



## Aggett's fellow detainees to give evidence at inquest

A DAY before he died Dr Neil Aggett provided in his own handwriting names and information of the greatest use to the Security Police, Major Arthur Cronwright, head of the John Vorster Square interrogation section, told the Johannesburg Inquest Court.

The inquest into the death of Dr Aggett, 28, a medical doctor and trade unionist found hanged in his cell at John Vorster Square in the early hours of February 5, has been postponed until September 20.

Maj Cronwright told the court the documents had not been shown to the Attorney-General, officers of the court and the Aggett family lawyers because the investigation was not complete.

When Mr George Bizos, SC, counsel for the Aggett family, questioned this, Maj Cronwright said the information was secret because it had been obtained while Dr Aggett was being held under Section Six of the Terrorism Act.

Prompted further by Mr Bizos to explain why he had withheld the documents, Maj Cronwright appealed to the magistrate, Mr Petrus Kotze, for court protection.

He said the contents of the documents implicated a 'very respected person present in this court today who is named and who would be warned about the investigation', and who had links with the SA Communist Party.

The magistrate said he would decide before September 20 if the documents could be used.

During his cross-examination of Maj Cronwright, Mr Pieter Schabert, SC, counsel for the Minister of Law and Order, read out a statement in which Dr Aggett allegedly admitted he was a communist. The statement was typed but unsigned.

In the statement Dr Aggett said he 'supported the Marxist ideology and I am therefore a communist. I am also an idealist.'

Mr Bizos said the statement was a typed copy of a statement by Dr Aggett. The words 'I am also an idealist' had appeared in the original

but had been left out of the copy, he said.

The magistrate said although Dr Aggett's statements could be used in the proceedings, the court had previously decided that the contents were not necessarily true.

Cross-examined by Mr Bizos earlier, Maj Cronwright said Dr Aggett had heard Security Police discussing the possible arrest of people he had named during a lengthy interrogation session.

Maj Cronwright said the discussion took place in front of Dr Aggett on the morning of February 4. Several hours later, Dr Aggett was found hanged in his cell.

These 'new names' were part of the useful information Dr Aggett had supplied to the SP in his own handwriting.

Later, Maj Cronwright said the SP had been in no hurry to complete Dr Aggett's interrogation.

Mr Bizos told the court that on the weekend of January 28-31, Dr Aggett had been interrogated for 62 hours by several trained officers working in eight-hour shifts. According to affidavits made by Dr Aggett's interrogators, he had been allowed 11 hours' rest.

Maj Cronwright said he had given Lieutenant Stephan Whitehead permission to interrogate Dr Aggett for 62 hours over that weekend, but dissociated himself from the part of Lt Whitehead's affidavit which said that Dr Aggett required more 'intensive' interrogation after he had completed his statement that weekend.

Maj Cronwright said he would not have authorised an 'intensive' interrogation unless Dr Aggett had agreed to it.

He said Dr Aggett was not taken back to his cell but was allowed to sleep on the 10th floor in front of his interrogators in case he was in an agitated state and needed a doctor, and because Dr Aggett was anxious to complete his interrogation.

Asked if the SP were 'as anxious as Dr Aggett' to complete his interrogation as soon as possible,

## Detention support committees meet to plan future action

THE FIRST ever National Detention Seminar was held in Johannesburg last month, drawing together delegates from all over the country - who have been affected by detentions or involved in detention support work.

About 150 delegates from the western and eastern Cape, Kimberley, the Witwatersrand, Durban and the so-called Ciskei and Venda homelands attended the seminar.

Opening the seminar, Dr David Webster, a member of the Johannesburg Detainees' Parents Support Committee (DPSC) said support committees felt the need to assess their activities and plan for the future.

'In the last two or three years', he said 'there have been a number of new developments in South African politics' he said. 'Campaigns such as the Anti-Republic Day and Anti-SAIC, saw the re-emergence of a non-racial alliance against the apartheid state, involving democratic and progressive organisations and a significant growth of independent trade union strength'. 'The recent wave of detentions was aimed at crushing this alliance, which was reminiscent of the movement of the fifties' he said.

Webster isolated different phases of activity of the detention support committees. The early response was defence, followed by consolidation of the support groups and a developing self confidence which resulted in an offensive against the state and recently a phase of fall-off in activity.

