

PRP and UP calls to scrap language rule

Political Staff

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DR ALEX BORAINÉ, Progressive Reform Party MP, said last night that the Soweto tragedy "could have been averted if the Government had not stubbornly refused to scrap the regulations compelling Black children in secondary schools in urban areas to be taught on a 50-50 English-Afrikaans basis".

Police fired first —claim

Own Correspondent

JOHANNESBURG. — A witness to yesterday's shooting incident in Soweto in which a schoolboy was killed and a number injured said a policeman had fired before there had been any stones thrown.

Mr Victor Dladla, 20, who lives behind the Orlando West High School where the shooting took place, described it as follows:

"A large number of schoolchildren, many from the Morris Isaacson High School came down the road carrying placards at about 9.30am:

"The placards read 'Away with Afrikaans' and 'Kill Afrikaans'.

"Then a light-blue police car carrying five Black South African police drove up towards the column of schoolchildren.

"Twice the group of police tried to stop the procession."

Mr Dladla said one policeman then took out his gun and fired a shot. A boy fell down.

"At that moment the children spread and picked up stones. They started throwing stones at the police.

"The other policemen fired at the children with revolvers and seven more were hit by bullets."

Police spokesmen consistently through the day said the shooting on the school children had been provoked by the children stoning the police.

And the United Party's Mr Andrew Pyper, MP, said it appeared that "some form of confrontation was inevitable" after the Nationalist Government had decided to force the medium of instruction on Black pupils.

"Having tried to convince the Government on this issue, it is clear to me that they would not listen to reason.

"It is completely senseless from an educational point of view to try to force people to be taught through the medium of two foreign languages," Mr Pyper said.

Both Mr Pyper and Dr Borainé said their parties had tried to convince the Government for years that its language policy was causing conflict.

PARENTS' CHOICE

"Our basic attitude has always been that the decision should be left to the local boards to decide the medium of instruction, and naturally to let parents have a choice," Mr Pyper said.

Dr Borainé chronicled a number of occasions when the PRP had brought "increasing bitterness and frustration" caused by the language policy to the attention of the Government.

The African Teachers' Association of South Africa 18 months ago had described the regulation as "cruel and short-sighted".

Dr Borainé said that only on June 4 he had asked the Minister, Mr M C Botha for information on the student strikes in Soweto. Mr Botha had replied that 2 000 pupils were involved and that they objected to the 50-50 medium rule.

Dr Borainé said that for years the PRP had warned the Government about the "deep resentment over the language issue, but they refused to listen, with disastrous consequences".