

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

WHOLE SESSION:

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opvallend in daardie gebiede dat die dissipline nog gehandhaaf word. Ons het nog nooit skool probleme ondervind nie en die skole is waar 'n mens normaalweg baie stukkende ruite sien in die skole is daar minimaal.

Die tsotsi element is dit teenwoordig in u gebied? -- Ek kan amper sê daar is geen tsotsis nie, want sodra hulle werkloos is, skakel ons arbeidsafdeling met ons welsynsafdeling om die man te ondervra en hom te probeer plaas in werk wat hy nou geskik ag. So ek kan sê dit is minimaal. Ek kan dit nie beskryf as tsotsi nie, miskien 'n paar werklose jeugdiges, (10) of hulle verander dikwels van werk, maar ek kan hulle nie beskryf as tsotsis nie, dit bestaan nie.

Kan u moontlik aan die Kommissie vertel of daar skoliere uit Soweto of die Rand se area is wat skoolgaan in u gebied, wat in koshuise woon in u gebied? -- Nee, glad nie.

Daar is nie ander terreine waar daar kontak is tussen die inwoners van u gebied en inwoners van Soweto nie? -- Nee, tensy dit baie geheimsinnig geskied is ek nie bewus daarvan nie.

Geen verdere vrae, Edele.

GEEN VERDERE VRAE.

(20)

ADV. VAN GRAAN: Edele, die volgende getuie sal deur dr. Yutar gelei word.

DR YUTAR: The first witness this morning is Mr Mellet.

LEON MELLETT: sworn states:

DR YUTAR: Before I introduce you what you are and why, I would like to make it perfectly clear that as a result of an exhibit that I handed in yesterday, EXHIBIT 204, which comprised certain press cuttings written by what was termed a 'crime reporter' I asked the police to get in touch with you to come and see me that you may testify and that is why (30) you are here this morning. You were born in Natal. -- That is/...

is correct.

And you have been a crime reporter for the Natal Mercury for the last 10 years. -- That is correct.

You have lived all your life thus far in this province of Natal and you have a very good all round knowledge of the situation here, particularly with regard to the Zulu population. -- Yes, most of my life. I have lived elsewhere for short periods.

Now, with that background could you tell His Lordship what your view is as far as you could ascertain and (10) observe? What is the attitude of the Zulu race as a whole towards the riots which broke out in Soweto in June, 1976? -- I believe that the Zulu is a very disciplined nation and that their children have got a lot of respect for their parents. I have also noticed in the past that the Zulu is also very respectful towards the police. This came about also during the 1973 strikes. They never really wished to have a confrontation with the police itself. I also believe that the parents of the Zulu would like to see that their children further their education and as a result I think the parents had (20) tremendous influence over their children in not taking part in the riots which took place elsewhere in the country, but unfortunately there were instigators and these people did try their luck with the children.

You talk of instigators. From where did they come? -- My information is that most of them came from the Transvaal. They came trainloads and even busloads.

You call them instigators, others have termed them agitators, I do not suppose there is much difference between the two. -- No, I do not want to make a difference between (30) the two.

And/...

And what was the method they adopted? -- After getting the children worked up, the school children, the case in Inanda particularly, they succeeded in getting the younger children in the front to act as shields for possible police bullets. I think they were hopeful that there would be a confrontation between the police and the marchers in which case if bullets had been fired, some of the children would have fallen. If this was the case, the Zulu parents would have been very agitated and this could have then furthered the little bit of a situation that we had here. In fact (10) it could have become much worse I believe, than in Soweto, if the parents had become agitated by this.

We led evidence elsewhere in the country that what you have told us has occurred elsewhere; the children in front and then the older groups at the back and the instigators or the agitators they took up their position far behind. Did this apply here too? -- Yes, that is correct.

They followed the same method. -- Yes, they followed the same method. They even had children carrying some banners.

