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INTERVIEW OF FRIDAY JUNE 18 WITH WINNIE MANDELA ON SOWETO RIOTS FROM ERIC ABRAHAM TELEPHONE CAPETOWN 655875

ABRAHAM: WINNIE MANDELA WHAT IS YOUR REACTION TO THE CURRENT OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE IN THE BLACK TOWNSHIPS SURROUNDING JOHANNESBURG AND ON THE WITWATERSRAND?

MANDELA: NATURALLY WE ARE TERRIBLY SHOCKED BY THE SITUATION, BUT THIS IS PRECISELY WHAT WE HAVE PREDICTED AND FURTHERMORE WE FORSAW THAT THE NATIONALIST REGIME'S LAWS WOULD LEAD THE COUNTRY TO THIS TYPE OF SITUATION.

ABRAHAM: THE AUTHORITIES SEEM TO BE MAKING A DIVISION BETWEEN THE SO CALLED LAW ABIDING CITIZENS OF THE BLACK TOWNSHIPS AND WHAT THEY TERMS 'TSOTSI'S' OR LOOTERS AND OPPORTUNISTS. WHAT IN YOUR OPINION IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE DISTURBANCES IN WHICH APPROXIMATELY 90 PEOPLE HAVE DIED AND OVER A 1 000 HAVE BEEN INJURED?

MANDELA: AS I HAVE TOLD THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC TIME AND TIME AGAIN RACE RELATIONS IN THIS COUNTRY HAVE DETERIORATED TO THE EXTENT THAT THERE WILL NO LONGER BE ANY POSSIBLE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN BLACK AND WHITE. WHAT IS HAPPENING IS, IN FACT, A PROJECTION OF BLACK ANGER AGAINST THE RACIST REGIME. THIS ANGER IS DIRECTED AT ANYTHING THAT IS CONNECTED WITH THE SYSTEM AND THE GOVERNMENT. IT IS NOT A QUESTION OF THE INSISTENCE OF THE AFRIKAANS LANGUAGE AS THE MODE OF INSTRUCTION FOR BLACK SCHOOLCHILDREN. THE BURNING OF THE OFFICES BELONGING TO THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION - THE BEERHALLS, ADMINISTRATION OFFICES, POST-OFFICES, ADMINISTRATION-RUN BUSES AND THE LIKE - SHOULD BE ENOUGH FOR PEOPLE TO REALIZE THIS POINT. IT HAS GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH VANDALISM AND OPPORTUNISTS (TSOTSI'S) OR ANY OF THOSE SUGGESTIONS. IT IS BLACK ANGER AGAINST WHITE DOMINATION.

ABRAHAM: IT HAS BEEN REPORTED THAT THE DISTURBANCES WERE INITIALLY STARTED BY SCHOOL-CHILDREN, THE SOME 10,000 BLACK SCHOOLCHILDREN IN THE SOWETO TOWNSHIP. YET FROM THE WORKERS AND ADULTS I SPOKE TO IN SOWETO YESTERDAY IT WOULD SEEM THAT THEY HAVE THE SUPPORT OF THE BLACK POPULATION AT LARGE AND THAT THE BASE OF THE CONFRONTATION HAS BROADENED BEYOND THAT OF THE AFRIKAANS LANGUAGE ISSUE. WOULD YOU AGREE?

MANDELA: PRECISELY. WE WARNED THE GOVERNMENT THAT THIS WOULD HAPPEN IF THEY CONTINUE COMPELLING THE CHILDREN TO LEARN A LANGUAGE THAT THEY DID NOT WANT TO LEARN AND CONTINUED DECIDING OUR CHILDREN'S FATE IN OUR PRESENCE. WE HAVE NO SAY WHATSOEVER EVEN IN THE MEDIUM OF THE INSTRUCTION OF OUR CHILDREN - AND IF THEY DEMONSTRATED THEIR HATRED AGAINST THE LANGUAGE THEY HAVE OUR FULL SUPPORT. BUT AS SUCH, THE AFRIKAANS ISSUE WAS MERELY A UNIFYING FACTOR - IT COULD HAVE BEEN ANYTHING.

