The Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960: Its historic significance in the struggle against apartheid


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# The Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1960: Its historic significance in the struggle against apartheid

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"Half measures are no good in this wilderness any more than a leaking boat is any good in an ocean. One needs certainty, a sense of security, something solid to hold on to in the dangerous void - and it has to be absolutely solid.

- Alan Moorehead

The savage massacre of African patriots at Sharpeville and other places in South Africa on 21 March 1960 is of paramount significance in the struggle against apartheid and needs to be understood in its historical scope. Sharpeville marked unquestionably a turning point in the struggle for liberation in Azania. As a respected African church leader, Canon Burgess Carr of Liberia, said it was the watershed which spurred the outpour of revolutionary struggle against white minority rule and colonialism throughout southern Africa. The fatal gunning down of some eight score peaceful African demonstrators and the maiming of several hundred others, in a callous and live re-enactment of the wild west, rightfully brought international public opinion against apartheid South Africa to a boil. So far the massacres at Sharpeville, Langa, Nyanga and Vanderbijl Park stand out prominently in the minds of people all over the world as the sanguinary examples of apartheid barbarism. Within Azania these massacres which form the darkest cloud in a long nightmare of brutal repression, are revered as a source of inspiration and rededication.

The militant Black students’ movement, the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), had one of its early brushes with the South African
political police, the Special Branch, after declaring March 21 "Liberation Day" and arranging a meeting to observe the Dey at the University of Natal in 1973. One of the nine SASO members now charged under the Terrorism Act, in the Pretoria Supreme Court at the so-called Palace of Justice, Dr. Aubrey Mokoape, was arrested and charged with organizing the commemoration of Sharpeville Day. As veterans of Robben Island prison will testify, political prisoners also defiantly hold special meetings to mark 21 March every year. Ever since 1960 from the eve of each anniversary of Sharpeville Day until after police put on alert throughout the Vaal triangle. This region in which Sharpeville is located is ringed off by heavily-armed men, often with support aircraft hovering above the location itself. Anyone leaving or entering the place must show an official permit.

Sharpeville: a source of inspiration and rededication

The reverence of the African people for this Day grows from the fact that the political campaign launched to attack a fundamental cornerstone of apartheid colonialism, i.e., the pass laws, brought them far closer to the seizure of political power than anything attempted before. Conversely the white minority regime dreads the memory of 21 March 1960, with the chain of staggering events which followed after that day.

- Canon Bdrgress Carr, "Sharpeville Day" Commemoration speech, Nairobi, March 1972

In particular they hate to be reminded of those events which had the National Party government as perilously close to collapse as it has ever been. Mr. Lewis M~osi, a South African journalist who left the country on an exit permit in 1961, was a political reporter with the Post, a newspaper aimed at the African market, when the Sharpeville massacre occurred. As is well known amongst Azanians, Mr. Nkosi was in that unique position of African professional with good connections amongst Whites. His assessment of the situation in Azania at the time can therefore be considered balanced as it reflects opinion on both sides of the colour line. Of the man who was the principal architect of the historic Positive Action Campaign against the pass laws, Mr. Nkosi wrote in 1963.

"... a tall distinguished-looking African prisoner, a university instructor and political leader who, at the age of 36, has a rare distinction of having scared Dr. Verwoerd's government out of its wits. As anybody knows by now, the South African Government does not scare easily." 3/

Continuing, Mr. Ikosi wrote:

"In March 1960, Robert Sobukwe, President of the banned Pan Africanist Congress, helped to orchestrate a crisis that panicked the South African Government and nearly brought about the kind of political anarchy which all too often makes possible the transference of power overnight." 3/

This report comes closest to the truth of what it looked like in Azania after the Pan Africanist Congress launched its campaign against the pass laws on 21 March.

