

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS (INC.)  
SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VIR RASSEVERHOUDINGS (INGELYF)  
P.O. Box 97 JOHANNESBURG Posbus 97  
2000.

THE LANGUAGE MEDIUM ISSUE AS A CAUSATIVE  
FACTOR IN THE SOWETO DISTURBANCES

A. Some General Considerations on the Medium of Instruction  
in African Education

1. Before the introduction of Bantu Education, African languages were used as the media of instruction in most African schools in all provinces up to and including Std. 2, except in the Orange Free State where they were used up to Std. 4. English was introduced as the medium of instruction from Std. 3 for the most part, later in some cases. In Natal, Zulu and English were each used for half the subjects taught in Std.s 3 and 4. (Eiselen Report, 1951, paras. 395 - 399.)
2. The Eiselen Report recommended that the mother-tongue of the pupil be the medium of instruction during the first 4 years of schooling and "that this principle should also gradually be applied in the subsequent four courses of study in the higher primary school by progressively extending the use of the mother-tongue to the higher standards year by year". (Ibid., paras. 921(c) & p. 21(d).) 96(1) 1118 55
3. The Report made no prescriptive recommendation concerning language medium in the secondary school, but recommended the development of suitable terminology in the African languages in all subjects; where feasible, "teachers ... should be encouraged to teach ... and pupils to write examination papers through the medium of the mother-tongue". (Ibid., para. 921(h).)

4. In regulations made under the Bantu Education Act, when new higher primary syllabuses were published in August 1955, "teaching was to be through the medium of the mother-tongue, starting from Std. 3 in 1956".
5. Until 1958 the Std. 6 examination papers were set in the official languages and the main Bantu languages, pupils being free to reply in whichever they preferred. But from 1959 onward only Bantu languages might be used. (M. Horrell, *A Decade of Bantu Education*, p. 66.)
6. In the new 1958 syllabuses for secondary schools, language policy was detailed as follows:

"The principle of mother-tongue instruction will ... also be applied at the Junior Certificate level of the secondary school, but the Bantu languages as media of instruction will be introduced progressively as the technical difficulties which render their effective use impracticable are overcome.

"Religious instruction is already given in the mother-tongue, also physical education and music if the teachers are qualified to do so.

"Half the subjects which are not taught through the medium of the mother-tongue must be taught through the medium of English and the other half through the medium of Afrikaans. If this rule cannot be carried out because of lack of textbooks or of teachers proficient in one or other of the official languages, permission to depart from it must be obtained from the Department. (M. Horrell, *op. cit.* p. 72.)

7. In the 1962 Report of the Bantu Education Department Table G on page 9 shows that of 252 secondary schools (excluding private schools), 104 used only English, 72

predominantly English, and 76 both media (defined in the Report as "2 subjects through ... Afrikaans and 2 through ... English"). Thus in 1962 30% of secondary schools were able to follow what had been laid down as policy for the secondary school.

8. There is undoubtedly sound educational support for beginning instruction through the medium of mother-tongue. Nevertheless, several African countries begin school teaching through English (e.g. Swaziland). In multi-lingual countries, however, the issue of switching from a vernacular medium to an official language as the teaching medium is not one of "whether" but of "when".
9. There was widespread opposition in the African community to the extension of mother-tongue instruction beyond Std. 2. For example, in 1956, the Federal Council of African Teachers' Association (now the African Teachers' Association of South Africa) agreed that, in their opinion, a changeover to an official language as medium should start in Std. 3 and be completed by Standard 5. (See also A15 and A16 below.) (M. Horrell, A Decade of Bantu Education, p. 69.)
10. The triple-medium rules set out in A6 above caused even stronger objections. In 1962, Dr. W.G. McConkey, former Natal Director of Education, submitted evidence to the "Commission of Inquiry into the Teaching of the Official Languages and the Use of the Mother-Tongue as Medium of Instruction in Transkeian Primary Schools", the Cingo Commission, on behalf of the S.A. Institute of Race Relations. He expressed the opinion that the use of three languages as concurrent media of instruction was an extraordinary step, and continued:

"In the course of the previous decade, all four provinces in the Union of South Africa considered and rejected (three of them after considerable experimentation) the principle of dual-medium education

for White children. In view of this experience it is obvious that the adoption of the principle of trilingual, triple-medium education for African children was not motivated on educational grounds. On such grounds all South African educationists must have known it to be indefensible."

