

PART E.

CAUSES.

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## CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION.

### 1.1 The terms of reference.

1.1.1 The Commission's terms of reference were to inquire into and report on the riots "and the causes which gave rise thereto". The Commission is accordingly required to establish which conditions or facts or acts gave rise to the riots. In its inquiry, the Commission did not go too closely into the question of a direct causal connection between a possible cause and the result, and considered all those matters which, strictly according to the acceptable evidence and not according to unfounded speculation, had contributed materially to the outbreak of the riots.

1.1.2 In this part, attention is given to direct and concurrent or concomitant causes of the riots, planned and coincidental causes, and those matters that contributed to the creation of a milieu in which individuals could easily be induced by agitators or particular circumstances to rioting and violence. Some of these matters are of a political nature, while others again have their origins in the modern way of life. These are matters, in particular, that gave rise to frustration, dissatisfaction, and friction; they are also called grievances. In this part, these causes and circumstances are dealt with in the order in which they are listed in the table of contents.

### 1.2 Discussion of the causes.

1.2.1 Virtually all the causes that are enumerated have already been dealt with in this Report. It is for this reason that the discussions in this part are, with few exceptions, confined to a recapitulation of the findings recorded elsewhere in the Report.

1.2.2 Some of the elements of the riots that were discussed in Part C may, in certain circumstances, also be regarded as causes of disturbances. Intimidation, which was a particularly important element of the riots, can for instance also be classified as a cause if its object was to force the dupes to riot or if the intimidation was carried out by means of riots. Other examples are the detention of persons, agitation, the campaign against shebeens, and solidarity with Soweto.

1.2.3 The Commission had regard to the fact that not all grievances were necessarily causes. Some of them were so trifling and minor that they could not even be regarded as concurrent or contributory causes. Some of these were only dragged in later, while they had no connection with the riots; they were sometimes raised because there was a good opportunity for airing grievances or because they could serve as extenuating circumstances for the conduct of scholars and youths.

## CHAPTER 2 : THE IMMEDIATE CAUSE.

### 2.1 Introduction.

2.1.1 In paragraph B1.1.1, the Commission stated that the following matters in particular were largely and directly responsible for the disorders that erupted in Soweto on 16 June: "... the policy on the medium of instruction in Black secondary schools and the application of that policy, the organised resistance to its application, the official handling of that resistance, and the failure of officials and policemen to foresee the imminent eruption in Soweto".

2.1.2 The Commission will discuss these six factors briefly because they were the combined cause of the first rioting, which subsequently spread throughout the country. As regards the policy on the medium of instruction, it is necessary to deal also with aspects of the policy and the aims of Bantu education.

### 2.2 The policy on the medium of instruction.

2.2.1 When the State took over Black education from the provinces and church organisations in the early fifties, the idea was to create a system of education that would meet the needs of the developing Black community. Critics of this system imputed a less laudable aim to the Government. When, in the course of the riots, Bantu education had virtually superseded Afrikaans as the reason for the rioters' dissatisfaction, there were many who described

the object of this system as a deliberate attempt to train the Black pupil in such a way that he would be subservient to the White man or, put more strongly, that he would be and remain the oppressors' slave.

2.2.2 Initially, after thorough investigation and consultation, the following uniform policy regarding the medium of instruction was decided upon for Black schools. In the primary classes up to Std VI, the pupil's mother tongue was to be the medium of instruction. In the secondary classes, the mother tongue was still to be used in non-examination subjects, and language subjects would be taught in the language itself, while equal use was as far as possible to be made of Afrikaans and English in the content subjects. The object of this dual medium education was to give the pupil not only an academic education but also to prepare him, so far as his ability to communicate was concerned, for the sphere of employment he was likely to enter. This policy was praised in some quarters. It was criticised in other quarters, because, among other things, it was proof, so far as the use of Afrikaans was concerned, of the object of keeping the Black man in a state of subservience.

### 2.3 The application of the policy.

2.3.1 The words "waar moontlik" (wherever possible) were inserted in the statement of policy regarding the equal use of media of instruction because there were several parts of the country in which there were not sufficient teachers with the so-called required language proficiency for the strict implementation of this policy. From necessity, a system of exemptions was decided on. This meant that, if a secondary school did not have enough teachers to teach two content subjects through the medium of Afrikaans or English, the Department could be asked for exemption from this policy and for permission to have three or four content subjects taught through the medium of one of the languages. The school board had to address such an application to the Department through the inspectorate. The final decision rested with the Secretary.