Cold blooded massacres such as that in Sharpeville have been a
deliberate tactic for crushing political opposition from the earliest days of
european colonialism in azania, as much as they have been a pattern elsewhere in
the world. as late as in 1946 r.hap.pywhite police had been used to crack down
on a massive miners' strike along south africa's gold-belt, the witwatersrand.
this tactic is still very much in use: striking african miners were massacred at
carletonville and the western deep level mines as recently as 1973. The impact
of it all is all too often too temporary. But not so with sharpeville.
A landmark in the struggle against apartheid

Perhaps those who have commented that PAC and Sobukwe struck a fluke blow
at the apartheid regime ought to be forgiven for their understandable ignorance. A
veteran of the struggle against white settler domination like Mr. I.B. Tabata is
better placed to judge. Mr. Tabata has conceded that Mr. Sobukwe and the PAC
read the mood of the masses more correctly than anyone else: hence massive
support for the positive action campaign continued to roll-in as from March 21.

It is fair to note that Mr. Tabata did not agree with the resistance tactics used
by the PAC.

The leadership of PAC maintains that from their days as africanists within the
African National Congress they already had their finger on the national pulse.
This is not the place for polemics but for the record it needs to be stated that PAC
leaders explain that one of the main reasons why the Pan Africanist Congress had
to be formed was the crying need amongst the masses for leadership that could
take on the oppressor militantly. The grinding apartheid repression within South
Africa was demanding a change of tactics from protest to positive action. The
techniques of positive action were scoring successes elsewhere in Africa and the
Azanian masses sorely wanted to have their fight against white domination linked
up to the decolonization struggle in the rest of Africa.

Mr. Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe and his Africanist colleagues resolved in 1958 to
break away from the African National Congress and in April, 1959, they formed
the Pan Africanist Congress, at the Orlando Community Hall, in Johannesburg.
The inaugural conference was attended by delegates from all over the country,
representing more than 1,000 provisional branches of no less than 12 members
each. A constituency wider than the already committed Africanists had grown in
the period leading to the inaugural conference.

I have purposely introduced this article by a quote from Alan Moorehead's book,
"The Russian Revolution". I have done it because the quote was found to
be applicable to the Azanian situation. The Africanists, Mr. Sobukwe and his
comrades believe there is no middle course between present day white domination
and African rule*in azania. Mr. Sobukwe said as much in an interview with a
Swedish journalist who visited him in his place of "house arrest" in Kimberley,
where he lives under a "maze of restrictions" 5/. He said "a total overthrow
is needed." 6
In a speech he delivered at a rally to mark African Heroes Day in 1959, Mr. Sobukwe amplified the PAC attitude. He stated then:
"The issues are clear-cut. The Pan Africanist Congress has done away with equivocation and clever talk. The decks are cleared, and in the arena of South African politics there are today only two adversaries: the oppressor and the oppressed, the master and the slave."

As PAC members went around the country organizing for the struggle, they found, in Mr. Sobukwe's own words, that the non-nonsense and militant posture of the PAC strikes "a responsive chord in the hearts of the sons and daughters of the land" and that it has "awakened the imagination of the youth of our land while giving hope to the aged who for years have lived in the trough of despair." 7/

Preparation for the anti-pass campaign
The go-ahead for launching the Positive Action Campaign was given at the first and only national conference of the PAC, held on 19 and 20 December 1959, in Johannesburg. The angry apathy which hung over the oppressed African masses was gradually giving way to an atmosphere of expectancy. PAC slogans like "Izwe lethu" (our land), "I Africa" were catching on like epidemic in the townships and villages, others like "Africa fcr the Africans!" were sprouting on walls along with the name of Sobukwe which was rapidly becoming a household word. Drum, the leading magazine for Blacks, asked in a headline article:
"Africanists fireworks or false alarm? That issue was banned by the regime and the police seized copies already in circulation.

At last the order came out! Against the background of intensified door to door campaigning by PAC activists, Mangaliso Sobukwe announced at a press conference in Johannesburg on 18 March that the Pan Africanist Congress would launch the first phase of its unfolding programme for the liberation of South Africa on Monday, 21 March 1960. The target of this campaign would be the pass laws, the lynch-pin of the system of apartheid in South Africa. The door to door campaigning was reinforced with a call on all pass carrying African men to leave their passes at home, march to police stations nearest to them and demand to be arrested for refusing to carry a pass, euphemistically called the "reference book" since 1953 when the "Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Native Documents Act" was passed.