(M. Horrell, *op. cit.* p. 78.)

11. In 1963 the Cingo Commission recommended that the second additional language should not be introduced until the third year of school, and that only one official language should be used as a medium in secondary classes, since the simultaneous introduction of TWO new media was "contrary to sound educational principles". (Sprocas, Education Report, p. 35.)
12. Both recommendations of the Cingo Commission, listed at 11 above, were rejected by the Government as "being inconsistent with the principle of equal treatment for both official languages". (Sprocas, Education Report, p. 35.)
13. In his survey of the medium issue in 1969, Professor L.W. Lanham, of the University of the Witwatersrand, stated, "Research findings are not yet conclusive about the merits of the mother-tongue as opposed to a world language as a medium for teaching general subjects from the higher primary stage upwards. But there is no support in the literature for the simultaneous introduction of two foreign languages for African pupils in the first year of the lower primary school and, in particular, the sudden change to the use of both as media of instruction in the secondary school." (Sprocas, Education Report, p. 36.)
14. The argument that the 50-50 principle must be enforced to comply with the Constitution has been used many times since, most recently by the Hon. the Minister of Bantu

Administration, Development and Education in his discussions with Soweto leaders on 21 June 1976. However, since the entrenched equal treatment clause of the Republic of South Africa Act has never been used to enforce two teaching media simultaneously on White, Coloured and Indian pupils, it is difficult to see why it should be differently interpreted in the case of African children, merely because they previously (in the primary school) used an African language as the medium of instruction.

15. Moreover, although Transkeian legislation, from 1963 till October 1976, remained subject to confirmation by the South African Government, the Constitution was not invoked to veto the Transkei legislation which in 1964 reintroduced English only as the medium of instruction in the Transkei from Std. 3 upwards.
16. Subsequently, all other homeland governments have reverted to English as the sole medium of instruction from Std. 3 upwards.
17. The above has been set out in some detail to summarise the language medium issue in African Education. What is clear beyond doubt is that the 50-50 principle:
  - a. was not written into the Bantu Education Act but subsequently introduced by syllabus regulations:
  - b. was not introduced on educational grounds, nor has it ever been justified by the authorities on educational grounds.

B. Language Medium Policy 1968 - 1975

1. The 1968 Bantu Education Report, in the section on "medium of instruction in secondary schools" (page 9) states

"only 26% of all secondary schools carry out the policy in full, while ... 43% teach no subject except Afrikaans itself through the medium of Afrikaans... The core of the problem is the availability of teachers who are thoroughly proficient in both official languages".

Comparison with the previous report which gave statistics on the topic, that for 1962 quoted at A7, shows that there was a decrease from 30% to 26% in the percentage of secondary schools which "carried out the policy in full". (The figures are not strictly comparable since the 1968 Report does not include statistics for the Transkei.)

2. It will be noted that the quotation given above does not question the educational desirability of the 50-50 principle, nor indeed is this crucial factor alluded to in the many annual reports of the Bantu Education Department, all of which devote a brief paragraph to the language-medium issue in secondary education.
  
3. The new 12-year education structure designates classes above Std. IV as secondary. In African education this had the effect of bringing the question of the post-primary medium of instruction into the higher primary school. Table 3.1.3. in the 1975 Bantu Education Report lists 113 junior secondary, 45 secondary and 3 technical secondary schools in the White area, a total of 161 secondary schools. Apart from 2 064 lower primary schools there are 335 higher primary and 3 071 primary schools (which have both lower and higher primary classes) thus a total of 3 406 schools with higher primary classes, compared to 161 with secondary classes. The new structure abolished the Std. 6 class in higher primary schools. In terms of numbers, there were 158 000 students enrolled in Forms I - V throughout the country in 1972, while in the same year there were 176 000 enrolled in Std. 5 alone. These details are given to underline

the fact that the problems of applying the secondary school language medium policy to Std. 5 were considerable.