2.3.2 Uncertainty, misunderstanding, and dissatisfaction arose as to the grounds for exemption. Initially, the only recognised ground was a shortage of teachers with the required language proficiency, but other grounds were mentioned officially from time to time. Thus it was said on one occasion

that, if a textbook for a certain subject was available in one language only, that subject should be taught in the language of the textbook. In 1973, school boards and committee boards, among others, were asked to recommend whether the medium of instruction at their secondary schools was to be Afrikaans only or English only, or both these languages on a fifty-fifty basis. To make a substantiated recommendation, the boards had to consider the following matters as reasons for departing from the principle of equal use: The dominant language of the White community in the town, city or area in which the school was situated; the desirability of uniformity at feeder and recipient schools; the medium of instruction in other schools in the board area within which pupils could move freely; the desirability of single-medium schools, and the advantages of the existing policy. In making their recommendations, they had to bear in mind that the language proficiency of teachers might only present a temporary problem. A year later, the Minister's decision concerning these recommendations was announced in a circular. The status quo was to be maintained; this meant that, wherever possible, the two official languages were to be used equally as media of instruction, and that the granting of exemption would depend mainly on the availability of teachers with the required language proficiency.

2.3.3 The Commission would like to make the following observations about this circular. So many possible grounds for exemption were mentioned that confusion and uncertainty were created among the boards, especially since the reason for exemption that was finally decided upon as being the main one, had to be regarded, in the making of recommendations, as a problem of a temporary nature. In spite of subsequent policy statements, the real grounds for departure from the equal use of the official languages were never satisfactorily explained to boards and parents in certain areas. To this may be added that a satisfactory test of the required language proficiency was never devised; the teachers in Soweto were not helpful in this regard, and further dissatisfaction arose.

2.3.4 A second observation in regard to this circular is that it was never sent to the boards. They had to learn from others what had been decided about their recommendations. This point is important, since the request to boards to make recommendations had given many of them the impression that they had

some say in the matter of the medium of instruction in schools; some of them even thought that they could take a decision in this matter. The Department tried in vain to clear up this misunderstanding. It was stressed that the final decision rested with the Secretary, but there is evidence that on more than one occasion applications for exemption went no further than inspectors' offices. The parties concerned suspected as much. When exemption was refused, the reasons for such refusal were not given to the boards or the schools. Keeping board members and parents in the dark aggravated dissatisfaction about educational matters and created an opportunity for unfounded speculation and rumours.

2.3.5 The third observation concerning the circular is that a translation of the words "waar moontlik" did not appear in the English text. In this case this could not have created the impression that no exceptions to the policy of equal use of the media of instruction would be allowed, but this kind of mistake was repeated subsequently. Towards the end of August 1974, the Regional Director sent a circular to all school principals in the Southern Transvaal Region on the subject of a uniform approach in schools. It was stated in mandatory language that Afrikaans and English were to be used on a 50-50 basis in that region. No mention was made of exemption, with the result that the idea arose that the policy had been changed and that departures from policy would no longer be tolerated. Subsequent directives did not rectify this matter, and scholars contended that Afrikaans was being forced down their throats.

2.3.6 Two factors that complicated the application of this policy were the considerable increase in the number of scholars and the change-over to a twelve-year educational structure. In secondary schools, in particular, the increase in the number of pupils was exceptional. In 1974, there were 14% more pupils than in the previous year. The number of 178 959 swelled to 252 515 in 1975, an increase of about 40%. In 1976 the increase was about 53%; the total was 389 046. Furthermore, this increase was unexpected and caused a lack of space and a shortage of teachers. It seems that, in the circumstances, the Department and its officials solved most of the problems caused by this increase satisfactorily. This may also be said of the problems that arose from the change-over.

CHAPTER 35 : SUMMARY.

35.1 The factors which combined to give rise to the first riots were the application of the policy on the medium of instruction in Black secondary schools, the organised resistance in Soweto to this application, the handling of this resistance, and the failure of the education officials and the police, who did not see the danger coming, to take precautionary measures.

35.2 The riots were continued by the organisers of demonstrations, boycotts and strikes, by the distributors of inflammatory pamphlets, by inciters' speeches, and by rioters who wanted to take part in the violence and looting or who wanted to bring about chaos to paralyse the Government.

35.3 Several other factors discussed in this Report were not direct causes of the eruption or continuation of the riots, but they did contribute to the rioting. Singly, their influence was not equally strong or equally far-reaching; nevertheless, jointly or severally they served to create a state of mind that was receptive to the provocation to riot.