Now, we are going to talk about a few incidents and (20) we will start off with the anonymous call that you received in connection with the medical students. Will you deal with that first? -- I think that was the first instance of any problems we have had since the June riots in Johannesburg. I got a call to say that the students were gathering and were planning a march on to the city in which they were hoping to distribute pamphlets to buses, it was a bus route they were going to follow and urged the people to join them in their protest march in sympathy with the Soweto rioters. When I got there they had already started marching along Sydney Road. (30) At the time there were no policemen there. I followed them
for/...

for about two and a half to three kilometres and they stopped buses going out to the townships. They blocked the roads and distributed pamphlets through the windows of the buses and urged workers from nearby factories who had all gathered at the side to see what was going on, to join them, but the workers just ignored them and just looked at them and as far as I could see not a single member of the public, the Non-White public there, joined in the protest. The police then arrived and blocked off the route and these people stopped at the intersection, this is a distance before the police (10) arrived - where the police actually were and they moved away and when the police moved in they scattered in all directions and there were not many policemen there and it was impossible for the few policemen who were there to make as many arrests as they did. What in fact happened was that from the factory workers and from the onlookers assisted the police and probably arrested most of them. Many of them who got away then re-grouped again in Gale Street out of sight of where the police were active at the time and a motorist came past and said that the students were re-grouping and they were again trying to (20) urge the workers and bystanders to join them in their march. It was impossible at that time for the police to get their vehicles on the road to get to the scene and they had to go by foot and they ran and it struck me that many motorists and particularly delivery trucks driven by Non-Whites had stopped and had given the policemen lifts to the scene where more arrests were made and where again the members of the public, particularly Non-White people, had joined in making the arrests. Some of the students sought refuge in the nearby factories, but the Non-White workers there hauled them (30) out and returned them to the police.

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In other words, there was complete cooperation on the part of and assistance by the general public to assist the police against these people who were trying to stage a march and a protest. -- Yes, it resulted in a large arrest. I think it was near 81 or 91.

91 actually is the figure. We come now to another incident where two plainclothes policemen were keeping watch on a drug dealer in a nearby school. Is that correct? -- That is correct.

What happened there? -- This is one school I learned (10) later had a bit of a background, a bit of a tsotsi element among the children. They in fact had a little shebeen on the quiet and had taken to dagga smoking and various of these things. Two Narcotics Bureau detectives or Drug Squad detectives had information at the time that there was a drug merchant operating near the school, but it so happened that these children were being addressed by two members of the Inkatha Movement at the time, which the police I believe were not aware of and again some of the agitators there managed to sweep up the children in this way that they now believed that (20) these two policemen were Security policemen keeping observation or spying on what was being said that day.

This is what the agitators had told the children that these two policemen who were there on quite a different mission, were in fact spies spying on the children? -- On the children and the officials of Inkatha.

And what effect did that have on the audience? -- Well, this annoyed the children and they grouped together and they eventually surrounded the police car and they started shouting that the policemen must be killed. The two policemen had (30) no other alternative but to get back into their car and to try

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and force their way out. In fact one shot was fired in the air to clear the way, but as they moved away the students then stoned the police car and it was damaged in the incident and by now they were quite incensed and there were about 300 of them and then they took to the streets and they started moving towards a nearby hotel. During this, they tried to get the pupils from the nearby school of which a large percentage happened to be Transvaal scholars to join them, but these children just looked through the window and refused to join them. Then they started stoning one bus in which there (10) were people inside and they started stoning other motorists, African motorists. When the police finally came, they dispersed and scattered in all directions, but the police managed to arrest 2 of the ringleaders.

Two of the children? -- Of the children. They were believed to be the ringleaders.

Right, now I would like you to tell the Commission what happened following the arrest of these two. -- The situation then remained tense for the following day. The children refused to go to school, they refused to attend classes, (20) and then at the time it appeared as if we were heading in Umlazi for a situation which could have erupted the same as in Soweto. The situation remained like that the whole day. There were no more incidents, except for one when a group again moved off and they again stoned a bus, but they were also dispersed as the police appeared on the scene. Then on the third day the children again would not go back to school, they gathered at school and the indication then was that they were planning big trouble. They refused to get dressed in uniforms, they were dressed in plain clothes and it (30) appeared that day as if they had planned a mass riot.

