

Day 2: – Tuesday, 17 November 1964

CHAIRMAN: This session of the inquiry is hereby convened.

SUGRIM SINGH: Members of the Commission. . . Before the proceedings this morning, I wish to refer to a matter which I consider, as Counsel to this Commission, to be of some importance in the deliberation of the Commission. To be specific, I refer to reports in the press, particularly the *Daily Chronicle*. I wish to make it clear that we welcome the press and we do not propose by any means to muzzle the press. But there appears a headline in the *Chronicle* stating that the Wismar District Commissioner tells the Wismar Inquiry Commission the Security Forces did a good job.

The Commissioner did make this statement – it may not be in the actual words but words tantamount to this. But members of the Commission and my learned friends, bear me out that that statement taken out of its context is misleading because you will recall vividly that the Commissioner before the date of the disturbances, and during the day of the disturbances, May 25th, 1964, told you in his own unequivocal terms that he was so afraid that he not only confined himself to his home and Compound far away north at Christianburg but he had actually arranged a craft to remove from the area if the violence in any way threatened him.

In short, of his own knowledge he knows nothing about any happenings on May 25th or the day preceding the 25th. His information was obtained by talking perhaps to different people, until Tuesday or Wednesday, when he passed through the area. The point I am making, members of the Commission – I have no truck with the press as regards these headlines – but it must be stated in its proper context that the Commissioner was not there at all and obtained his information from people outside, days after the disturbances. I make this point, members of the Commission, because this refers to one of our important terms of reference.

This statement does not convey what transpired before you yesterday. I do not ask for the exclusion of the press. I do not say it is deliberate. As this matter is of considerable public importance, I trust that the press will bear this in mind in all future references and publications about this Commission.

SHEPHERD: Chairman, I do not know whether I may be permitted to say something in connection with this rather odd submission made by Counsel who represents the Commission. Let me borrow a paper – not having had my breakfast, I was not very attentive to read the headlines. There was nothing in which within me as a lawyer that reacted through the headline in a sort of a way in which Counsel appears to have so reacted. Headlines are necessarily very short and are merely designed to give an impression; those who want to know the whole story read on and probably can supply another caption at the end. I thought that there was something military in Mr. Sugrim Singh's address, and he probably must have stated – and I am sure he will be the first to say – that he does not wish to threaten the press. We are not to force on impression.

CHAIRMAN: Mr. Shepherd, I do not want to interrupt you, but I feel, members of the Commission, that Mr. Sugrim Singh has brought to our attention a headline in a certain newspaper to our notice. Mr. Shepherd, you are appearing for the Police and Volunteer Forces, under the circumstances without going into details in the whole preparation for the press to be here – and we will like to have them here – at the same time having regard to this very important and somewhat very difficult Commission which we are having, we would ask the press to be more careful in reporting, because the man in the street reading the headline would have the impression created by the headline in the newspaper referred to since it was in bold type. And since this statement regarding the Police and Volunteer Forces was attributed to a responsible officer as the Assistant District Commissioner, it is doubtful whether reading the article would create any different impression.

I do not want to enlarge very much on this point but I feel, members of the Commission, we would find the task easier with a little cooperation from the press. From the beginning I stated we come here –

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although we heard and read of this before with unbiased minds and to give an impartial finding with regard to the terms of reference, and we ask that members of the public as well as the press and witnesses should assist us in getting to the truth of this matter rather than to have big headlines in the papers which can be misleading.

Again I ask that reporters exercise a little care in the reports they make, I wish also to point out that we have been entrusted with a duty and we intend to investigate those points which have been referred to us in our terms of reference.

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CARTER: I do not want to prolong this matter, but just to say that in Mr. Sugrim Singh's remarks he sought to associate this Counsel with some of the points on which this Counsel would agree, and so on, but I would like to disassociate my self from Mr. Sugrim Singh's remarks entirely.

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SUGRIM SINGH: Members of the Commission, I intended to convey, and my learned friends would bear me out, that the Assistant District Commissioner said that he was at his Compound and it is therefore impossible for him to express an opinion based on personal observation. That's all. He was at his Compound on the day of the incidents and remained there and did not go out.