4. The 1972 Bantu Education Report states on page 45, "The medium of instruction in all secondary classes (from Std. 5 to Form V) will be English and/or Afrikaans. For schools situated in the homelands the decision as to which medium policy will be followed will in each case be taken by the homeland government concerned, in consultation with the Minister of Bantu Education. For schools under the Department of Bantu Education the final decision on the medium of instruction at the secondary school level rests with the Secretary for Bantu Education."
- 5.1. Bantu Education Department Circular No. 2 of 1973 gives the decision of the Secretary for Bantu Education concerning "Medium of Instruction in secondary schools and Std. 5 classes in white areas".

Section A of the circular outlines policy, Section B contains instructions.

A. 2 reads, in full,

In all secondary schools and Std. 5 classes the medium of instruction must be one of the following:

- a. Exclusively Afrikaans;
  - b. Exclusively English;
  - c. English and Afrikaans on a 50-50 basis.
- 5.2. Points 3 and 4 specify, respectively, that where a single medium is chosen, the official language not chosen as a medium must be given two more periods per week on the time-table than the one chosen as the medium of instruction, and that the mother-tongue will continue to be

"used as a medium of instruction for Religious Education and non-examination subjects".

- 5.3. Point 5 states that the decision about which of the 3 alternatives offered will be chosen will be taken by the Secretary for Bantu Education. "However, School Boards (Committee Boards, Advisory Councils), Circuit Inspectors and Regional Directors may make recommendations in respect of all secondary schools and Std. 5 classes falling under them".
- 5.4. Point 6 lays down that, in deciding on the language medium policy in any particular school, "the criterion to be used shall be which of the two languages is dominant in the white community of the city/town/area where the school is situated".
- 6.1. Section B of this circular (which is signed by H.J. van Zyl, Secretary for Bantu Education) contains instructions to school boards (committee boards, advisory councils), circuit inspectors and regional directors. They are required to make recommendations, backed by sound arguments, to reach Head Office before 31 May 1973. Furthermore, they are asked not to deal with the recommendations for individual schools in isolation so that pupils moving from primary to high school, or from one school to another within the areas of the new Bantu Administration Boards, should not be handicapped by a change of medium after Std. 5.
- 6.2. Point 5 of Section B reads, in full

"Because of these various considerations it may appear that the only (or easiest) solution will be to continue with the present policy of employing both English and Afrikaans as school media on a 50-50 basis. However, it must be stressed that it will be in the interests of pupils to use one medium only. (Underlining in circular.)

"Therefore where it is at all possible, an attempt must be made to institute single-medium schools. In thickly-populated areas where both English and Afrikaans are strongly represented, and where there are sufficient schools, some schools, for example, might use Afrikaans exclusively while others would use English medium only. There are other areas where the white population is so homogeneous as far as home language is concerned, that single-medium Afrikaans schools or single-medium English schools are the obvious solution."

- 6.3. Point 6 states that "The language competency of teachers may also create a temporary problem, but as bilingualism will continue to be emphasised this should not in the long term be considered as a decisive factor".
  
7. Though the circular is not dated, 6.1. above makes it clear that it was issued before May during 1973. The crucial A2 section of the circular clearly gives three medium choices, and the instructions - underlined - that it will be in the interests of the pupils to use one medium only are addressed not only to school boards but also to circuit inspectors and regional directors.
  
8. It would appear that, subsequent to the issue of this circular, the policy outlined in it was modified. Departmental Circular 6 of 1974, dated 17.4.74 and signed by the Acting Secretary, Mr. G.J. Rousseau, shows the change. It states that "... The Honourable the Minister has decided as follows for all secondary classes in White regions:  
  
"a. That the status quo in the use of both official languages, on a 50-50 basis, for the purpose of instruction at the secondary level, will be maintained.

"b. Should practical difficulties arise in giving instruction in half of the subjects through the medium of one or other of the official languages, departmental approval must be obtained for any deviation from the above decision. Departmental approval in such cases will be dependent largely upon the availability or non-availability of teachers competent to teach the particular subject through the official language concerned.

"2. Schools which in the past have already received approval to deviate from the laid-down policy need not apply again.

3. Should practical difficulties be experienced in future at new schools or where new courses/ subjects are introduced, the necessary application requesting permission to deviate from the established policy must be submitted.

