in Motatema. Six people from Dennilton, Jane Furse, Tafelkop, GaMatlala and Witbank were shot dead.

Motatema people discovered shallow graves of people killed at a previous funeral.

Tayco has a close relationship with the Motatema Youth Congress (Moyco). There are also Parents Crisis Committees, working committees of students and union branches in Tafelkop, Motatema and surrounding villages.

Tension in Ikageng

IN IKAKENG tension has been high since the DET suspended schools in February.

Students there officially returned to school on March 2.

They have been boycotting classes because their demands have not been met. Their first demand is that troops get out of Ikageng.

"The troops occupy our schools full time. At Tlokwe High they have now taken over the admin-

offices and continue intimidating us in various ways," a Tlokwe High student said.

Students are also demanding the release of detained students, some of whom are as young as 12 years old. They say that public violence against students stop. That expelled students be reinstated. That the harassment of members of Ikageng Civic association ceases. Community organisations have

been meeting to try to resolve the tension in Ikageng. Teachers and priests are getting together to talk about the situation in their township. "At the moment our township is teeming with SADF and SAP. They drive at high speed, intimidating people," a resident said. On March 29, Bishop Tutu held a church service in Ikageng. The army and police were nowhere to be seen. Minutes after he left, they reappeared.