

C O N F I D E N T I A L

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

EVENTS OF 1976 WHICH CULMINATED

IN THE RIOTS OF JUNE 1976

(This chronology is based largely on newspaper reports.)

JANUARY

20 January: A meeting of the Meadowlands Tswana School Board met at the Moruto-Thuto Lower Primary School. Minutes of the meeting read:

"The circuit inspector told the board that the Secretary for Bantu Education has stated that all direct taxes paid by the Black population of South Africa are being sent to the various homelands for educational purposes there.

"In urban areas the education of a Black child is being paid for by the White population, that is English- and Afrikaans-speaking groups. Therefore the Secretary for Bantu Education has the responsibility towards satisfying the English- and Afrikaans-speaking people.

"Consequently, the only way of satisfying both groups, the medium of instruction in all schools shall be on a 50-50 basis.

"The circuit inspector further stated that where there was difficulty in instructing through the medium of Afrikaans an application for exemption can be made. He stated that if such an exemption is granted by the Department of

Bantu Education, it shall be applicable for one year only.

"In future, if schools teach through a medium not prescribed by the department for a particular subject, examination question papers will only be set in the prescribed medium with no option of the other language. The circuit inspector stated that social studies (history and geography) and mathematics shall be taught through the medium of Afrikaans, physical science and the rest through the medium of English.

"Asked whether the circuit inspector should not be speaking at the meeting in an advisory capacity, the inspector stated that he was representing the Department of Bantu Education directly.

"The Board stated that they were not opposed to the 50-50 basis medium of instruction but that they wanted to be given the chance of choosing the language for each subject.

"The circuit inspector stated that the board has no right to choose for itself, but should do what the department wants. He suggested that the board could write to the department via himself and the Regional Director on this matter. At this juncture the circuit inspector excused himself and left the meeting.

"The board was not happy about the statements of the circuit inspector and that to write a letter would not offer any favourable reply.

"The board unanimously accepted a motion moved by Mr. K. Nkamela, and seconded by Mr. S.G. Thwane, that the medium of instruction in schools under the jurisdiction of the Meadowlands Tswana School Board from Standards 3 to 8 should be in English. The meeting further resolved that the principals be informed about the decision."  
(Rand Daily Mail, 21 April, 1976.)

## FEBRUARY

Early in February two members of the Meadowlands Tswana School Board, Mr. Letlape and Mr. Peele, were dismissed. In the Assembly on 27 February the Deputy Minister stated that they were dismissed in terms of regulation 41(1) of Government Notice R429 dated 13 March 1966, which states that the regional director may "if he is of the opinion that the continued existence of any school board or the membership of any member of any school board is, for whatever reason not in the interest of the Bantu Community or the education of Bantu, at any time dissolve such school board and order the constitution of a new school board or terminate the membership of such member of any school board".

The regional director gave no reasons for the dismissals, but it was believed that they were due to the board's refusal to use Afrikaans as medium of instruction in their schools.

6 February: The remaining seven members of the board resigned in protest at the dismissal of Messrs. Peele and Letlape.

Mr. M.C. Ackerman, regional director of Bantu Education for the Southern Transvaal refused to comment on the matter. Mr. M.A.N. Engelbrecht, chief inspector of schools, in a statement to the Rand Daily Mail, said that Black schools were entitled to choose between English and Afrikaans as a medium of instruction depending on proficiency, that the choice was made through an application by the principal of the school which is considered by the secretary of the Department of Bantu Education, and that it was a professional matter that fell outside the jurisdiction of the school boards.

Chief Lucas Mangope took up the matter with the Central Government and subsequently reported that the school boards were free to choose the medium of instruction to be used in their schools.

24 February: Junior Certificate students at Thomas Mofolo Secondary School clashed verbally with their principal over the medium of instruction and police were called in.



27 February: In the Assembly the Deputy Minister of Bantu Education said that applications for exemption from the language ruling had been received from school principals, but that no statistics were kept of such applications. He went on to say, "The change-over to the twelve year structure has entailed that the principle in respect of the medium of instruction applicable in the case of secondary schools also becomes applicable in the case of Standard 5. Applications to deviate in these cases are considered in the light of: the availability of teachers proficient to teach through the medium of one of the official languages; the fact that textbooks in a certain language have already been supplied to the senior classes or the school which the pupils will eventually attend." (Hansard No. 5, Col. 401.)