In discussion groups the internal and external functioning of the detention support committees was analysed to evaluate their activities. Support activities have covered many areas from the struggle for material support and welfare of detainees to education of committee members, raising awareness and education of the general public, monitoring of security police activity and delegations to the authorities.

Delegates felt achievements had

Maj Cronwright said: 'There was no hurry. He could have stayed there for a year.'

Maj Cronwright said he had never read Dr Aggett's statement to Sergeant Aletta Blom on February 4, in which he claimed he was assaulted and tortured, because he (Maj Cronwright) did not want to interfere with the investigation into Dr Aggett's death.

Mr Bizos said: 'I submit the reasons for not looking at the statement were because you did not care and because you knew he had been ill-treated.'

Maj Cronwright said Lt Whitehead, one of Dr Aggett's interrogators, had kept Dr Aggett and his girlfriend, Dr Liz Floyd, under constant surveillance for 'years' before his arrest.

He did not think, however, that this would have influenced Lt Whitehead's feelings towards Dr Aggett in any way.

Mr Bizos suggested that when a policeman followed somebody 'night and day for two years' he would 'not be feeling very friendly towards that person'.

Maj Cronwright disagreed, admitting he knew of the surveillance of Dr Aggett.

In his testimony, Brigadier Hendrik Muller, chief of Johannesburg's Security Police, denied that Section 22 of the General Laws Amendment Act, the 14-day detention clause, was used to isolate detainees to prepare them for interrogation.

His denial came after Mr Bizos said that Dr Aggett had told a



Durban lawyer, Zac Yacoob.

been made in areas such as winning concessions for detainees welfare, support for family and friends, and in publicity. In addition many people peripheral to the struggle for democracy had been brought into its ambit. However some of the problems were that there was no equalization of concessions to detainees and there was a tendency for individual rather than collective action.

The function of special groups arising from the detention issue was discussed. Health sub-committees have been established in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg. These committees are publicising the conditions and effects of detention, such as solitary confine-

ment and methods of interrogation, and the demands of the DPSC for access by detainees to independent doctors.

The Health sub-committee it was felt, had succeeded in initiating a high degree of publicity relating to the health care of detainees. Also various medical organisations have condemned detentions and the handling of the detention issue by the Medical Association of South Africa (MASA).

Delegates realised the structure and functioning of committees was different in each area, determined to a large extent by the nature of the broader struggle in that area. 'The extent to which detentions are an issue depends on the resistance/repression ratio at the time' said Zac Yacoob, Durban lawyer and chairperson of the meeting.

'Detentions are a permanent feature of state strategies, but mass campaigns against the state around the detention issue is not always possible or desirable,' he said.

'There is a direct relationship between the extent to which we can mobilize around the detention issue and other democratic struggles that are being waged. The support committees have to keep in touch with other activities and struggles... we are only a small part of the struggle.'

At the seminar's end, delegates reaffirmed the need for ongoing support work and laid the basis for national co-ordination. In a unanimous resolution they pledged to rededicate themselves to continue and intensify their fight, in the short term for changes in the treatment of detainees and the conditions under which they are held, and in the long term for the unconditional release of all detainees and the abolition of the security legislation which serves to maintain the unjust apartheid system.

'These demands we shall fight for side by side until they are met in a free, non-racial and democratic South Africa,' they said.

Dr Aggett's statement, but could not release him because he had been told Dr Aggett had not answered questions in a satisfactory way.

Asked if any urgency prompted the 62-hour interrogation session, Brig Muller said Dr Aggett could have begun to reveal 'new names'.

'I submit', Mr Bizos said after Brig Muller had refused to disclose the names, 'that, in the absence of new names, this alleged information never took place and if the officers tendered them to you, they did so to justify their actions.'

When Mr Abraham Mouton, an inspector of detainees, gave evidence, he denied he was helpless to do anything about detainees' complaints. He said he immediately reported complaints to the Minister of Justice.

'If a detainee says he has been assaulted and fears he will be assaulted again the next day, and you tell the Minister, is this not helpless?' Mr Bizos asked.

Mr Mouton said it was not helpless because he urged detainees to air their complaints. He had received a number of complaints, but knew of none that was followed up.

During a trial within a trial, the magistrate ruled that several of Dr Aggett's fellow detainees would be called to give evidence. Dr Aggett's girlfriend, Dr Liz Floyd, was among them.

Although the inquest court has sat for 16 days, still to give evidence are Dr Aggett's interrogators, at least eight detainees, a psychologist and a psychiatrist.

Brig Muller said he had not read