

**DOCUMENT 5 DAN MONTSISI TESTIFIES AS TO THE ORIGINS OF
THE SOWETO UPRISING, 1976**

In 1976 Dan Montsisi was a high school student and one of the organizers of the protests that began on 16 June in Soweto. With the fall of apartheid, he

became an ANC member of parliament and continues to represent his constituents in Soweto.

When we organised the demonstration [16 June 1976] for instance a number of meetings started quite earlier because as members then of the then existing student organisations we were aware of problems which were taking place . . . obviously Afrikaans was something quite difficult and we couldn't conceive of Afrikaans being taught as a medium of instruction in the township of Soweto, because most publications and magazines are English and most people around, I mean we were more acquainted with English rather than Afrikaans. We do speak Afrikaans and we do Afrikaans as a language, but now for maths for instance to be taught in the medium of Afrikaans, Science and Economics and all those subjects to be taught in the medium of Afrikaans that was highly unthinkable.

So we met with, firstly it was in May 1976. . . . One of the issues came up about what we are going to do on the issue of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Some time in April, May 1976 the students . . . voiced out their concerns. Now the announcement was actually made some time in 1975 in December by the then existing Minister of Education. Now the spiral went on of this concern within the school community and also within the teachers because some of them were quite aware of the fact that they were not competent enough to teach in the medium of instruction which they actually designed to do.

A number of meetings were held . . . the . . . school board in Meadowlands [to which Sophiatown residents had been removed in 1954–55] refused to acknowledge and accept that their own schools and the teachers should actually teach in Afrikaans. They tried to talk to the Department and even explained to the district officials of education that there is no way in which you can introduce Afrikaans as a medium. The Department refused to listen. The circuit inspector refused to listen.

Now there was no way in which the parents and the teachers could have been able to do anything because the powers that he (the inspector) had actually refused, in a period of about five months, to negotiate and actually resolve the issue of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. Treurnicht later said that where the government actually funds the government will decide the policy regarding education.

Now in a way it was a challenge to the young people of Soweto, and the young people of South Africa because he (Treurnicht) was saying you are going to take Afrikaans whether you like it or not and you are going to do it. . . .

When we met finally on the 15th of June in order to inform the students about the day there was a lot of enthusiasm and excitement among students because the government was reluctant to actually withdraw Afrikaans as a medium and the students were prepared that they are not going to let Afrikaans

ruin their future, because already the type of education system that we were receiving left quite a lot to be desired. So on the placards, as we reported to them, firstly they had to condemn Afrikaans as a medium and secondly while they had a lot to say about the Nationalist Party leadership, Verwoerd for instance and Vorster, B.J. Vorster. And then the student leadership at the same time made known their displeasure about apartheid government in general so that the placards that came on June 16 were a reflection of what the students were up against in addition to Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. The major issue as it is was Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.

Now on the 16th we met in my school immediately after the assembly. The teachers were not informed. Only a few teachers knew about this and immediately after the assembly the official prayer meeting in the morning, we took up the rostrum. So I had, together with my colleagues explained the route that we were going to take . . . obviously when we marched we were not aware that this was a chapter actually in the history of South Africa. We had not gone out to really bring about the transformation and change that took place. We only went out into the demonstration hoping that tomorrow we will come back to our classes, sit down and begin with our lessons. That is what we thought. So we moved out of our school.

All along when we began to march, I mean the contingent was gaining its momentum and it was becoming stronger. So already while we were heading towards Morris Isaacson there was something like four to six thousand students and people in general who were on the march, because those parents were not at work, you know the unemployed and the young people who were out there in the township, actually joined the march, but nevertheless the march was peaceful. No single stone was thrown up to that moment . . . [then the police began shooting and teargassing the protesting students]. . . .

Now if one has to comment about the condition in which those students [who had been shot] were, you had girls for instance who were clad in gym dress but now those gyms were actually cut into two by the fence and they were just exposed, and some of them were actually bleeding. There is one particular girl whom I saw who had a gash on the head and all the time they had been trying to stop the blood that was flowing profusely and a number of them did not even have their shoes on. It was terrible. It was almost as if these people had come from a battlefield, not a demonstration.

Now on our way to Morris Isaacson we met a van, it was a green bakkie [pick-up truck], one of these Municipality vans, it was driven by a White man. That is when violence started with our group. Mostly the girls were in the forefront. I have never seen so many stones in my life raining on a car or on a target. I don't know where most of the stones came from. In no time the bakkie had no windows. And the student girls themselves actually struggled and fought among each other to get hold of the White man who was inside the car. They dragged him out. They pelted him with stones, with bottles, with

their shoes as they were screaming. There was a young boy who was also looking for a way through to the White man. Finally when they made space for him he produced a knife and he stabbed a number of times in the chest of the White man.