The pass system was deliberately chosen because (i) it is the lynchpin of apartheid and (ii) of all the apartheid laws none is as pervasive, and few are as perverted, as the pass laws. They show no respect for the sanctity of marriage - men are forcibly separated from their wives or vice-versa because one of them cannot
obtain the permit to reside in the same area. They tear away children from their parents: a child above the age of 16 needs a special permit to live with its parents outside the Bantustan reservation, otherwise it must find accommodation in one of the location barracks they call hostels in South Africa. They deny men and women the universal right to sell their labour to whom they choose; every African man or woman seeking employment has to obtain a special permit to look for work - within a limited period, usually 14 days; otherwise they face deportation to the 'homelandt (bantustan reservation they most likely have never known). The indignities are legion and falling foul with any of the pass law regulations leaves an African open to arrest and imprisonment. Sentences are most frequently served out on prison farms, under the most primitive conditions.

The best known African campaign before Sharpeville was the potato boycott. It came as a result of exposures in newspapers like the Post about conditions for African prisoners in the potato prison farms of Bethal, in the Eastern Transvaal. Investigative reporters found that prisoners are dressed in nothing but sacks, they sleep on damp cement floors and are out working the potato fields with bare hands from the crack of dawn until dusk. They are continuously whipped by jailers on horse back, and the one meal a day they eat is always half-cooked dried maize without any protein. Many die from disease and torture before they complete the relatively short terms of imprisonment, between two and six months.

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The pass laws, therefore, affect every living black person in Azania. A campaign aimed at liquidating this obnoxious system automatically enjoys the support of every African man, woman and child. PAC aimed at striking a death blow at this cornerstone of apartheid fascism with its very first campaign. In his final message to all Party branches and regions, on the eve of the campaign, Mr. Sobukwe explained that the principal aim of the campaign is to get enough of the black labour force behind bars. He said: "Industry will come to a standstill and the government will be forced to accept our terms. And once we score that victory, there will be nothing else we will not be able to tackle."

Contrary to less informed opinion, Mr. Sobukwe did recognize that the campaign's total victory would be sabotaged. Accordingly he added in the same message: "But we must know clearly that our struggle is an unfolding one, one campaign leading to another in a never ending stream until independence is won.”

The challenge to the racist regime, on this occasion, was going beyond a simple demand for concessions. The bid was clearly for political power. It was expected that the regime may hit back like a cornered beast. In Mr. Sobukwe's message to the regions and branches it was pointed out: "The government will be ruthless. They will probably cut us off from one another*, censor the press, use their propaganda machinery to malign the leaders, mislead the people and spread falsehood about the Campaign."

9/
In this non-violent campaign there is none that could have been more concerned to avoid the shedding of even an ounce of blood than the leadership of the PAC. Mr. Stanley Motjuwadi, a long-time journalist with Drum and its current editor, recalls in the issue of his magazine of 22 November 1972, that: "A day after the Sharpeville shootings I had an interview in Johannesburg's Fort (prison) with Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe ... He was awaiting trial on a charge of incitement and seemed to have aged overnight. He was depressed and almost at the point of tears - the Sharpeville tragedy had really hit him hard." 10/ 2/ Sobukwe, R.M., Ilessage to all Party branches and regions, March 1960. 9 Ibid. 1/ Motjuwadi, StanelyPAC in perspective, Sobukwe the man who still walks tall (London, 1973). * Sobukwe has been cut off from his colleagues for 16 years. He was jailed for three years for leading this campaign, kept for a further six years in solitary confinement on Robben Island and subsequently banished to Kimberley 400 miles from his ghetto house in Johannesburg. -6-

