



masterminding mass detentions

— the method in the madness

Much has been heard about police action during the State of Emergency - but very little has been read. Police have been shielded from public exposure by the strict censorship provisions of the Emergency regulations. One of the few ways in which police action can be exposed is through evidence before the courts. During a recent Cape Town court hearing, two telexes were submitted as evidence, dating from the first days of the national State of Emergency in June 1986, which throw light on the police strategy to curb township resistance. The telexes, sent by Major General A.J. Wandrag, Senior Deputy Commissioner of Police in charge of Riot Control to subordinates throughout the country, instruct the police to

- * detain rather than disperse people at the scene of gatherings in the townships.
- * avoid bringing them to court, except in criminal cases, thus preventing bail or any other means of securing their release.

The telexes acknowledge that the majority of those detained will be youths and that the prison authorities 'have the necessary accommodation for youths.'

'There must be NO, but NO doubt that to end the current climate of unrest, youths who make up the largest proportion of the troublemakers, must be removed from the community. No bail, or other means of release must be permitted.'

For the record we publish both telexes here.

The first telex, dated 13 June 1986, reads (in translation):

1. Where persons commit offences during unrest situations which amount to transgressions of the Emergency regulations, they must be detained in terms of the Emergency and not directly criminally charged.
2. Care must be taken that members of the force are not unnecessarily ensnared in court cases on trivial issues.
3. In matters of a purely criminal nature, such as murder, (and) robbery, the accused must be charged in terms of the crime.
4. Maximum arrests must be made at the scene of unrest.

The second telex was sent the next day (14 June) as a follow-up. It refers to a body called the G.V.S. which is not identified in more detail. According to an expert on the National Security Management system, these letters probably stand for 'Gemeenskaplike Veiligheids Sentrum' (Joint Security Centre).

State of Emergency - Action in terms of Emergency Regulations.

1. Despite repeated orders that stringent action must be taken against agitators and perpetrators of unrest, the response has left much to be desired.
2. The Security Forces and the South African Police in particular, have been requested on a daily basis at G.V.S. meetings to act more effectively in unrest situations.
3. There are daily incidents of gatherings, stone throwing, arson etc.

4. The SAP forces must in such cases be used to carry out maximum arrests, in other words rather patrol in larger numbers and stabilise an area by means of mass arrests.
 5. On 13 June the G.V.S. decided that extremely strong action must be taken against those who violate the Emergency regulations. To execute this decision it is unavoidable that many youths will be arrested. There must be NO, but NO doubt that to end the current climate of unrest, youths who make up the largest proportion of the troublemakers, must be removed from the community. No bail, or other means of release must be permitted.
 6. The prison authorities have confirmed that they do have sufficient accommodation for youths.
 7. Many thanks for what you have already done. Let us combine our efforts to bring about peace and quiet once and for all.
- These mass detentions became a focus for the work of the now banned Detainees Parents Support Committee and the Free the Children Alliance. Their opposition to detention and their efforts to secure the release of detainees (particularly children and youth under the age of 18) have been of great effect. On 31 May, Adriaan Vlok, Minister of Law and Order, announced that there were no more children under the age of 16 in detention. According to recent estimates about 250 youths between 16 and 18 years remain in detention. The Black Sash continues to work for the release of all detainees. □