4. Applications from schools must be submitted to Head Office through the normal channels, and must bear the recommendations of the Circuit Inspector and Regional Director."

The circular was sent to regional directors and circuit inspectors only.

9.1. On 29 August 1974 the Southern Transvaal Regional Director, Mr. W.C. Ackerman issued Regional Circular No. 2 of 1974, headed "Uniform approach in schools". The circular states that "the Southern Transvaal ... inspectorate desire a more uniform approach in our schools" and sets out under a) that in Std. 5, Forms I and II, General Science and Practical Subjects must be taught through the medium of English, "Wiskunde/rekenkunde & Sosiale Studie" through the medium of Afrikaans, and

Religious Instruction, Music and singing and Physical Education through a Vernacular medium.

- 9.2. The rest of the wording illustrates the peremptory tone which, it has been asserted, did much to increase tension in this region. It reads,

"These subjects will be taught from 1975 in the above-mentioned media in Standard V (and preferably Standard VI also). In 1976 the Secondary schools will continue with these media.

Forms III, IV and V

The 50-50 basis should already be in operation in Form III. Subjects which replace the subjects mentioned under a. will be taught through the same medium (see 9.1. above).

Schools which are not teaching on a 50-50 basis must do so from 1975."

- 9.3. Possibly because the circular contained no reference to exemptions at all, a clarifying Southern Transvaal Regional Circular, No. 1 of 1975, was issued on 8 January 1975 and signed "F. Potgieter; for Regional Director". Referring to the previous circular, this one states that "it is necessary to clarify the following:

"While the status quo in respect of medium of instruction as given in 1955 must be retained, the only change being the replacement of mother-tongue teaching by that of official languages as from Std. 5. You are referred to paragraph 1 of the Regional Circular No. 2 of 1974 for the practical application thereof. This should be read with Departmental Circular No. 6 of 1974 for alternative arrangements where teachers have difficulty in giving instruction in an official language."

9.4. The Northern Transvaal Regional Director, Mr. J.G. Erasmus, in his Regional Circular No. 4 of 17.10.1974, issued the same instructions as those contained in the Southern Transvaal Circular issued 1½ months earlier and mentioned at 9.1 and 9.2 above. The instructions are almost identical, except for paragraph 4 which reads:

"You are also referred to Departmental Circular No. 6 of 1974. The instructions contained in this circular must also be observed. The above arrangement has also been adopted by the Southern Transvaal Region. Your co-operation in this matter will be appreciated."

9.5. It will be noted that the Northern Transvaal Regional Circular referred to the April Circular which was quoted at 8 above and made provision for existing and new applications to deviate from the 50-50 policy; it also ended on a courteous note.

10. Only Dr. Van Zyl's early 1973 circular (see 5 above) concerns itself with what is in the interests of the pupils. It is also obvious that between the issue of Circular 2 of 1973 and Circular 6 of 1974 there was a change of policy, possibly made by the Minister himself since the later circular begins "The Honourable the Minister has decided ...". Nevertheless, the reversion to the triple medium policy announced in April 1974 still allowed for existing deviations to stand, and for new ones to be considered on application. The August 1974 circular by Mr. Ackerman, however, seemed to cancel any deviations whatever - even though this formulation was modified by the "clarifying" circular issued more than four months later.

11.1. Circular 6 of 1974, quoted at 8 above, made the approval of deviations from the 50-50 principle dependent mainly

on the availability of teachers competent in the medium and subject concerned. The manner in which such competence has been assessed has been a source of much dissatisfaction.

- 11.2 White teachers in the service of the Transvaal Education Department have their competence to use the second official language as a medium of instruction assessed during their College training. Those judged equally capable of using both languages as teaching media are given an EA language endorsement on their Teachers' Certificates; most students, however, are assessed as able to teach through the medium of the second language, but more competent in the use of their home language. The relevant endorsements are Ea or Ae. Some few are denied the a or e endorsement if their competence is judged to be too poor to merit it. But the possession of at least an a or e symbol in one's second language is a condition for any form of promotion in the teaching service, and, partly no doubt for this reason, some teachers who possess the e endorsement and have been teaching in some English-medium schools have been found to have very considerable difficulties in using English to communicate effectively with English-speaking children. But these teachers had their language competence properly tested during their College course.
- 11.3 African teachers appear to have no language competence test nor any endorsement on their teachers' certificate. They are merely required to answer "yes" or "no" on their contract form prior to employment to a question on whether they can use both media.
- 11.4 It has been stated that language competence tests carried out on African teachers in Soweto in order to assess their ability to use Afrikaans as a medium of instruction have consisted of some inspectors exchanging two or three Afrikaans sentences with the teachers being tested.