Any who have followed Sobukwe's role at the head of PAC know full well the man's courage: he went through nine years of imprisonment without flinching and all those who have seen him, during his imprisonment and now under house arrest, including Members of Parliament from the ruling National Party and the white opposition parties, testify that his convictions remain as strong and his determination as unwavering. Mindful of the panic a threat to their power creates in despots, Mr. Sobukwe wrote to the Commissioner of Police in South Africa, on the eve of the campaign, emphasising that the PAC campaign against passes would be non-violent and imploring the Commissioner to instruct his men to refrain from the use of violence in an attempt to put down demonstrations. As a further precaution Mr. Sobukwe sternly told PAC leaders and cadres all over the country: "My instructions, therefore, are that our people must be taught now and continuously that in this campaign we are going to observe absolute non-violence." Many assessors of the tragic events of 21 March 1960, have shown the same disregard for PAC's precautions against police violence as was shown by the South African police themselves. Monday, 21 March 1960

It is appropriate to focus on Sharpeville itself at this stage. Under the Chairmanship of Mr. Nyakale Tsolo, the PAC branch at Sharpeville approached almost every house and the men's hostel in the township, mobilizing support for the strike against passes planned for Monday, 21 March 1960. The full story of Sharpeville is still to be told, hopefully by those who helped to make this history. I was fortunate as head of the regional executive committee of the Vaal, from 1963 to work in the underground amongst many of the organizers and participants
in the historic event. Like most veterans of war the people of Sharpeville hate to relive their war time experience but I was able to learn from direct participants a great deal of what took place.

Not a single bus moved out of Sharpeville to take passengers to work on that Monday. PAC task force members started out before the break of dawn lining up marchers in street after street. By daybreak the marchers, under the leadership of the task force, were moving to a preappointed open ground, where they merged with other demonstrators. In line with the instructions of the Party leadership, then all the groups had been assembled, the 10,000 and more men, women and children proceeded to the local police station - chanting freedom songs and calling out campaign slogans "Izwe lethu" (Our land) "I Africa"; "Awaphele ampasti" (Down with passes); "Sobukwe Sikhokhle" (Lead us Sobukwe); "Forward to Independence, Tomorrow the United States of Africa"; and so on and so forth.

When the marchers ret -whed 3thu-pe[ville' police station a heavy contingent of police was lined up outside, many on top of British-made Saracen armoured cars. Mr. Tsolo and other Executive Branch members moved forward - in conformity with the novel PAC motto of 'Leaders in Front' - and asked the white policeman in command to let them through so that they could surrender themselves for refusing to carry passes. Initially the police commander refused but much later, towards 11 a.m., they were let through. The chanting of freedom songs was picking up and the slogans were being repeated with greater volume. Journalists who rushed there from other areas, after receiving word that the campaign was a runaway success in this mostly ignored African township, more than 30 miles, south of Johannesburg, confirm that for all their singing and shouting the crowd's mood was more festive than belligerent. But shortly after the PAC branch leaders had been let through into the police station, without warning, the police facing the crowd opened fire and in two minutes hundreds of bodies lay sprawling on the ground like debris. The joyful singing had given way to murderous gunfire, and the gunfire was followed by an authentic deadly silence, and then screams, wild screams and cries of the wounded.

Littering the ground in front of that police station in nearby dusty streets were 69 dead and nearly 200 injured men, women and children: a revolting sight which appalled decent human beings the world over as pictures of the massacre got around.

The same pattern of events had taken place in nearby Vanderbijl Park, where two Africans were gunned down by white police a few minutes later, and at Langa and Nyanga, a thousand miles away in Cape Town, where five people were shot dead by white police.

Domestic and international implications

With that savagery the apartheid régime sealed the path of non-violence and PAC resolved to continue the struggle through arms in future.

