

SUNSHINE AND SHARPEVILLE

STILL splashing from the inexhaustible fountain of fantasy that is London's South Africa House are bright invitations to immigrate or travel to South Africa. Bewildered by beckonings to 'Sunshine Plus!' and 'Exhilarating South Africa', Britishers who have read their newspapers or watched television with any attention during the past few weeks must wonder whether Sharpeville could ever have happened or whether the news of it has somehow escaped the notice of South Africa's diplomatic representatives abroad. For what sort of people are able to find South Africa after Sharpeville exhilarating, or the persistent police assaults on Africans in the streets of South African cities an attraction second only to the sunshine? The invitations stand, lighting the corridors of consulates and competing against other playgrounds along the walls of travel agencies all around the world.

To believe that the South African Government is merely brazening it out is to catch just the glitter on the iceberg passing by. The South African Government is capable of brazening it out precisely because it sees no reason at all for doing otherwise. No administration that had so assaulted the conscience of the world by its acts would add such insult to such injury unless its own conscience remained quite clear of disquiet. The truth is, of course, that the South African Government still believes in what its own posters proclaim, and to remove them would be an admission of guilt that it is morally incapable of making.

The South African Government feels no guilt over Sharpeville because it recognizes no wrong in killing 68 people and wounding over 200 more in defence of white supremacy. If it condemns itself at all in the lobby of its heart, it does so only in whispered doubts of the prudence. Yet, conditioned by the stock responses of its own electorate, how could it have supposed that the outside world would have reacted with such a hurricane of horror to the death of a few dozen black men? Was white supremacy to be risked at the cost of a little shooting? And if a salutary lesson is to be given black resistance again, is prudence to dictate the suicide of rule?

There are many who still doubt that the South African Government planned the killings at Sharpeville. Yet much larger crowds of protesting Africans than the one which assembled outside Sharpeville police station have since been dispersed with

warnings, baton charges, shots in the air or the wounding of a few front-line demonstrators in the legs. And surgeons giving evidence at the Sharpeville Commission of Enquiry claim that three-quarters of the Sharpeville wounded whom they examined in hospital had all been shot in the back. Eye-witness affidavits that no warnings were given by the police emphasize the significance of this. The Government decided upon a massacre at the outset of the anti-pass campaign, as the show of intransigence that it had for so long been promising the country. It is unfortunate that the show should have excited so much censure abroad, but no loyal Nationalist considers the show any less right or necessary than had the outside world ignored Sharpeville altogether.

A government capable of Sharpeville is unlikely to be turned from the highway of defiance it has chosen by the pluckings of protest. The censure of the outside world may be inconvenient; but white South Africa has suffered censure before, without feeling it necessary to make any changes in its conduct. In time, as other countries flare into the headlines, attention will wander and the censure abate; Dr. Verwoerd himself has often spoken of apartheid as though all it needed to do was to last out its moral blockade before achieving ultimate acceptance as a sort of universal religion of race. The lunatic who believes himself to be the Archangel Michael is not open to dissuasion on the point; whatever scepticism he encounters, he ascribes to ignorance or wilful self-deceit. And in just the same way does white supremacy react to the rebellions of reason.

What the South African Government has never ignored is the possibility of restraint. Industrial action by world trade unionism, economic sanctions by the United Nations, the physical prevention of further control over the trust territory of South-West—any of these three forms of action would tumble the walls of apartheid merely by trumpeting. On two occasions in the past, the Government rapidly changed its mind about utilizing convict labour to break African stevedore strikes when it was threatened by International Transport Federation reprisals. Commerce and industry in South Africa are already rocking under the effects of the Emergency, and the whites are more than ever aware of the economics essential to supremacy. The average Afrikaner no longer communes with his bible among the clear flat horizons of the veld. He listens to commercial radio in his suburban flat and dodges the dreariness of work among paper-backs, the

films and hire-purchase furniture. Blood is not nearly as important to him as privilege; he fights to "keep the kaffir in his place" only in order that he should not run any risk of competitively losing his own. Such people, however shrilly they threaten it, do not die in the streets as their ultimate sacrifice to obsession. They submit when they see at last that they have no other choice; it is so much easier after all just to go on living.

The outside world has a choice between breaking the back of white supremacy and actively assisting it to survive. There can be no moral escape into mere acceptance. For the Saracens and sten-guns that alone can contain black resistance are bought from abroad with the profits of the violence they allow. Behind the policemen who fired into the fleeing throng at Sharpeville are those who trade with South Africa, from the dock-side to the shop, exchanging or allowing the exchange of oil for diamonds, machinery for gold, bullets for fruit. They are accomplices in the force against which they protest; and as long as they remain so, their protests are not only hollow but insulting.

Sharpeville is yesterday now, with its 68 dead and over 200 wounded. Only in newspaper files can it still be seen, a suddenly arrested moment in the agony of Africa, twisted across the paper before being loosed into the past. The killed and the broken of Sharpeville are now a forgetting, the fading of faces under the glare of this morning's front page. And along the walls of airports and travel agencies round the world remain the coloured posters advertising 'Exhilarating South Africa'. If the revulsion against Sharpeville has any meaning at all, it must make another Sharpeville impossible, paying to those who died that Monday suddenly in the sunshine the respect of some purpose.