

COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE RIOTS AT
SOWETO AND OTHER PLACES IN SOUTH AFRICA.

WHOLE SESSION:

26th NOVEMBER, 1976.

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THE COMMISSION RESUMES ON THE 26th NOVEMBER, 1976.

MR HLUNGWANI: The first witness will be Mr Sawyer.

PETER JOHN WILLIAM SAWYER: sworn states:

MR HLUNGWANI: You are a technical official in Cape Town. You were kind enough to come forward to give evidence on a specific incident that you saw take place in the centre of Cape Town. That was on a Tuesday, you do not know which date, but I have found out that it was on the 7th September when rioting took place in Cape Town. Would you describe to the Commission the incident you saw take place that day? (10)
-- May I read?

Yes. -- I feel that it is my duty to state that the police action I witnessed from a high-rise building in clearing upper Burg Street using vehicles, was conducted with precision and was effective in clearing the street by the controlled throwing of tear gas canisters along the length of the street. I do not know upon which day it took place, but it was probably on a Tuesday of the riots. It was, I believe, the only day when such action took place in Burg Street. Shall I continue?

Yes, continue. -- On other occasions I saw men whom (20) I understood to be members of riot squads. The camouflage uniforms were distinctive and, in my opinion, suitable for the task. As a tax-payer I would be displeased were I to have seen policemen in their best blue uniforms having them soiled, and having to have them dry-cleaned at public expense.

(LAUGHTER) The camouflage uniforms are probably easy to launder at little expense. The men I saw were typical of the country's youth, with good faces and excellent bearing, behaving in a manner creditable to their force.

Whereabout is this place you are describing in (30) relation to what is called the Oswald Parow-rylaan? -- It overlooks/...

overlooks the whole length of Upper Burg Street, having a clear view to the arcade at the other end.

Did you have a wide range to see the happenings? -- No, the only range I saw was the length of the street and the width was narrow, the width of the street.

What time was it approximately? -- I cannot remember at all.

Could it have been at about 12 o'clock or something after 12 midday? -- As I cannot remember, I cannot say, but I could have a colleague provide that information I think. (10)

CHAIRMAN: If you do obtain more certainty, you could just phone the Secretary and tell him please. -- Yes.

MR HLUNGWANI: The only action you saw from the police was the tear gas? -- Yes.

Did they not use anything? -- I did not see other action as such. I have seen policemen moving in the course of their duties, but I cannot associate it with an action. So the answer to that question is that is the only actual action as such that I witnessed.

I ask you because the police used tear gas and batons (20) to disperse the crowd. -- That is the only occasion that I witnessed the use ... (intervenes)

That is now the first group they confronted. -- The only occasion that I saw tear gas used was that occasion.

Did you see batons used? -- No, I had not seen batons used myself.

M'Lord, I have no further questions.

MR NGO: Just one question. You say here: the men I saw were typical of the country's youth with good faces and excellent bearing. Now, there is a feeling that - I (30)
would like your comment there, that the young men have a tendency/...

tendency of being over-robust, rightly or wrongly, but there is that contention, particularly amongst the people in the townships. Now any comment there? -- I have no comments as I did not witness any other action. I have seen the squads in their vehicles and getting into their vehicles, but I have witnessed no other action and I cannot comment in any way on the robustness or otherwise thereof.

CHAIRMAN: Did it appear to you as if the use of the tear gas had some effect or was it - I do not want to say was it effective because obviously one cannot see from such a (10) long distance. -- I could see from that distance and the effect was quite miraculous. The street was full of people, the police drove through, the street was obscured by gas, the gas dispersed and the street was empty. That is the effect - quite miraculous.

Thank you very much and thank you for coming.

NO FURTHER QUESTIONS.

DR YUTAR: M'Lord, my next witness is a Mr F. Sonn and in calling him I shall not couple therewith an application that Your Lordship's Assessor will recuse himself. (LAUGHTER) (20)

FRANKLIN ABRAHAM SONN: verklaar onder eed:

DR. YUTAR: U is die president van die Kaaplandse Professionele Onderwysersunie. -- Dit is reg.

En die ander lede, ander amptenare is almal aanwesig in hierdie ouditorium op die oomblik. -- Dit is reg.

So u moet nou versigtig wees wat u sê, hoe u dit gaan sê, nie waar nie? -- Ek vrees so.

Nou daardie Unie het nou 'n volledige memorandum opgestel en u handig dit nou in as BEWYSSTUK 137 en u sal getuienis aflê volgens daardie memorandum. Nou net om die Kommissie (30) 'n idee te gee waaroor hierdie verslag gaan, sal dit miskien wenslik/...