It was a revealing comment, the one made by Mr. Carel de Wet, the Member of Parliament for Vanderbijl Park, a former cabinet minister in Mr. Vorster's government who is currently serving a second term as ambassador to the Court of
St. James. He complained: "Why did the police kill only two kaffirs in my constituency?" Clearly the mass killings were by design and they were intended to "teach the kaffirs a lesson." But the African people refused to be intimidated by the racist regime's hired killers, Africans across the land poured out into the streets in their hundreds and thousands in support of the campaign against passes. Much of industry, as hoped for by the PAC leadership, ground to a halt. As a result there was an unprecedented run on the stock market and a helter-skelter pull-out of £F43 million in foreign capital by investors. The country's reserves drained rapidly. In contrast to the exhuberant anti-government demonstrations by Africans in every major city in South Africa a perilous gloom seemed to settle over white South Africa and thousands fled abroad, causing the overseas travel business to be the only brisk business in town. The frustration of white settlers, particularly the mostly complacent English-speaking settlers, was dramatically shown by one man, Mr. David Pratt. He is the English-speaking farmer who fired two shots into Mr. Verwoerd's head at the annual Rand Easter Show in Johannesburg in April 1960. On that occasion the settler premier miraculously escaped death. (He was later stabbed to death in the House of Parliament in 1966.) Mr. Pratt told a magistrate he had done it because Verwoerd "I was leading the country into darkness" before he was whisked off to a mental.

Speaking after yet another massive PAC demonstration of 30,000 outside Parliament, in Cape Town, the man who acted as Prime Minister after Mr. Verwoerd had been shot, Mr. Paul Sauer, called for a 'new book' for South Africa and said things should not be allowed to slide back to conditions that had created the worst crisis the racist regime had ever faced. l/
The Verwoerd regime did not heed one of their own kind. Mr. Paul Sauer was quickly dropped from the cabinet and disappeared into the back benches before dying. The Minister of Justice who had given partial victory to PAC by temporarily suspending the pass laws also got the sack from the cabinet. The regime declared a state of emergency at the beginning of April 1960, and arrested over 18,000 people, including most of the country's leading antiapartheid politicians, black and white. During this first ever nation-wide state of emergency the PAC was outlawed, end with it the ANC. The state of emergency was virtually a declaration of martial law. Meetings were banned, a curfew was imposed and press censorship was introduced in effect if not in fact. The international community reacted with shocked anger to the Sharpeville, Langa, Nyanga and Vanderbijl Park massacres. The question of apartheid was brought up in the United Nations Security Council for the first time soon after the Sharpeville massacres. On April 1960, the Council called on the apartheid regime to "initiate measures aimed at bringing about racial harmony based on equality ... and abandon its policies of apartheid and racial discrimination.l2/ When the racist regime refused to give in to the reasonable and legitimate demands of the African people by strengthening its discrimination laws through the emergency, almost every country in the world turned from shocked anger to angry condemnation. Most countries have never stopped their attacks on the apartheid policies of the
South African white-settler regime. Since that time international public disgust with apartheid South Africa is manifest in her total isolation from normal human contact with the rest of the world, her international standing is better to only that of her sister parish - the Ian Smith racist regime in Rhodesia.

The observance of the International Day: a tribute to the martyrs of Sharpeville, Langa, Nyanga, Vanderbijl Park

The support of the international community is especially valuable to the people of Azania in their struggle for self-determination. The world community's heightened sensitivity to political injustice in 1960 combined with the political assault on the apartheid system - an assault conceived and carried out by the Azanian people - plays an important part in immortalizing Sharpeville.

1/ The Star, Johannesburg, January 20, 1973

1/ Unit on Apartheid, Notes and Documents, No. 24/70.

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The designation of 21 March, every year, as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination by the United Nations is a source of pride to the Azanian people and their liberation movement. The posthumous tribute to the martyrs of Sharpeville, Langa, Nyanga and Vanderbijl Park is viewed as tantamount to the canonization of men, women and children who paid for the noble cause of freedom with their own blood.

Further, it is important to bear in mind that the Azanian people see their own struggle as part of the whole of mankind's fight for the elimination of oppression. At the beginning of his trial - along with other PAC leaders, including Mr. Potlako K. Leballo, the National Secretary who is presently Acting President, Mr. Zeph Mothopeng, the Secretary for Judicial Affairs and the late Rosett Ndziba, a former member of the Regional Executive Committee for the Witwatersrand - Mr. Mangaliso Sobukwe delivered an unprecedented political statement from the dock (the record of which the court refuses to release). Mr. Leballo referred to this statement when addressing the Security Council in 1974, saying:

"It will be remembered that when this case began we refused to plead because we felt no moral obligation whatsoever to obey laws which are made exclusively by a white minority ...13/

But I would like to quote what was said by somebody before, that an unjust law cannot be justly applied. We believe in one race only - the human race to which we belong. The history of the human race is a long history of struggle against all restrictions, physical, mental and spiritual. We would have betrayed the human race if we had not done our share."