ABRAHAM: DO YOU SEE ANY SIGNIFICANCE ARISING FROM THE SOLIDARITY MARCH OF SEVERAL HUNDRED WHITE STUDENTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND WHICH TOOK PLACE YESTERDAY (JUNE 17) AND WHICH WAS SPONTANEOUSLY JOINED BY SEVERAL HUNDRED BLACK CITY WORKERS. COULD THIS BE READ AS AN INDICATION OF CERTAIN WHITE PEOPLE BEING ACCEPTED BY BLACKS AND JOINING THEM IN THEIR STRUGGLE FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA IN WHICH ALL CITIZENS BLACK AND WHITE HAVE THE VOTE?

MANDELA: AS I HAVE SAID BEFORE IN MY SPEECHES. I HAVE ALWAYS HAD FAITH IN THE REMNANTS OF WHAT ONE MIGHT CALL THE CONSCIENCE OF THE COUNTRY - THE STUDENTS. IT WAS UNFORTUNATE THAT THE RACES HAVE DRIFTED FURTHER AND FURTHER APART BECAUSE OF THE DIVISIVE RACIAL LAWS AND THE STAGE WAS REACHED WHERE THE BLACK MAN HAD TO CONCENTRATE ON HIS OWN BLACK PRIDE AND CONSCIOUSNESS. AS A RESULT OF THIS IT BECAME NECESSARY THAT THE BLACK MAN SHOULD SPEAK FOR HIMSELF AND THE WHITES FOR THE WHITES. BUT WE ARE AWARE OF THE FACT THAT THERE ARE THOSE WHITES WHO ARE STILL CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THIS COUNTRY AND WHO REALIZE THAT AT NO STAGE HAVE WE EVER BEEN ANTI-WHITE AND THAT IT IS OUR REJECTION BY THE WHITE MAN THAT HAS RESULTED IN THE FORMATION OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS.

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ABRAHAM: WOULD YOU AGREE THEN THAT BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS SHOULD BE VIEWED AS A STRATEGY FOR CHANGE IN THIS COUNTRY.

MANDELA: PRECISELY. THERE IS NO OTHER SOLUTION. BLACK HAS TO SPEAK FOR BLACK. BLACK HAS TO DEVELOP SELF-RELIANCE, SELF-PRIDE AND THERE IS NO OTHER SOLUTION.

ABRAHAM: WINNIE MANDELA, WOULD YOU AGREE THAT THE CONFRONTATIONS WHICH BEGAN IN SOWETO AND HAVE SINCE ESCALATED AND SPREAD TO OTHER PARTS OF THE WITWATERSRAND, AND INDEED OTHER PARTS OF SOUTH AFRICA, IS A CULMINATION OR OUTCOME OF THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT?

MANDELA: BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS IS NOT A THING OF TODAY, IT IS NOT NEW. IN FACT IT IS NOT NECESSARILY A CULMINATION. WHAT IS HAPPENING IS JUST ORDINARY BLACK ANGER AT THE WHITE RACIST REGIME. BUT IT CANNOT NECESSARILY BE ATTRIBUTED TO BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AS SUCH. THE ISSUE IS MORE THAT OF A BLACK NATION VERSUS A WHITE MINORITY.

ABRAHAM: DO YOU SEE THE CURRENT SITUATION ESCALATING AND COULD YOU MAKE SOME PROPHECY IN THIS REGARD. SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE THIS TO BE A DISPLAY OF BLACK SOLIDARITY AND STRENGTH WHICH MIGHT BE DIFFUSED SHORTLY?

