

WHEN Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe planned the launch of the Pan Africanist Congress's anti-pass campaign of March 21, 1960, he anticipated a clash between police and demonstrators.

He was determined however, to go ahead with the campaign and to do everything in his power not to give the police reason to use strength.

Strict instructions were given to those who were going to take part in the march to behave in an orderly fashion and to resist any temptation to be violent or unruly.

By SAM MABE

Supporters of the campaign were to leave their passbooks at home — which was illegal — and were to march to local police stations and hand themselves over for arrest.

Stressed

Mr Sobukwe had also warned the marchers to watch out for *agents provocateurs* or unruly elements among their numbers who might deliberately provoke the police to take action against the marchers. These were to be disciplined by the PAC.

On March 16, Mr Sobukwe wrote to the Commissioner of Police, Major-General Rademeyer, informing him of the intended march.

He stressed that the march was going to be peaceful and that the PAC was going to maintain discipline among the marchers. He requested the police not to provoke the marchers to resort to violence.

29 years after Sharpeville, the blood still flows



FOCUS

He asked the police not to give impossible commands to the marchers, who would at all times be ready to obey orders given to them.

He cited an example where police would give orders to thousands of people to disperse within three minutes, and then almost immediately baton-charge them.

As had been planned, Mr Sobukwe led a group of marchers who included Mr Zeph Mothopeng, the current president of the PAC,

who was released from prison recently.

They presented themselves for arrest at Orlando police station in Soweto. The police obliged and 150 of them were locked up.

There were similar peaceful marches to police stations at various parts of the country.

The most notable were at Langa near Cape Town and at Sharpeville near Vereeniging. It was also at these townships that violence erupted, leading to spontaneous labour strikes and the spread of violence which lasted for many weeks throughout the country.

Baton

At Langa, 10 000 people had gathered in defiance of a banning order announced a few hours earlier. The meeting was broken up by police who baton-charged the marchers.

Two people were killed and 26 injured. The Prime Minister, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, immediately suspended the pass laws.

The PAC declared March 28 a national day of mourning and on that day, violence broke once again in Cape Town and there were large-scale work stayaways.

A state of emergency which was declared on March 30 seemed to have

Orchestrated by Robert Sobukwe (above) the events of March 21, 1960, changed the face of black politics and black resistance. But although current PAC president Zeph Mothopeng is out of jail, little progress has been made since that fateful day



fuelled the anger of the people who continued with street demonstrations.

Thousands of people were arrested, and on April 8 the Unlawful Organisations Act was passed, meaning that the PAC was banned.

The African National Congress was also banned, despite objections from some liberal MPs who said the Government should rather negotiate with the ANC and work out a dispensation that would contribute to the restoration of law and order in the country.

It was the events of March 21 which changed the face of black politics and black resistance.

The Government adopted very tough measures against political activists. Even though the state of emergency was later lifted, most of its provisions were made into law.

Many people were subsequently detained without trial, others banned and various other clamps imposed on political activity in the townships.

Leader

Mr Sobukwe had shown himself to be a leader the Government could not trust. When he was arrested on March 21 at Orlando police station together with some members of the PAC's executive, he was jailed for three years.

At the end of his prison term, the Government was still not convinced that it would be safe to release him. A special law was passed in Parliament, the Sobukwe Clause, which allowed the Government to keep him in prison for a further three years.

In the past 29 years, there have been similar uprisings in South Africa, most notably in 1976, 1980 and between 1984 and 1986. Thousands of people have been killed.

Not all of them have been killed by the police. Victims of apartheid are now killing fellow-victims of apartheid.

Many reasons can be given for this state of affairs. But whatever they are, the fact is that very little progress has been made since 1960. The ANC and the PAC are still at each other's throats in their fight for supremacy.

Maybe these are some of the issues that need to be addressed today when the 29th anniversary of the Sharpeville shootings is commemorated.

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