The good rapport between the struggling African majority in South Africa and the international community suffers, however, from the economically inspired indifference of major industrial nations whose business companies have not only reversed the outflow of capital sparked off by the PAC anti-pass campaign but have multiplied manifold their investments in the apartheid republic.
Typical of the unfeeling attitude of foreign investors is a disclosure in the U.S. magazine, Newsweek, which reveals that:
"Top executives of sixteen major U.S. corporations (there are 300 all in all) operating in South Africa met secretly in January to discuss whether their presence was a tacit vote for apartheid ... The consensus was that they should stay and use their considerable economic influence to better conditions for black workers from within." 14/

1/ Refusing to plead was another PAC "first"; it has been emulated on several occasions since.
14/ Newsweek, New York, 15 March 1976.

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This rational lacks credibility and could never survive the test of an open meeting. South Africa has depended on foreign investments throughout its economic growth which dates to the last century. During that time Africans have had their every political, social and labour right taken away by an unending stream of draconian laws. It comes as no surprise when we find that erstwhile advocates of "foreign investments in South Africa to influence change" like Chief Gatsha Buthelezi of the Kwa Zulu bantustan and the Rev. Beyers Naude of the Christian Institute say in a joint statement published recently that: "Foreign investment in the central economy is devoid of all morality." 15J They were responding to a statement made by the "Minister of Bantu Administration", Mr. M.C. Botha. Mr. Botha had spelled out in unequivocal terms just how little the so-called homelands are ever going to get by way of autonomy.
"In the economic framework of the country, the economy of the homelands is interwoven with that of the Republic of South Africa and it stands to reason that the development of the homelands cannot be carried out at a pace which would have detrimental effect on the economy of the country." 16
Mr. Botha's statement makes it clear that South Africa is one country and effectively undermines the "independence" gimmick for so-called homelands. Safeguarding of the vital economic interests of South Africa under apartheid is based on keeping the bantustan reserves as reservoirs of cheap labour, the source of super-profits for foreign investors. No amount of foreign "economic influence" will alter that. On the contrary, the 16 major U.S. corporations investing in South Africa whose executives met in January - including IBM, ITT, GM, Ford, Firestone, Burroughs and Goodyear - know it.
"There will always be others to take our place"

At the end of their trial, at which they were charged of sedition and incitement because of their leadership of the Positive Action Campaign and the uprising which followed the Sharpeville shootings, Mr. Sobukwe told the court: "If we are sent to jail there will always be others to take our place" 17/. This forecast, based on a deep understanding of African hatred for white settler domination, has been vindicated countless times.
In the post-Sharpeville era the South African racist regime has enacted a series of harsh laws to harass its opponents, compounding the notoriety of apartheid year in and year out. Evidence was abundant that both the PAC and the ANC had resolved to carry on with the struggle underground, after the outlawing of the two African organizations under the amorphous Suppression of Communism Act. In 1962, the present white settler Prime Minister, Mr. J.B. Vorster, then 1 Gatsha Buthelezi and Beyers Naude, Foreign investment in South Africa Joharnebur, 10 March, 1976.

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"Minister of Justice", propelled himself to the front tanks of the ruling National Party's extremists by introducing the General Laws Amendment Act, a sweeping piece of legislation, more notoriously known as the "Sabotage Act", which upgraded simple offences like painting anti-government slogans to treasonable offences, punishable by a minimum of five years and a maximum of the death sentence.

The apartheid regime was forced into desperate measures by the spreading activities of the liberation movement in the underground, confounding the earlier boasts of that regime that it had "broken the backbone" of the African organizations. PAC's underground armed wing, which came to be known by the Xhosa name POQO (which means authentic), succeeded in spreading Mau Mau style panic amongst the white settlers. In the underground, PAC's branches had been regrouped into small cells and armed units, whose standard weapon, like that of the Mau Mau of Kenya, was the panga, a home-made machete. These POQO units staged a number of armed attacks on police and government stooges, including guards of the puppet chief minister of the Transkei, Matanzima. It was as a result of one of these attacks on the main police station in Paarl, when two whites were killed, that Mr. Vorster ordered Justice Snyman to conduct an inquiry into the Paarl uprising.