In some schools, all the teachers involved were judged competent after only some of them were tested in the manner just described. That such testing of professional people is unprofessional is true but possibly not relevant to the disturbances; that it caused resentment is relevant, and the effects on pupils of being compelled to be taught by teachers who cannot communicate effectively in the language they are using may well be a prime cause that impelled pupils to seek redress when parental and teacher representations failed to remedy a situation in which pupils were those mainly at a disadvantage - and facing mid-year examinations.

C. Community Reaction and its consideration by the Authorities

1. It was mentioned in the first section of this memorandum that the African community was dissatisfied with the government's language medium policy, both with mother-tongue instruction to the end of the primary school and with the triple medium policy in the secondary school. The homeland governments, without exception, have reverted to English-medium above Std. 2. It is therefore not surprising that the policy changes detailed in Section B above provoked a strong reaction in the African community. On 3 January 1975 the African Teachers' Association of South Africa sent a memorandum to the Department, urging the abandonment of the 50-50 policy, and objecting among other things to the principle that the choice of medium in an area should be decided mainly on the basis of "which of the two official languages is dominant in the white community of the area concerned".

The ATASA delegation which presented this memorandum was told, inter alia, that a final decision on the language medium issue had not yet been taken.

2. Individual School Boards in the Southern and Northern Transvaal regions also reacted to the regional circulars of August and October 1974 by sending memoranda detailing parents' and boards' objections to the compulsory introduction of Mathematics and Social Studies tuition in Afrikaans. No heed was taken of these representations, except that at least 18 members of various School Boards were dismissed by the authorities. (See first item in Annexure: minutes of 20.1.76 meeting of Meadowlands Tswana School Board as an indication of how the matter was handled by some circuit inspectors.)
  
3. The various school boards then combined in a voluntary Federation, which sent a delegation to see the Secretary for Bantu Education in January 1975, who urged those who felt they could not implement the ruling to apply for exemption from it. (It may be recalled here that the August Circular appeared to rule out such applications, and only the second, January 1975 circular, stated they could be sent. See 9.1 - 9.3 above.) So urged, many school boards did send applications, at least 17 of which were refused or received no reply. These affected more than 100 schools on the Reef and in Pretoria. Certain inspectors told some school boards that language medium was a professional matter over which school boards had no say - in spite of the fact that Point A.5 in the 1973 Departmental Circular had specifically stated that "School Boards may make recommendations in respect of all Secondary schools and Std. 5 classes falling under them". (See B. 5.3 above.)
  
4. In a further attempt to influence the authorities, the Federated School Boards petitioned the Bantu Education Advisory Board in April 1975, stressing, inter alia, the emphasis the Secretary for Bantu Education had placed on a single medium of instruction being best for pupils, and the problems arising out of the pupils

having to write a public (Std. 5 Higher Primary) examination at the end of the first year in which they would have been taught on the 50-50 basis. Again, no changes resulted from this memorandum.

5. In at least one meeting with principals an inspector stated that the inspectors controlled the examinations and would ensure that the pupils who might fail merely because of being taught and examined in certain subjects through the medium of Afrikaans would have their marks suitably adjusted.
6. The examination results for Stds. 5 and 6 in 1975, as published, show that the concern felt by parents and teachers over the entire medium issue is possibly justified. Std. 6 results in the White areas showed an 88,7% pass rate in 1973, 92% pass rate in 1974, and a 79% pass rate in 1975, during which year the pass rate in the newly introduced Std. 5 examination was 60,9%. (Tables 5.1, in the 1973 and 1974 Reports, and 5.1.A and 5.1.B in the 1975 Report.) Any educationist familiar with these matters would regard a 39% failure rate in Std. 5 as high.
7. Further representations were made by ATASA when a delegation met the Secretary for Bantu Education on 26 April 1976; he then promised to make new approaches to the Minister, but nothing had been heard of these three weeks later.
8. The Federated School Boards had arranged another meeting with the Secretary for June 20; this was overtaken by events. It is thus clear that urgent and responsible representations repeatedly made by the representatives of African teachers and parents had proved fruitless.
9. Opposition appeals made in the House of Assembly on 30 April were also fruitless.