From personal testimony. Available at:
<http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/Soweto/montsisi.htm>.

DOCUMENT 6 DAN MONTSISI IS TORTURED BY THE POLICE, 1977

Dan Montsisi was detained by the police in Johannesburg on 10 June 1977, and interrogated and tortured by them on several occasions before being incarcerated on Robben Island. Here he describes, in testimony given to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996, how agents of the apartheid state treated those they viewed as enemies.

[The police] fetched me from John Vorster Square [the main police station in Johannesburg] and we drove down to Protea Police Station, and they used the rubber truncheon to beat you all over the head and it was quite difficult because I was blindfolded and I couldn't see the direction from which the truncheon was coming from, so it was quite easy for them. It went on for quite some time. And then you could also be kicked and beaten with fists, stomach and so on. And there was also one other method they used, the rifle. They used the rifle to stamp on your toes. So every time you talk what they do not agree with they use the rifle on your toes. And one method they referred to as an airplane, I didn't know what they were talking about, but I was grabbed and they swung me and they threw me right into the air but when you land, fortunately it was a wooden floor so they did that several times. All along I mean they were like laughing and so on and so on, ridicule you and so on. And they were pulling the muscles on the back to put a strain on you so they come from behind and they pull the muscles with their own hands. And so they also forced me to squat. That time I was quite weak and I didn't have much power left in me. I could have collapsed any time but they still continued, so I had to squat against the wall and a brick was placed on my hands as I squatted against the wall. I don't know what happened because I think the brick fell and it hit me on the head and when I regained consciousness they had poured water all over me. So the first person I saw looking down at me was Visser, Captain Visser from Protea Police Station. So all I said to him when I saw him was that 'Baas they are killing me', that is what I said to him. And I never thought I would say 'baas' but I did. So they explained to him that – they used very strong language, 'hardegat', so they were going to continue. That time they had removed the blindfold and he left the room, and then as soon as he left I could see the people who were instrumental in the torture. Although

there were something like eight policemen inside there were two others Trollip and Van Rooyen, those were the ones who were the leaders and the senior was this Lieutenant van Rooyen. So they blindfolded me again and this time they took off my pants and my underpants and they used what we referred to later as we were taken about it as a USO, an unidentified squeezing object, but probably it was a plier, to actually press my testes. They did that twice or thrice and when they do that it becomes very difficult for you to scream because you like choke. When they leave you then you are able to scream. So they did that twice, thrice. I don't know what happened and again they poured water all over me. And I was taken to John Vorster and ja [yes] I was dumped there. Later I saw a doctor, a district surgeon Williamson, so he was able to treat me. He wasn't supposed to see me, it was just a mistake on the part of the police, because in the cells in John Vorster Square when they were opening the cells they opened my own cell by mistake. Those who were tortured must not be seen by the doctor because they will be . . . (indistinct), so this policeman opened my door unaware and then I couldn't go on my own so I used the wall to walk towards the part of the cells was a surgery where the doctor saw us, so I crawled and so on and so on. When the security police saw me they wanted to take me back to the cells so I screamed, so fortunately the doctor came out and he saw me, then he said I want to see that man. . . . My whole body was swollen, there were stripes all over the body and so on. So the doctor was able to see me and he made a profile of a human being to indicate all areas of injury. My medical record was subsequently submitted in court so it's properly recorded. When I recovered this was some time in September they took me again. This time it was on the 10th Floor of John Vorster Square and there it was De Meyer, Sergeant de Meyer, Captain . . . they didn't touch the face and Stroewig was just concentrating on the head. He didn't hit anything except the head. So he just focused on the head and so on and so forth. For the whole day he did not hit anything except the head and I think I collapsed and again I was taken to hospital. So this time they took me to the Florence Nightingale Clinic in Hillbrow. It was a White hospital so no Africans can see one of the student activist casualties, unlike if you had to take him to an African clinic, quite a number of people could have seen him. So I was smuggled into an exclusive White clinic. There they did brain scanning and well they checked me and they wanted to do a lumbar puncture. At that time I didn't understand what a lumbar puncture was so they explained that they are going to stick a needle in my spine and extract the liquid. I refused because I wasn't quite sure whether I could trust them to do that to me. I knew the spine to be quite sensitive so I refused. So the security cops came again to try and talk to me to do the lumbar puncture, I refused. They promised that they would take me back to prison and beat me up and bring me . . . (indistinct) and so on and so on, but once I was with the doctor I was able to tell the doctor that he shouldn't, so fortunately the doctor did not do it. I recovered

their shoes as they were screaming. There was a young boy who was also looking for a way through to the White man. Finally when they made space for him he produced a knife and he stabbed a number of times in the chest of the White man.

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