MANDELA: FROM WHAT I KNOW OF OUR NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT AND THEIR HANDLING OF NATIONAL ISSUES I BELIEVE THAT MORE PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE SHOT. MORE PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE ARRESTED. THEY ARE GOING TO DEAL WITH US THROUGH THE TRIBAL LEADERS AND BECAUSE THE PEOPLE ARE UNARMED THE SITUATION IS GOING TO DE-ESCALATE. AFTER ALL WE HAVE NO MACHINE GUNS. WE ARE FACED WITH PEOPLE GUNNING US DOWN WHILE WE ARE MERELY CARRYING STONES, NOT THAT ONE HAD ANY INTENTION OF FIGHTING A BATTLE WITH STONES. THE POLICE FIRED AT INNOCENT CHILDREN. INNOCENT UNARMED CHILDREN. WHAT HAS HAPPENED IS JUST AN ORDINARY RETALIATION BY THE BLACKS AGAINST MACHINE GUNS. SO WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN BECAUSE THEY HAVE THESE MACHINE GUNS IS THAT THEY ARE GOING TO QUELL IT. IT IS GOING TO SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY AND THEY ARE GOING TO CONTROL IT WITH THE SAME MEANS THEY HAVE USED HERE.

ABRAHAM: ACCORDING TO AN EYE-WITNESS REPORT IN THE INITIAL INCIDENT IN SOWETO THE POLICE FIRED FIRST AND THE STONES WERE THROWN AFTERWARDS. DO YOU BELIEVE THIS TO BE CORRECT OR DO YOU HAVE ANY FURTHER INFORMATION AS TO WHO STARTED THE CONFRONTATION?

MANDELA: I HAPPENED TO BE PRESENT, I WAS ON THE SCENE. I WAS, HOWEVER NOT PRESENT WHEN THE FIRST SHOTS WERE FIRED AT THE CHILDREN. WHAT HAPPENED WAS THAT AS THE ABOUT 10,000 CHILDREN MARCHED TOWARDS THE ORLANDO WEST HIGH SCHOOL - WHERE THEY INTENDED TO HOLD AN INNOCENT MEETING AT WHICH THEY WERE GOING TO FORMULATE A STRATEGY IN THE EVENT OF THE DEPARTMENT COMPELLING TO CONTINUE WITH THE AFRIKAANS, TO DECIDE JOINTLY AS TO WHAT THEY SHOULD DO. SO WHAT HAPPENED AS THEY WERE NEARING THE SCHOOL, THE POLICE FIRED AT THE INNOCENT SCHOOLCHILDREN WHO WERE RIGHT IN FRONT. THESE CHILDREN WERE AGED BETWEEN 8 AND 10 YEARS. THEY WERE NOT EVEN PART OF THE DEMONSTRATION. THE FIRST SHOTS LANDED ON A BOY OF ABOUT 10 YEARS OLD.

ABRAHAM: SO ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE REPOSENSE ON THE PART OF THE SCHOOLCHILDREN WAS PROVOKED BY THE EXCESSIVE MEASURES USED BY THE POLICE?

MANDELA: YES OF COURSE. WHAT THE POLICE DID WAS TO SET A DOG ON A CHILD. THE DOG BIT THE CHILD AND THE STUDENTS NATURALLY GOLD HOLD OF THE DOG TO PROTECT THE CHILD AND AS THEY DID THAT THIS PARTICULAR POLICEMAN FIRED THE FIRST SHOTS AT THIS CHILD, WHO DIED ON THE SPOT. THAT IS HOW THE DOG GOT KILLED AND THAT IS HOW THEY PROVOKED 10,000 CHILDREN. AND GOT THE SPONTANEOUS REACTION FROM THE CHILDREN WHO JUST PICKED UP STONES AND THREW THEM AT THE POLICE TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND NATURALLY AFTER THAT THE SITUATION WAS UNCONTROLLABLE WHICH IS PRECISELY WHAT WE HAD PREDICTED. AS THE GOVERNMENT IS LOOKING FOR COMMUNISTS UNDER OUR BEDS, ALL OVER THE COUNTRY - IN OTHER WORDS SOME KIND OF SCAPE GOAT THE COUNTRY WILL FLARE UP IN UNORGANIZED VIOLENCE WHEN BLACK ANGER PROJECTS ITSELF IN THE MANNER YOU SEE TODAY.
END OF INTERVIEW.

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