D. Pupil Reaction in 1976 and Adult Response to it

1. It must be remembered that the Southern Transvaal Circular of August 1974 had said that "in 1976 secondary schools will continue with these media" (i.e. those begun in Std. 5 in 1975). Thus it was in 1976 that Form I classes began to bear the full burden of Afrikaans-medium instruction in Mathematics and Social Studies. These classes are temporarily accommodated in Higher Primary Schools in 1976 to ease the accommodation shortage in secondary schools, and using the accommodation available because of the abolition of Std. 6 classes in 1976. (Item 4 of Department Circular No. 14 of 1975.)
  
2. Active opposition from pupils began on 17 May, presumably mainly because of impending mid-year examinations, some of which would be in Afrikaans, and also because adult representations, as detailed in section C above, had been fruitless. It is important to note that the school where the strike started, Orlando West Junior Secondary, had elected an interim pupil committee which stated that they "had tried without success to meet our circuit inspector, Mr. De Beer". (Rand Daily Mail, 20.5.76.) Therefore, they stayed away from classes on Monday, 17 May, and on 19 May gave their principal a 5-point memorandum addressed to the chairman of their school committee, with the request that he intercede with the Regional Director.
  
3. On 19 May, pupils from Belle Higher Primary School joined the strike, which was joined on the following day by pupils from Emthonjeni and Thulasizwe Higher Primary Schools, all in the same area. Asked by the Press what the authorities were doing about the striking pupils, the Circuit Inspector, Mr. M.C. de Beer, was reported on 22 May as saying "The Department is doing nothing about the matter".

4. On 22 May, a meeting of school board members and parents decided to ask the students to return to school "while the matter received attention". However, their pleas, and those of the Orlando-Diepkloof School Board on 22 May, were ignored by the pupils who were joined by those from Pimville Higher Primary and Khulangolwaze on 24 May.
5. On 25 May, concerned about both the inactivity of the authorities and the reported growing anger among pupils and some parents in Soweto, the Director of the S.A.I.R.R. telephoned the Regional Director, Mr. W.C. Ackerman, but was told, inter alia, that the matter was no longer merely one of language medium but was being used for other purposes. The Director telegraphed a senior member of the S.A.I.R.R. Executive, Mr. Rene de Villiers, M.P., with the request that he see the Deputy Minister responsible. Mr. De Villiers conveyed the contents of the telegram sent by the Director on 25 May to the Deputy Minister responsible, Dr. Andries Treurnicht, who informed Mr. De Villiers a day or two later that the problems of the pupil strike in Soweto had not yet been considered serious enough to be referred to the Secretary for Bantu Education, but that he would have an enquiry instituted into the causes.
6. On 26 May a teacher teaching Afrikaans at Pimville Higher Primary School was stabbed with a screwdriver by a student. Police arriving the next day to make an arrest in connection with the stabbing were stoned by some pupils.
7. On 30 May the Sunday Express reported that Mr. De Beer had stated that he could have the striking pupils expelled if they had been absent for more than ten days.
8. On 1 June pupils at Senaoane Junior Secondary School joined the strike. Two days later some of the striking pupils at the four higher primary schools returned

to classes, apparently being told that lessons in mathematics and social studies were being suspended for the time being.

