

ILL-TREATMENT OF SOBUKWE IS DENIED

SUNDAY EXPRESS

Express Reporter

THE Commissioner of Prisons, Major-General J. C. Steyn, this week denied a British newspaper report which contained allegations about the Pan-Africanist Congress leader, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, and his life of detention on Robben Island.

The report, said to be based on an affidavit sworn by a man who served 14 months on Robben Island, appeared in the left-wing "Sunday Citizen."

According to the "Sunday Citizen," the affidavit has been sent to the United Nations Secretary-General, U Thant. It alleges that the conditions under which Sobukwe is detained are "callously, studiously and maliciously designed to destroy irreparably his physical health and undermine his mind."

"LOST WEIGHT"

Because of these conditions, the affidavit claims, Sobukwe lost 35 lb. in weight in his first year on the island.

"In direct contradiction of Ministerial assurances, Sobukwe has to do long, exacting manual labour, is given a very poor diet and is not allowed newspapers or a radio.

"The object is to speed the destruction of his personal magnetism as a rallying point for African nationalism — a process already started by public forgetfulness of him, as he languishes in prison oblivion."

The report added: "It seems certain similar tactics will be employed against Nelson

Mandela." **5 JUL 1964**

But when I interviewed General Steyn in Pretoria on Wednesday he described the "Sunday Citizen" report as "absolute rubbish."

He said: "I saw Sobukwe recently. He is fit and well and he has not lost weight. As a matter of fact he asked me to stop his breakfast because he could not resist it and was putting on too much weight."

"Sobukwe does not have to do manual labour. He is allowed to read newspapers and even has his own radio set."

Answering the allegation that Sobukwe was given a very poor diet, General Steyn said this could be exposed as "the blackest of lies."

"Sobukwe's status is not the same as that of the convicted prisoners. As a result, it was decided not to give him the usual prison diet."

"It is obviously not expedient to have meals specially cooked for him, so he is supplied from the canteen which serves the prison officials on Robben Island."

SICK BAY

The "Sunday Citizen" report also alleged that political prisoners were made to sleep on light mats on a cement floor when they were admitted to the hospital on Robben Island, whereas criminal prisoners were given beds.

Denying this, General Steyn said: "Whenever necessary, all prisoners are sent to a hospital on the mainland."

"For less serious cases, we have a sick bay on the island in which all prisoners are given comfortable beds."

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