

Uitenhage worker tells of what he saw on March 21

THE police's explanation for what happened on March 21 on Maduna Road goes something like this: a mob of about 4 000 people after singing a song about killing whites, surrounded two Caspirs and then began to shower the police with rocks and stones. The police feared for their lives so the order was given to open fire. Here we carry an account of the massacre given by a Uitenhage worker. Which do you think is the true story?

MY house is in the street in front of the square. That day people started gathering in the square and making preparations to go to the funeral at about nine in the morning.

I was in the front room of my house just watching. A Caspir came into the square and drove around chasing people. People would run away into the houses. Then a white policeman standing on the top of the Caspir shouted 'throw' trying to encourage people to throw stones. But the people just ignored him and started congregating again.

Then they started marching down Maduna Road. As they were marching the Caspir overtook them and parked where the taxis usually pick people

up. I started running after the people in order to join them. The Caspir then drove past again and went and parked near 19th avenue.

As we neared 18th and 19th, we stopped and waited for other people to join the march. We were singing freedom songs as we walked. We started moving again and as we were going past the 7th Day Adventist Church the Caspir overtook again and went up to the top of the hill and parked across the road. It was joined by another Caspir which came from the town end of Maduna Road with a landrover and white police truck.

As the crowd reached 15th Avenue, one policeman came

up on top of the Caspir and he raised up his hand. The crowd stopped. Then I saw a small boy on a bicycle come out from the front of the crowd and ride up to the Caspirs. He looked back at the crowd, raised his fist and then started riding again. As he started riding he was shot and then all the police started shooting from both Caspirs.

We all started running. As I was running I saw another Caspir at the back of the crowd. They were also shooting. When the shooting stopped I saw the police come down from the Caspirs, collect stones and throw them among the people lying on the road. Then the ambulances came and started collecting people. I started going home then.

8 000 mourn Langa dead



Workers at Volkswagen sing Nkosi Sikelela during the memorial stoppage

OVER 8 000 workers in FOSATU's Uitenhage factories stopped work for 15 minutes on March 28 in memory of those killed at Langa a week earlier.

Machines were switched off and workers gathered for a short prayer meeting.

At the meetings, worker leaders outlined the history of the struggle for liberation.

Recalling the shootings at Sharpeville in 1960 and now at Langa in 1985, they said the struggle for freedom from oppression would not be halted by events like these, they only made people more determined.

The workers then observed a few moments of silence and finished off with the singing of Nkosi Sikelela.

In many of the factories, workers wept as they remembered loved ones senselessly murdered in the massacre.

In some of the factories, even the clerks, cafeteria staff and medical staff joined in the stoppage.

And staff in the FOSATU offices in Port Elizabeth and Uitenhage also observed the time of silence.

E Cape chairman explains why unions did not back stay-away

FOSATU and the unity unions have been attacked for refusing to support the March 16-18 stay-away called by the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (Pebco). To put the record straight, we asked the federation's Eastern Province chairman, Thembinkosi Mkalipi, to give some background to the stay-away and explain why the unions decided not to back it.

SINCE the November stay-away in the Transvaal, there had been suggestions in Port Elizabeth that we should also have a stay-away. But an official decision was only taken at a Pebco rally sometime in January. We saw it announced in the press.

On February 7, FOSATU had its first meeting with Pebco and other UDF affiliates. Food and Canning Workers Union and the General Workers Union were also there. In the meeting we asked Pebco why they had now come to the unions when the decision for a stay-away had already been made.

Without any caucusing, all the unions at that meeting took a common stand. We said that because of the economic position in the Eastern Cape, it was ill advised to go on a stay-away.

We said we supported the use of stay-aways as a means of pressure, but all our factories were involved in retrenchment negotiations and Ford was closing. How could we be expected to support a stay-away? Pebco kept on pushing for a stay-away committee to be elected immediately. The unions refused saying they would have to go back to get a mandate from the workers.

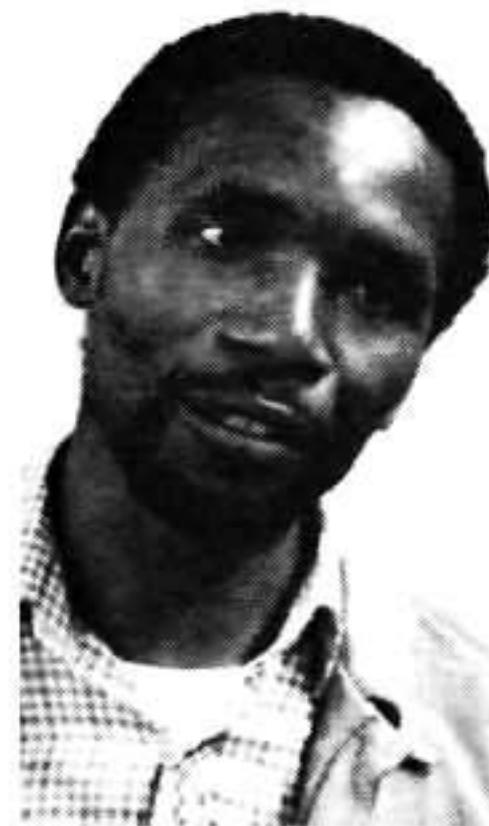
At the next meeting, the FOSATU delegation, which for various reasons arrived late, was merely told by Pebco that a decision had been taken and that a stay-away committee would be elected at a Pebco rally.

The only contact we had with Pebco after this meeting was two days before the stay-away. We as unity unions once again said we were against the stay-

away. We also said that the demands for the removal of GST and the petrol price increase were unrealistic. The other issue which worried the unions was that the stay-away would divide workers racially. Coloured workers were not expected to support the stay-away. As non-racial organisations we

said we could not encourage some of our members to stay-away and not others. We said that employers could use the stay-away as an opportunity to replace African workers with coloureds. Also, we said, it was likely that unorganised workers would be fired. We asked Pebco to call off the stay-away and enter into genuine discussions with worker representatives. At this point, Pebco walked out of the meeting.

Now, to evaluate the success of the stay-away. In the press, white businessmen stated that on the Friday business had been as good as Christmas. Black businessmen also said they had benefited from the stay-away. In the light of these statements, it seemed to us that the only people who didn't benefit were the workers. Many workers in small factories were fired, some workers were suspended and most lost wages. We agree that in terms of numbers the stay-away was 100 percent successful. But petrol is still the same price, bus fares have remained the same and GST is unchanged. Nothing has been affected by the stay-away, except workers have suffered.



E Cape chairman, Mkalipi

Workers donate R2 400 to victims' families

FOSATU workers in Uitenhage so far have donated over R2 400 to the families of those killed in the Langa massacre.

To this has been added another R2 000 from the International Metalworkers Federation.

So far, workers at VW, Veldspun, Dorbyl, Goodyear, Borgwarner and Farm Fare have given money to the Langa fund. Money still has to be handed in from other FOSATU factories in the area.

Eastern Cape Regional secretary, Brother M Sam said that the fund had been started on March 27 by the FOSATU Uitenhage Local in order to assist families in meeting funeral expenses and other needs they might have.

He said the money had been divided up between 22 families — each family received about R180.

'Other unions involved in the present unity talks have also said that they will be giving money to the fund,' he added.