9. Pupils at Belle Higher Primary School stoned other pupils of the school who had returned to classes, and also stoned the school buildings. A pupil was arrested at the school two days later in connection with the stoning incident.
10. On 4 June Dr. A.L. Boraine, M.P., asking a question about the pupil strikes in the House of Assembly, elicited the reply from the Deputy Minister that "Std. 6 and Form I pupils say they object against the 50-50 medium applicable in these classes (and) the School Boards concerned are negotiating with the pupils".
11. On 7 June, a five-man UBC deputation, accompanied by Mr. N.P. Wilsenach, the WRAB Director of Housing, met the Regional Director, Mr. W.C. Ackerman, who, it is stated, told the deputation that there was nothing he could do about the matter.
12. On 8 June police went to Naledi High School "to inquire about some matter"; pupils stoned the police and burnt their car. The same day 15 pupils from Thulasizwe Higher Primary School were detained by police but released after questioning.
13. On 9 June, Naledi High pupils again stoned policemen who had come to investigate the previous day's disturbance.
14. The next day, 10 June, pupils at Emthonjeni Higher Primary School refused to write their Social Studies examination in Afrikaans. It would appear that at this stage, there were still some pupils from the four higher primary and two junior secondary schools on strike.

15. On 11 June, pupils at Morris Isaacson High School posted a placard at the main gate reading: "No S.B.'s allowed. Enter at the risk of your skin." It was reliably reported that antagonism towards the police was running high at the school.

The same day, Orlando West Junior Secondary School refused to write their June exams.

16. On receiving these and other reports, the Director of the S.A.I.R.R. on 11 June sent a second telegram to Mr. De Villiers, M.P., which read:

"Situasie Soweto skole oor Afrikaans as medium versleg blykbaar daaglik x Geweld het reeds voorgekom en kan maklik herhaal word x Vertrou van harte Dr. Treurnicht op hoogte van sake."

Mr. De Villiers discussed this telegram with Dr. Treurnicht who, according to Mr. De Villiers, was clearly unaware of the gravity of the situation since he had, presumably, not been fully informed, and "obviously believed the situation was not in any way dangerous".

17. On the same day, 11 June, Dr. Mathlare called a press conference to announce the inauguration of a Soweto Residents' Association on 4 July, and said that a committee would be elected "to represent Soweto parents fully concerning the recent school strikes". The next day, writing in Weekend World, Mr. T.W. Kambule, principal of Orlando High School, was quoted as saying "School children are doing exactly what the parents and everybody feel about Afrikaans - only they had the courage to stand up against it".

18. On 11 June Dr. Fisher inquired in the House of Assembly about the details of the Naledi High School incidents on 8 and 9 June (see paras. 12 and 13 above). The

Deputy Minister replied, "My Department has no knowledge of any such incident". (Hansard, 1976, No. 19, Col. 1185.)

19. On 11 June, in reply to a further question in the House by Dr. A.L. Boraine, M.P., the Deputy Minister stated that the principals of Belle, Emthonjeni, Khule-Nqolwazi and Pimville Higher Primary and Thesere Junior Secondary Schools had applied for permission to deviate from the 50-50 ruling, but that permission had been refused because "after inspection it was found that all teachers concerned were competent to give instruction through the medium of both official languages". (Hansard 1976, No. 19, Col. 1185.)
20. In a newspaper interview published in the Sunday Tribune on 13 June, Mr. B. Ngakane, a former teacher now employed in a private educational post, sketched the effect which the three-week strike had had on the pupils.

"The issue has become, in a way, a symbol of resistance among the youth to White oppression and White authority. The children have learned that they can defy their principal, they can defy the School Board, they can defy the inspectors - and they have in the process learned the lesson of solidarity, which is new to them ... The children show no signs of breaking and there is a danger that the strike will spread. The children, aged between 13 and 18, have the sympathy of their parents and teachers, although not active encouragement. The pupils don't trust their parents on this. They think they'll send them back to school before they've won their point ... Order in the schools should be maintained without the interference of the police. They are just hardening attitudes. The situation is potentially explosive."

21. The next day, June 14, Councillor Leonard Mosala warned in the UBC that enforcing Afrikaans in schools could result in another Sharpeville. He asked that police interference in the schools should be avoided at all costs, as the children might become aggressive at the sight of the police. Referring to the pupils, Mr. Mosala said, "They won't take anything we say because they think we have neglected them. We have failed to help them in their struggle for change in schools. They are now angry and prepared to fight and we are afraid the situation may become chaotic at any time."
  
