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The Special Criminal Courts Amendment Act introduced by the Minister of Justice, became necessary because the law as it stood did not permit the constitution of a special court.

This could be assembled only if the Attorney-General satisfied the Minister of Justice that the ends of justice were likely to be defeated if the accused were tried by jury.

The treason suspects, however, elected to be tried by a judge and two assessors. This did not allow the Minister to appoint a special court, so he amended the Act.

It was the third time the Minister has amended the law because of an exigency arising from the proceedings. During the lengthy preparatory examination he amended it twice: The first time to make it possible for the hearing to proceed in the absence of the accused; the second to relax the strict rules which formerly applied to the substantiation of documentary evidence produced in court.

DAWN SWOOP

The case opened at dawn on December 5, 1956, when 156 people were arrested in a Union-wide police swoop.

The preparatory examination opened in the Drill Hall, Johannesburg, on December 19, 1956, in a tense atmosphere. Thousands of Africans seethed round the building. At one stage there were demonstrations by the crowd and the police used revolvers and Sten guns.

On the third day the

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The remaining 95 were committed for trial.

As the mammoth hearing droned on it drew world-wide attention, and a fund, started to aid the suspects and their dependants, drew contributions from all parts of the world, notably Britain and the United States.

The Old Synagogue has been specially converted and acoustically conditioned for the trial, which is expected to last several months.

Before the accused are asked to plead, defending counsel can take exception to the charge or ask the court to quash it if they consider that it has any formal defects.

If such an application were made and upheld by the judges, the massive indictment would have to be redrafted.

SEVEN FROM CITY

Among the accused will be Prof. Z. K. Mathews, acting Principal of Fort Hare University at the time of his arrest; Piet Beyleveld, who contested one of the Coloured seats at the last general election; the African lawyer, Joe Slovo, and his European wife, Ruth Slovo; Dr. G. M. Naiker, president-general of the South African Indian Congress; Moses Kotane and Walter Sisulu.

Seven of the accused are from Cape Town: Lionel Forman, an advocate; Ben Turok, MPC; Mrs. Sonia Bunting; Fred Carneson, a former MPC;

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