



ON THIS DAY

MARCH 22 1960

In South Africa 67 people were killed and nearly 200 wounded in the Sharpeville disturbances.

World opinion condemned South Africa, which a year later left the Commonwealth and became a republic

[SHARPEVILLE]

JOHANNESBURG, MARCH 21

The Pan-Africanists' campaign against the pass laws exploded to-day on the banks of the Vaal river — at Vereeniging and in Vanderbijlpark near by, the site of many industries and the country's largest steel-rolling mill. After desultory shooting in the morning, in which one African was killed and another seriously wounded, a crowd of several hundred Africans this afternoon began stoning the police armoured cars. Quite suddenly there were bursts of firing, chiefly from Sten guns, and the mob scattered, leaving about 80 people sprawled on the ground in a growing pool of blood.

Among them was a dead child and a screaming woman, painfully if superficially wounded. By dusk a dozen bodies were in the mortuary with, according to the police, more to come in. Some 30 people had been admitted to local hospitals with serious wounds.

One report put the number of dead at more than 50, while the injured people exceed 150, including a score of women and children.

FRENZIED HELP

Mr Charles Channon, a Press photographer with long war experience, described the scene as the "bloodiest" he had ever seen; he added that most of the young constables were "obviously appalled" by what their shooting had done, and they tried to make some amends by the "almost frenzy" with which they helped to get the wounded people into the ambulances. . .

Nobody seems to know quite how the tragedy occurred, especially as the anti-pass campaign had opened to-day so calmly almost everywhere. Around Johannesburg, headquarters of the movement, there were civil disobedience protests, which were handled amicably, almost humorously; and at Durban and Port Elizabeth everything was normal.

The Pan-Africanist Movement, which is a rival breakaway group from the moderate African National Congress, had set to-day aside for pass law protests, and people were asked to go peacefully to the nearest police stations to report that they had not got their passes with them and ask to be arrested. In most places the police apparently told them to go away, although in Johannesburg Mr Robert Sobukwe, leader of the Pan-Africanists (and a lecturer at Witwatersrand University), was detained with 10 others for questioning.

CAR WRECKED

Around Vereeniging, however, trouble was apparently expected, and after the shooting in the morning police reinforcements were sent there. Soon after noon about a dozen Saracen armoured vehicles were on call at the Sharpeville location. Soon the police station at Sharpeville, standing in a large open compound, was virtually besieged by thousands of Africans shouting "Africa, Africa!".

The only way the police outside could make contact with those in the station was to force a way in with the Saracens. As soon as the armoured cars got through the ranks of Africans would close again. A municipal motor car which ventured through earlier in the morning emerged as a wreck, with the occupants injured. Gradually the station force was built up to 60 armed policemen.

Up to late this afternoon no official explanation had been given for the immediate cause of the order to fire, but some hooliganism had been going on before the crowd started stoning the armoured cars. . .

True 22/3/88

Robert Sobukwe Papers

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