#### MARCH

Members of the Meadowlands Tswana School Board said they had been informed that they would only be reinstated if they withdrew a circular saying that schools under them should be instructed in English.

14 March: Parents at Donaldson Higher Primary School unanimously rejected the use of Afrikaans as medium of instruction.

#### APRIL

26 April: A delegation from the African Teachers' Association of South Africa met the Secretary for Bantu Education, to whom they presented a memorandum concerning medium of instruction, and reported that the problem was to be reviewed by the Department.

30 April: Opposition speakers in the House of Assembly called on the Government to allow Black pupils to choose the official

language in which they wished to be educated.

MAY

17 May: Students at Orlando West Junior Secondary School went on strike in protest against the enforced use of Afrikaans as medium of instruction. They demanded to see the inspector, Mr. De Beer, but he refused to meet the pupils.

19 May: A committee of students from Orlando West presented a 5-point memorandum protesting against the use of Afrikaans as medium of instruction to their principal, Mr. Mpulo. After several meetings with the principal and staff the students drafted a letter, stating their grievances, to the Regional Director.

Students at Belle Higher Primary School also went on strike.

20 May: Emthonjeni Higher Primary and Thulasizwe Higher Primary Schools joined the strike.

21 May: Mr. M.C. de Beer, circuit inspector for the striking schools, stated that the Department was "doing nothing about the matter".

22 May: A meeting of parents, school board members from various areas and Inkatha Yesizwe members was held and it was decided that students should return to school while the matter received attention.

24 May: Striking pupils ignored pleas by the Orlando-Diepkloof school board to return to school.

Pimville Higher Primary and Khulangelwazi Higher Primary Schools joined the strike.

25 May: The Director of the S.A.I.R.R. sent the following telegram to Mr. R. de Villiers, M.P. (a member of the Executive Committee of the Institute): "Deeply concerned Afrikaans medium controversy Black schools x Position Soweto very serious x Could you discuss matter with Minister concerned." Mr. De Villiers conveyed the contents of the telegram to the Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration, Dr. Andries Treurnicht, who said he was not aware of any real problem, but would enquire about the matter. A day or so later Dr. Treurnicht sent the following note to Mr. De Villiers:

"Die probleme i.v.m. die staking van leerlinge in Soweto word tans nog op laer vlak gehanteer en blykbaar het onderhandelings nog nie 'n finale dooiepunt bereik nie. Dis ook nog nie na die Sekretaris van die Departement verwys vir uitsluitel nie. Later miskien wel.

"Ons sal vasstel wat die aanleidende oorsake is, maar op die oomblik word genoem dat die kinders staak omdat onderwysers (volgens die kinders?) nie bevoeg is om vakke in Afrikaans aan te bied nie! Moontlik is dit nie so eenvoudig nie."

26 May: Members of the S.A.I.R.R. staff spoke to Mr. T.W. Kambule, principal of Orlando High School. Mr. Kambule stated that there was no doubt that principals and teachers at the striking schools were being intimidated by the circuit inspector, Mr. De Beer. Apparently teachers, having been asked whether they could SPEAK Afrikaans, to which they answered "yes" for fear of losing their jobs, were then told that they could therefore TEACH through the medium of this language. (It should be borne in mind that African teachers have no language endorsement on their professional certificates, and that most teacher training colleges for Africans use English as medium of instruction.)

Mr. Kambule said that Mr. Ackerman, Regional Director, had asked him to help mediate between the Department and the



striking schools. He attended a meeting between Mr. Ackerman and the principals of the schools and although he (Mr. Kambule) knew that the schools did not have staff qualified to use Afrikaans as medium of instruction, when Mr. Ackerman put the question to the principals, they all said that they did have the staff, undoubtedly because they were afraid of victimisation.

27 May: The first violent incident occurred: Mrs. K. Tshabalala, a teacher of Afrikaans at Pimville Higher Primary, was stabbed with a screwdriver by a student. Students stoned police who came to make an arrest in connection with the stabbing.

According to various newspaper reports, Mr. De Beer had threatened during May to expel pupils who stayed away from school for more than two weeks.