22. By June 14 - the fourth week of the strike in six or seven schools affected by the enforced Afrikaans-medium tuition in Mathematics and Social Studies - there was clearly growing sympathy for the striking pupils both among Soweto adults - see items D. 17, 20 and 21 above - and among students in other Soweto post primary schools including some which used only English as medium. It is known that in the senior classes of high schools, where pupils are 17 - 22 years old, many are politically aware and belong to the S.A. Students' Movement. In the circumstances of this lengthy strike, in which several thousand pupils were involved, it is a likely consequence that such pupils, especially those who had already shown their anger at the presence of the police in their school (see D. 12 and 13) should consider a protest march. It appears that some pupils at Naledi High School initiated such a march on the morning of 16 June, but it must be emphasised that their intention was known the day before, and indeed reported in the Press.
  
23. Naledi High pupils, joined by others, converged on Orlando West Junior Secondary School - where the strike had begun on 17 May - and, according to most reports, they intended to march to Orlando Stadium in order to discuss the enforced language medium issue. Police

tried to remove placards from the marchers, and it appears that this is the point at which tension increased and violence erupted. Shortly thereafter Hector Petersen, aged 13, was killed by a police bullet. This caused the escalation of the demonstration into the riots which cost such tragic loss of life, grievous injuries, damage to property and other consequences which the Commission will probe in detail and report on.

24. In a statement to Die Beeld on 17 June, the day after the riots began, the Deputy Minister of Bantu Education, Dr. Andries Treurnicht, said that in the White areas of South Africa the Government should have the right to decide the medium of instruction, as the Government supplied the buildings and subsidised the schools. This statement may well have inflamed feelings still further.

E. Some Comments on the Language Medium Issue in the Light of A - D Above

1. Following meetings between adult African spokesmen with the Minister, Mr. M.C. Botha, on 19 June and with the Secretary for Bantu Education during the following weeks, the Minister announced on Monday 28 June that schools themselves could decide on the language medium issue through their school committees, and that such decisions had merely to be sent to the Secretary for confirmation. The three options open, English only, Afrikaans only, or 50-50, are the same as were spelt out in the early 1973 Departmental Circular quoted at B. 5.1 above. Had this circular not been repudiated - possibly by Mr. M.C. Botha himself since his name is specifically mentioned in D/C 6 of 1974 as having so decided (see B. 8 above) - the whole dispute on the language medium issue would unquestionably have been avoided.

2. To put the issue beyond doubt we recommend strongly that Section 15c of the Bantu Education Act be amended so that the choice of language medium should not be left solely to the discretion of the Minister at any time.
3. It is also regrettable that the educational effect of the 50-50 rule on the pupil appears not to have been considered at all - with the notable exception of the underlined sentence in A. 5 of the repudiated D/C 2 of 1973 (see A. 6.2 above). "It must be stressed that it will be in the interests of pupils to use one medium only."
- 4 . In the light of the evidence presented in Sections C and D above, any impartial observer must be deeply disturbed by the failure of the authorities to respond positively to the innumerable representations by teachers and school boards, and their failure to respond to the many urgent warnings by Soweto civic leaders, by Opposition M.P.'s and by the S.A.I.R.R. in the period 25 May - 14 June. In the light of all the circumstances, it is our considered opinion that failure to respond to so many representations and warnings constitutes culpable negligence.
5. In view of the number of children arrested, interrogated, released and to be charged following the riots, and in view of allegations made in the Press, on the Radio and on Television, it is important to end by quoting the Commissioner of Police, General Prinsloo, who, according to several newspapers, stated on 16 July, "Intensive police-investigations have not brought any conspiracy to light".

**Collection Number: A1132**

**Collection Name: Patrick LEWIS Papers, 1949-1987**

***PUBLISHER:***

*Publisher:* Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

*Location:* Johannesburg

©2016

***LEGAL NOTICES:***

**Copyright Notice:** All materials on the Historical Papers website are protected by South African copyright law and may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, or otherwise published in any format, without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

**Disclaimer and Terms of Use:** Provided that you maintain all copyright and other notices contained therein, you may download material (one machine readable copy and one print copy per page) for your personal and/or educational non-commercial use only.

This collection forms part of a collection, held at the Historical Papers Research Archive, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.