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Report on conversations with Maxwell Sirenya

On the 25th of August 1977 I was present when Maxwell talked about his experiences at home during 1976. He spoke of his experience as a student at Fort Hare, of mass meetings which were held to discuss tactics to be taken by the students against the administration of the university and the police. He described one particular day, when a mass meeting called by the students (I think soon after June) was banned by the administration and the police surrounded the campus in force. He said all the students were gathered outside facing the police guns and there was indecision as to whether to walk across to where the meeting was to take place. No-one dared to move but he decided to take the first step and after he moved all the students followed. There was no shooting but he stressed that he did not fear death. He repeated a few times that he did not like telling this story about his actions and what we should all remember was all those who had died.

Other information he gave about his studies: he said he and other students were picked by big companies (I think he mentioned Anglo-American) to get jobs in industry and that he had been on a tour of factories sponsored by these companies. If I remember correctly he was on this tour in June 1976. He spoke of rejecting this kind of a future. He spoke about how he had come to know about the ANC and talked broadly about old men in his village who had been veteran ANC men and of how he had spoken to them. He had been given Mandelas No Easy Walk to Freedom by a Minister of Religion and it had made a great impression on him. He made no mention on the policies of the ANC.

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In the office soon after he arrived he once mentioned that at the airport in Germany his friends had shown him some propaganda of the ANC (Nationalists) and that he had told them he knew nothing of them, / did not identify with them - I cant remember how the discussion arose.

Steve Biko

On October 1st, at a social, after the memorial he told me that if the office had ordered him not to attend the memorial he would have gone. He had been present at the Womens meeting when Kate told people not to go. He said he had some criticisms of Biko but this was not the time to raise them. He said he had just spent the weekend with Drake at Oxford. When I asked him ~~how~~ had they discussed Bikos death he said there was no need for them to but stressed that they had been up all night talking.

Hilary Rabkin