Midway through his inquiries, Justice Snyman suspended hearings and submitted an interim report warning the government that PAC planned similar attacks on white South Africans on a nation-wide scale during 1963, on orders of Mr. Potlako Leballo and the national headquarters of the PAC in Maseru, Lesotho. 18/ Mr. Vorster reacted by amending the Sabotage Act to include the infamous 90-day "detention without trial" law and the so-called Sobukwe Clause (of the same Act), empowering the "Minister of Justice" to detain at his pleasure the PAC leader after he completed the three-year hard labour sentence for leading the Sharpeville campaign. Under the 90-day detention law the rule of habeas corpus was overridden and any commissioned police officer could order the detention of a political suspect for 90 days at a time and the courts, such as they are, are powerless to act. This travesty of justice, universally condemned within South Africa and abroad, has today been succeeded by an even more draconian indefinite detention law which came with the 1967 Terrorism Act. Black
consciousness movement detainees have been held under the Terrorism Act for indefinite periods after the pro-FRELIMO rallies in September 1974.

A massive swoop on suspected members of the PAC was mounted by the South African security police from the end of March 1963. By the middle of the year more than 10,000 POQ suspects were behind bars. The ANC underground, which had been conducting a campaign of sabotage under its armed wing, Umkonto we Sizwe, suffered similarly. Some of the casualties of this blitzkrieg against the underground movement were those who appeared with Mr. Nelson Mandela, the former Transvaal president of the ANC*, in the comparatively well reported Rivonia trial which began in October 1963. Thousands of detainees were during 1963 convicted of belonging to PAC and furthering its aims in violation of the ban imposed in 1960. They received relatively milder sentences. Hundreds


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of those whom state prosecutors found to have come from higher up in the ranks received far more severe sentences. Records show that 40 POQO activists were executed from amongst those arrested in 1963. The list of executed PAC men has since that time passed the 100 mark because even within prisons jailbreaks were staged and government spies were killed. Also several other cells have been raided during the later part of the 1960's and in the 1970's. Most of those charged under the Sabotage Act have been given long stretches on Robben Island, where many from the 1963 arrests are still serving, and a few have been executed. In his extensively researched but hopelessly one-sided book, Urban Revolt in South Africa, Mr. Edward Felt grudgingly concedes that the growing discontent amongst the African masses was attested to "by the mounting support for PAC and its terrorist wing POQO". 1/ Mr. Sobukwe's promise that "others will take our place" was being fulfilled. With the rise of the Black consciousness movement, following the bleak period and widespread apathy ushered in by the ruthless suppression of the 1960s, it is self-evident that apartheid brutality has all but spent itself as a deterrent. The timing could not be more fortuitous in the light of the victories which African liberation movements have scored in Angola and Mozambique and the intensifying armed struggle in Namibia and Zimbabwe. Just as Sharpeville resulted from the hightide of decolonization in Africa north of the Zambezi, the battle for liberation everyone is predicting soon to take place in South Africa stands to gain from the favourable conditions now surrounding the African masses within Azania. The apartheid regime is vulnerable

The greatest significance of the campaign which led to the Sharpeville shootings lies in the fact that it proved that the' South African apartheid regime, like all oppressive regimes, is vulnerable. Further it shows that it is the human element and not sophisticated weapons alone, which will be the decisive factor in the resolution of the struggle between the African majority and their white minority oppressors. Yeaxs after apartheid South Africa had equipped itself with the finest arsenal/modern weapons in the whole of Africa, a seasoned commentator on the
political scene, Mr. Allister Sparks, told readers of the Johannesburg Rand Daily Mail that the growing black labour movement "places tremendous real power in the hands of black workers; this is going to become the main pressure factor in South African politics in the future." 2/ I would add that the decisive factor will be the armed struggle. Be' that as it may, it is worth recalling that on the eve of Sharpeville, Mr. Sobukwe said when African workers force industry to come to a standstill "the government will be forced to come to our terms." 21 A combination of renewed armed struggle, with the rough edges of the 1960's smoothed out, and pressure on industry by the African labour force, are far more powerful than any weapon in Mr. Vorster's arsenal.