## JUNE

1 June: Pupils at Senaoane Junior Secondary School went on strike.

3 June: Pupils at Emthonjeni, Belle, Thulasizwe and Pimville started returning to classes. Pupils were apparently told that lessons in mathematics and social studies - the subjects taught in Afrikaans - would be suspended for the time being.

5 June: Pupils at Belle Higher Primary School stoned the school buildings and other children who had returned to classes during the lull in the strike.

7 June: A pupil was arrested at Belle Higher Primary following the stoning incident on the 5th.

A five-man deputation from the UBC, accompanied by Mr. N.P. Wilsenach, the WRAB director for housing, met Mr. M.C. Ackerman, to discuss the school strikes. Mr. Makhaya, chairman of the UBC, said the deputation had requested Mr. Wilsenach to accompany them to speed up the appointment with Mr. Ackerman. At the meeting Mr. Ackerman said there was nothing he could do about the issue.

8 June: Police went to Naledi High School "to make some enquiries about some matter". Students stoned the police and burnt their car.

Fifteen pupils from Thulasizwe Higher Primary were detained and released after questioning.

9 June: Pupils at Naledi High School again stoned policemen who had come to the school to investigate the previous day's disturbance.

10 June: Pupils at Emthonjeni refused to write their social studies exam in Afrikaans.

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." According to a teacher, antagonism towards the police was running high at the school.

Students at Orlando West Junior Secondary refused to write their June exams.

The Deputy Minister of Bantu Education, in reply to a question in the Assembly, stated that his Department had no knowledge of the incident in which police were stoned at Naledi High School. (Hansard No. 19, Col. 1185.)

The Director of the S.A.I.R.R. sent an urgent telegram to Mr. R. de Villiers: "Situasie Soweto skole oor Afrikaans



as medium versleg blykbaar daaglik x Geweld het reeds voor-  
gekom en kan maklik herhaal word x Vertrou van harte Dr.  
Truernicht op hoogte van sake."

Dr. Treurnicht, on being informed of the contents of the tele-  
gram, said that he did not think there had been an escalation  
of the dispute, but would make further enquiries. Later he  
told Mr. De Villiers that he had spoken to his officials and  
had reason to believe that the matter would be amicably settled.

At a press conference Dr. Mathlare announced the inauguration  
on 4 July of the Soweto Residents' Association and said that  
a committee would be elected to "fully represent Soweto  
parents in matters concerning the recent school strikes",  
as many parents had agreed that school boards and committees  
were not representing them properly.

He also said, "We reject Afrikaans as a medium of instruction  
because it is the language of the oppressor."

13 June: In an article in Weekend World, Mr. T.W. Kambule,  
principal of Orlando High School, was quoted: "If teachers  
in the junior high schools accept or are forced to use  
Afrikaans then the Government will have a good case in forc-  
ing Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in high schools.  
School children are doing exactly what the parents and every-  
body feels about Afrikaans - only they had the courage to  
stand up against it."

14 June: Councillor Leonard Mosala warned that the enforcing  
of Afrikaans in schools could result in another Sharpeville.  
Speaking of the children, he 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." He also said  
that police interference in the schools should be avoided at  
all costs, as the children might become aggressive at the sight  
of the police.

16 June: A march in protest against the use of Afrikaans as medium of instruction, apparently initiated by pupils of Naledi High School, moved through Soweto and converged on Orlando West Junior Secondary School, where the strikes had first started a month before. There was an incident where police tried to remove placards from the marchers. The 10 000 marchers were confronted by the police as they gathered in front of the school and tension increased, especially when police fired tear gas into the crowd. The children retaliated by throwing stones at the police who opened fire, apparently first firing warning shots and then into the advancing children, killing at least one child, Hector Petersen.

Later Dr. Melville Edelstein was killed at Morris Isaacson High School and Mr. N. Esterhuizen, a WRAB official was also beaten to death.

Police reinforcements were brought into Soweto and army troops were placed on standby as rioting spread throughout Soweto and buildings and vehicles were burnt.

All schools were closed at the order of Mr. M.C. Botha.

In a statement in Parliament Mr. Kruger, Minister of Justice and of Police said that "Student unrest over dissatisfaction with their curriculum was brewing in Soweto for the past ten days." (This was four weeks after the first school had gone on strike.)