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In other words the situation assumed ugly proportions and now will you tell the Commission what helped to diffuse it? -- Two members of the Kwa Zulu Government, I have their names here, the one is Mr W. Sabelo, he is a member of the Inkatha Central Committee, and the other, Mr J.T. Zulu, he is the urban representative of Kwa Zulu. They approached Brigadier Gert Kruger who was the then divisional inspector of police for Port Natal and Colonel B.J. Horak, the district commandant for Durban South and various other officers who were there. I was with them at the time. And they came to what I (10) would term a gentlemen's agreement between the Kwa Zulu officials and Brigadier Kruger and General Horak. The two Kwa Zulu officials asked for the release of the two students and then they promised that if the students were released in their custody and taken back to the school, they would be able to diffuse the situation. I believe the police were faced then at the time with a situation where they have two people who are facing possible serious charges on the one hand and on the other hand a situation which could erupt into the riots which could carry on and I think they came to a wise decision (20) at the time to then agree after about a 2 hour consultation to release the students. The students were first of all brought into the meeting and the students then apologised and said that they acted wrongly and they were released and taken back to the school where they promised that they would apologise to the school principal and to the rest of the students for the trouble and the inconvenience they had caused; also to the parents and other officials, because the previous night some of the officials had gone - the Non-White Kwa Zulu officials had gone with loudspeakers and had called for a (30) meeting with the parents and various other teachers in the area and/...

and there it was - became very evident that the people then, the parents and the officials did not wish to join in any form of rioting that was taking place in Soweto. I think as a result of this gentlemen's agreement between the police and the officials the situation in Durban was diffused for good at that time.

Now we come to one final point and perhaps it is appropriate to put it to you seeing that you are a newspaper man. We have led evidence in the Transvaal and in the Cape that the press media at the time of the riots created a (10) political climate in which agitators flourished. Are you prepared to comment on that and tell us what is the position here? -- It is a difficult question, but I believe that the press play a dual purpose in this. I believe irresponsible reporting and reporting where a journalist who is not senior enough to handle a situation like this, could create a situation where this type of reporting could further the aims of the agitators and the people behind it and create a political climate which could snowball and without stopping it, without doing any good purpose. On the other hand I also believe that (20) the press can also play another role in trying to ease the situation or calm it down. Here I feel unfortunately that officials are to blame for this reason that when a situation like this erupts and the newspaperman also has his duty to do to report what he believes are the facts, they sometimes do get a case where they are pushed aside by officials and in which case now the reporters concerned would then look for the news elsewhere and invariably they would find the people who would be too willing to talk would be the persons on the other side, the agitators and the ringleaders and the people (30) behind it. Now this is the case where the leftist groups would/...

would get the publicity which would further their aims and invariably this would be exaggerated and it would be lies - not on the reporter's behalf but what is given to him. I feel that if the officials would open the doors and give the true situation and the facts as they stand at the time, to a senior journalist a situation could be put in true perspective.

And in that way not only perhaps the publishing of what is falsehood but even half-truths. -- Yes, I would like to quote just one example which came to my notice quite recently. It was when the police went to make some arrests at the (10) Allan Taylor Residence. Information was given by the residents to a reporter that about 400 policemen with dogs, assisted by Naval officials and Army, went in and surrounded the place, and smashed windows to make, I think, 7 arrests. I do not think there were more than 7 or 8 policemen at the time, but now the reporter at the time believed this and I think that if this was printed as what the reporter believed truth, it would have had an adverse effect on the situation.

And in the publishing of what I have termed half-truths, a famous English judge once said that a half-truth is (20) sometimes worse than a downright lie and has that happened over here, the publication of half-truths? -- Yes, I think so.

Then finally, you have been kind enough, at my request, to prepare a memo, together with extracts from the newspaper which you wrote under the name 'Crime Reporter' and you now hand it in as an EXHIBIT 206. I have no further questions.

NO FURTHER QUESTIONS.

DR YUTAR: I now call Mrs Lamb of the Black Sash.

CAROL VIRGINIA LAMB: sworn states:

DR YUTAR: You are the Chairlady - I see you have got (30) here Chairman - of the Black Sashes Natal Coastal Region. --

That/...