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Sharpeville Day in 1976 is therefore being commemorated under very promising prospects for the struggle in Azania. At this time, supporters of the Azanian national liberation struggle would do well to be mindful of one particular danger facing Azanians in particular, and Africa in general. According to a survey published in 1972 by the United Nations Unit on Apartheid "total foreign investment in South Africa amounted in 1970 to R5,818 million."22/ A guide to the rate at which foreign money is pouring into South Africa is that for 1970 alone Z328 million came in, "only to be exceeded once again during 1971." 23/ The principal investors are Britain, the U.S.A., France, the Federal Republic of Germany, i.e., the leading Western industrial countries and Japan. The first four are members of NATO and the first three are also permanent members of the Security Council. In its very first meeting to consider the question of apartheid in South Africa, the Security Council recognized that apartheid could endanger international peace, which is an understatement. But for these countries and their investments, apartheid South Africa would not be as strong an enemy for the oppressed African majority to deal with. In a brilliant article which tears away the double talk which he calls South Africa's "new-speak", a Washington Post correspondent says South African foreign policy: "stripped of diplomatic phrasing ... rests on the notion that poor black neighbouring states can be bought off; give them enough aid and they won't harbour the guerrillas that could threaten the system". 24/

On the other side of the blackmail coin is an even grimmer picture, crystallized by the introduction of the new Defence Amendment Bill which declares as a "legitimate target" any African country, South of the Sahara, judged by the apartheid regime to be posing a threat to South Africa. The aggression against the People's Republic of Angola and stubborn occupation of the southern part of this independent African state is a demonstration that this new defence bill, like all of South Africa's barbaric laws, is no mere threat. Apartheid South Africa feels licensed to commit aggression against any independent African State. The British
magazine, The Economist, reveals where western countries stand when their economic interests get affected:

"It is on the borders of South Africa ... that the West should be ready to draw a line in defence of its economic interests."

And since it is OAU tradition that independent States should help those countries fighting for their liberation, it is clear that "defence of its economic interests" for the West could include the aggression against those countries in Africa which refuse to take South Africa's bribes.


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To help the Azanian liberation movement, and Africa as a whole, a commitment is required from the international community which goes beyond the condemnations poured at South Africa since Sharpeville. Measures need to be taken, within the United Nations system as well as at the national level in every country, and these must rapidly lead to all United Nations Member States, amongst other measures, ratifying and implementing the provisions of the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid.

A recent report from the Nairobi Sunday Nation on the general atmosphere inside Azania is fitting for concluding this article because the situation it describes is reminiscent of the mood inside the country during the time of Sharpeville:

"At first glance inside South Africa there is little to show that it could be on the brink of a prolonged war. But scratch the surface there are all the fears and frustrations of a population preparing to defend itself. It is Whites who are getting edgy ... At the scene of a shooting in Central Johannesburg - I heard a chilling comment: 'They are getting frightened, it's Angola.' Main railway stations are periodically packed with soldiers, many leaving behind wives and children as they head off to the barracks. The radio plays record requests 'for the boys on the border' ... A mining official discreetly displays his armoury, which he bought just in case two hand guns, a .22 rifle and a shotgun. Many of the Whites have been on retreat most of their lives, moving down Africa as each country gained independence and black rule. South Africa was the last 'refuge' ... Now they all sit in South Africa - four and half million Whites outnumbered five to one by blacks - wondering what the future holds. A lot have yet another escape route through retaining their original nationality particularly the British. In the meantime they will heed Major General Neil Webster director-general of
resources, who recently told them 'to get used to the idea of living with a warlike situation for many years to come". 2/25/ Sunday Nation, Nairobi, 22 February 1976.