The Director of the S.A.I.R.R. issued the following press statement:

"The tragic situation which has arisen in Soweto was entirely preventable. First, the enforced use of two new media of instruction in secondary education at the same time is educationally unsound, and the Bantu Education Department knows this. For months representations have

been made by homeland leaders, school boards and other bodies. The African Teachers' Association saw the Secretary for Bantu Education on this issue late in April. Yet no conciliatory statement was issued by the Minister of Bantu Education who has now closed Soweto schools.

"Secondly, the pupil strikes in one area which preceded yesterday's more widespread demonstrations and subsequent rioting were due largely to inept handling of the language medium issue in one limited Soweto area. Here again, warning signs and repeated requests for action were ignored, thus causing rising tension.

"Failure to act wisely in time is the prime cause of the deaths and injuries, of destruction of property and a tragic disturbance of public order and race relations.

"We appeal for wise and responsible guidance from the country's leaders."

17 June: Many pupils apparently unaware of the suspension of classes, returned to school.

Rioting continued, apparently now led by tsotsis and gangsters who had taken advantage of the previous day's violence and had started looting.

Putco suspended bus services and all clinics in Soweto were closed.

Pupils in Tembisa demonstrated in sympathy with Soweto scholars and rioting broke out in Krugersdorp's Kagisa township.

In a statement in Die Beeld Dr. 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 supplies the buildings and subsidises the schools.



In the Assembly Mr. Kruger, Minister of Police, said that the Government had not expected the riots in Soweto to result from the school strikes against Afrikaans as medium of instruction, and that the language question was not really the cause of the riots. The Minister also announced the appointment of Mr. Justice Cillie as a one-man commission of enquiry into the causes of the riots.

Mr. M.C. Botha, Minister of Bantu Administration and Education, stated that at seven of the senior secondary schools involved in the demonstrations, subjects were taught in English only, and that at only one high school one subject was offered in Afrikaans. (It should be borne in mind that although not directly affected by the ruling at present, senior secondary and high schools would eventually be affected as the children at present at higher primary schools progress. In addition, many high school pupils have brothers and sisters in the lower classes, which were affected by the ruling, and sympathised with and wished to support them over this issue.) According to Mr. Botha the equal treatment of the two official languages as entrenched in the constitution, had to be considered, and teachers were employed under the explicit assumption that they were proficient in both languages.

Opposition members called for the resignation of the Minister and Deputy Minister of Bantu Administration because of their inept handling of the matter.

Chief Buthelezi called for a conference of leaders to resolve the crisis.

18 June: Rioting spread to Alexandra Township, Vosloorus at Boksburg and Kathlehong near Germiston, Mahlakeng in Randfontein, and again Kagiso. Students at Turfloop protested at the shootings in Soweto, but there was no damage to the University. At Ngoye, the administration buildings and library were burnt down by protesting students.

Students at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Medical Faculty of the University of Natal held protest marches. In Durban 87 Black students were arrested.

Mr. John Rees and Dr. Beyers Naude received orders warning them to dissociate themselves completely from the "situation of unrest" and public gatherings were prohibited until 29 June in terms of the Riotous Assemblies Act.

In a statement in Parliament Mr. Vorster said that law and order were to be preserved at any cost.

Homeland leaders called for calm and an end to rioting.

Soweto leaders demanded that Afrikaans be dropped as medium of instruction before they would co-operate in the setting up of a reconstruction committee.

The following letter was sent to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Bantu Administration, Development and Education by the Assistant Director of the S.A.I.R.R.:

"The South African Institute of Race Relations, deeply concerned about the violence that has taken place in Soweto, has instructed me to appeal to you to accept the reasonable request of the African people that their children should be educated through one medium chosen by their parents. We believe that such a decision would help significantly in present conditions, since it would show that reasonable requests made by responsible African people are not rejected out of hand by those with the power to make decisions.

"We realise, however, that this request must be considered in an educational context, and we therefore take the liberty of suggesting how it might be framed on educational grounds.

