



Johannesburg,  
April 1966

## 2. Death at the Flamingo

THE WEATHER WAS typically South African — warm to cool with scattered showers and thunderstorms in some parts of the country. And inside Flamingo Nightspot in Fordsburg, Johannesburg, life was as cheerful as it could best be. The nearly-200 patrons were swinging and twisting their hips feverishly, darting backwards and forwards, to the beat tune of the pulsating music from the band.

In fact the Saturday evening was, at least inside this hall, so good that the unsuspecting happy "nite-lifers" carried on right into the small hours of the next morning. No one — not even the stars above — could have known what was about to happen.

Suddenly as the clock stood at about 2.30 a.m. the door of the hall swung open with a terrific bang hitting the brick wall. The enthusiastic, hilarious crowd of smartly-dressed young men and women and their band stopped with equal, abrupt suddenness. Almost everybody in the hall spun round towards the door. Six policemen — four Whites and two Africans — burst into the hall. They had with them a barking police dog. It was on a leash.

The White policeman who held the dog went straight on to the stage, had a cursory exchange of words with the club owner before announcing that the evening was over and ordering everybody to disperse. He advanced to the crowd, his dog snarling and barking at the people before him. The panic-stricken crowd surged forward to the door and began to scramble down the stairs into the street below.

Then there was disaster. The crush and the terror were too great. Some of them fell on their faces on the stairs. Ten young people were trampled to death in a stampede which can best be described as a miniature Sharpeville. Eleven others were injured. They included a young man who was shot in the stomach and a girl whose breast was lacerated by a police dog.

While police entered the hall with one dog, two others were kept in readiness outside in the street. Police authorities in Johannesburg and Pretoria have, however, told the nation that the allegations made by eye-witnesses soon after the horrible incident are all "infamous lies." Their story is that it was a drunken, uncontrollable, crowd and that the police went into the hall to arrest a criminal who had committed housebreaking. And that as police entered the hall, the "drunken" crowd stoned them.

At one stage they said that only one dog was used upstairs but this was later retracted. Not surprisingly, the police have also threatened eye-witnesses who spoke to the Press soon after the incident with perjury charges.

Demands from Mrs. Helen Suzman, lone Progressive Party MP, and the Press, for a judicial, not departmental, inquiry have been rebuffed by the Government and the nation told it need not worry because an inquest would be held!

ONE WONDERS JUST WHAT PEOPLE will give evidence even at the inquest as all those who saw and survived the fatal stampede have told "infamous lies" and are now living under the shadow of impending perjury charges. Although the stampede happened two months ago, even this nation is still waiting for the promised inquest and meanwhile the hunt for "drunken," "uncontrollable" and "housebreaking criminals" continue almost daily.

It is all part of a general plan engineered by the Rand's police chief (Brigadier Louis Steyn) to "clean" Johannesburg of all "criminals" — unemployed Africans and all those whose passes are, for one reason or another, not in order.

In its shameless, crude nakedness the concerted campaign which began last November means pre-dawn raids by large police contingents of African homes in the townships; midnight swoops on Africans who live in suburban Johannesburg's backyards with their legally married wives or their girl-friends, employed by white householders as in-living domestic servants. It also means harrassing and humiliating Africans in the streets demanding passes from them almost daily.

No doubt there are criminals in Johannesburg, as there are in any community anywhere in the world. But the immorality and ugliness of this drive is that because of its political nature it aims only at the deprived section of the entire society, for more reasons than simply the checking of crime. There has never been any suggestion, of course, that the root causes of crime will be looked into.

The figures began to mount late last year, when 300 Africans were arrested when a 200-strong police task force launched a blitz within central Johannesburg on November 5. Then 700 Africans were arrested in a large-scale pre-dawn raid of African townships soon after Xmas. Police went from house to house in their search for "criminals". There was a midnight raid in which 1,300 police in Johannesburg's flatland arrested 900 Africans in February and in yet another midnight swoop on the suburbs 993 Africans were detained on March 2, 1966. The raids go on in Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, too.

Almost in all cases, the Africans were charged for trespassing, vagrancy and failing to produce passes. The dogs are there, and the police in their hundreds.

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