"We respectfully submit that the following principles could form the basis of an acceptable policy:

- "1. It is desirable that children begin their education in their mother-tongue.
2. In a multi-lingual country such as South Africa, it is necessary that children switch to ONE of the official languages as a medium of instruction at some stage of their schooling if that language is not their mother-tongue.
3. The point at which such switch should be made, and the language medium through which such children should be educated, are matters which, in principle, should be decided by the parents or communities involved.
4. Both official languages should be taught as subjects to all children in South Africa.
5. It is accepted that in teaching any language, that language should be the medium of instruction.

"The above principles are educationally sound and accord with the historic experience of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. Their acceptance should therefore be seriously and urgently considered by the Cabinet.

"In making our request, we are as concerned as all other responsible South Africans to contribute to the restoration of peace, public order and goodwill in our area.

"I am taking the liberty of sending a copy of this letter to the Hon. the Minister of Bantu Administration, Development and Education."

19 June: Rioting in the townships of the Rand died down, except for sporadic outbursts.



Dr. Selma Browde was served with a warning order similar to those served on the Rev. Beyers Naude and Mr. Rees.

Mr. M.C. Botha met Black leaders in Pretoria. A joint statement was issued saying that the "tragic occurrences in Soweto were caused by misunderstanding and confusion". A meeting between Mr. Rousseau, Secretary for Bantu Education, and Black leaders was scheduled for Friday 25 June.

21 June: There were fresh outbreaks of rioting at Mamelodi, Atteridgeville, Hammanskraal and Mabopane, near Pretoria, at Kwa Thema, Daveyton, Duduza and Watteville on the East Rand, near Pietersburg and Potgietersrus and at Sibasa and Witsieshoek.

A meeting of Soweto school principals was held after which a statement was issued calling for the immediate scrapping of Afrikaans as medium of instruction, and stating that it was the language issue which was the real cause of the riots and other grievances were secondary.

Mr. M.C. Botha issued a statement in which he said that there would be regular consultation between Black urban leaders and White authorities at which various grievances would be discussed.

22 June: Disturbances in Mamelodi lead to further deaths, and there was unrest in GaRankuwa, where high school students demonstrated "in sympathy with those killed in the struggle".

In the Assembly Mr. M.C. Botha stated that the Government intended to decide whether to repeal or amend the language ruling before schools reopened. He reiterated the previous statement that the four senior secondary schools which had started the protest march, did not use Afrikaans as medium of instruction.

Mr. Kruger, Minister of Police, praised police action in the riots, and attacked the PRP, accusing them of becoming identified with Black Power movements.

In the United Nations Security Council, Mr. David Sibeko, Director of Foreign Affairs of the Pan African Congress of South Africa, suggested that Blacks killed by fellow Blacks in the riots were those suspected of being government informers.

23 June: All remained quiet in the main trouble spots, although there were cases of arson in Kwa Thema and near Nelspruit (where a building at Ngwenya Teachers Training College was fired). There was a minor outbreak of rioting at Jouberton near Klerksdorp, involving school children.

Chief Kaizer Matanzima condemned the use of guns on students, and called for the repeal of all discriminatory laws by the South African Government.

24 June: In Jouberton two buses were stoned by tsotsis and in Langa, Cape Town, police were called in after a crowd surrounded the vehicle of two Bantu Board officials.

25 June: 30 Black leaders and educationists from Soweto met Mr. G.J. Rousseau, Secretary for Bantu Education, to discuss the language issue. Mr. W.C. Ackerman, regional director, was not present at the meeting. A memorandum on the matter, originally drawn up by ATASA, was presented by the joint committee. After the meeting the view was expressed that the Government was expected to soften its attitude on the enforcement of Afrikaans as medium of instruction.

(In a subsequent meeting with members of the S.A.I.R.R. staff, Mr. Dlamlense, secretary of ATASA, said that at this meeting the following requests were made:

1. That all five circuit inspectors and Mr. Ackerman should be removed from their present posts.
2. That elected members of the school boards who had been dismissed should be reinstated.
3. That a single medium of instruction should be introduced immediately.

Mr. Dlamlense said that ATASA totally dismissed the Minister's earlier statements about "confusion" over the language issue. He said that the matter had been forced and referred to the departmental circulars of 1974, which stated that social studies and arithmetic must be taught through the medium of Afrikaans.)

By 25 June the major outbreaks of rioting had subsided with the official death toll standing at 176. However, since then sporadic outbreaks of arson and rioting have continued to occur in various parts of the country.



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