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CARTER: I still say I don't bear you out because it is the half truth. The Commissioner did say so, but he also said that he spoke to a number of people and that was the common opinion that the Police did a good job, and I have my note in which he said: "I felt that within the circumstances the Police did a good job."

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SUGRIM SINGH: I see.

[MRS. JANET JAGAN continues her testimony.]

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, Mrs. Jagan, when the adjournment was taken yesterday afternoon you said that around the 25th of May this year you were Minister of Home Affairs and the maintenance of public safety and public order and the Police came under your portfolio. Is that so?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: What about the Volunteer Force?

JANET JAGAN: No. The Volunteers are under the direction of the Governor of British Guiana.

SUGRIM SINGH: Can you tell this Commission, if you are in a position to do so, whether the members of the Volunteer Force stationed at Wismar and Mackenzie came from other parts of British Guiana, or were from the very area?

JANET JAGAN: To my knowledge they were from the area.

SUGRIM SINGH: Mrs. Jagan, as Minister of Home Affairs at that time, did you have any idea of the composition of the personnel of the Police and Volunteer Forces at Wismar; in other words, how many were East Indians and how many were Africans?

JANET JAGAN: No, I have no knowledge at all of the racial composition either of the Police or Volunteer Force.

SUGRIM SINGH: Do you share the view, Mrs. Jagan, that this tragedy at Wismar around the 25th of May was a racial attack by Africans on the East Indian population there?

JANET JAGAN: Well, it was common knowledge in that almost all the persons attacked were East Indians.

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SUGRIM SINGH: You would explain afterwards. In the main do you agree that the attack was a racial one?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Is it correct to say that you came to this conclusion after receiving complaints from various persons who were actually in the area at the time?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Do you say this from your own knowledge? You never went down there or were there on the 25th of May?

JANET JAGAN: No, I did not go there.

SUGRIM SINGH: Mrs. Jagan, I understand you said yesterday that there was a system in operation between your Ministry and the Police whereby your Ministry was kept apprised of outstanding happenings in this country involving security and public order, by means of letters or correspondence.

JANET JAGAN: No, I did not say that in evidence. I said formerly I had daily reports from the Commissioner of Police, but very often they related to events which were already published in the newspapers. I thought a more rapid system was necessary.

SUGRIM SINGH: You then instituted a system of getting in contact with the Police by means of telephone?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Much obliged Mrs. Jagan. To put it clearly, the onus was on the Commissioner of Police to keep you apprised of these outstanding occurrences involving public safety and order by means of telephone?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, let us move on to the Wismar tragedy. In keeping with this arrangement, did you receive any telephone message from the Commissioner of Police or on behalf of the Commissioner of Police prior to May 25th about tension growing at Wismar?

JANET JAGAN: No. Apart from normal written records I didn't get any telephone calls.

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SHEPHERD: Did you not receive information from the Commissioner that racial tension was rising? I can't remember – you said that there weren't any telephone calls. There are other means of communications such as minutes, files, letters, etc.

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SUGRIM SINGH: Members of the Commission, I made my question clear. I am sorry my friend did not listen. If he were, he would have heard me clearly. I mentioned "telephone" because I made the foundation. My question dealt with the period before the 25th of May – "did you receive any telephone call from the Commissioner of Police or his representative of any tension growing at Wismar", and the answer of the witness was "no", but she got written reports of happenings of the week before.

Now, Mrs. Jagan, you said earlier that these reports were usually late. Can you recall when you received a written report from the Commissioner of Police about tension growing at Wismar?

JANET JAGAN: I am not aware of any specific written reports of these statements. The tension was rising but the written report would mere have been a record of events, for example, so many houses burnt, so many people injured.

SUGRIM SINGH: Oh, but with respect to any tension growing you had no written reports?

JANET JAGAN: No.

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SUGRIM SINGH: You had no written report nor did you have any telephone conversation from the Police about tension growing at Wismar.

JANET JAGAN: As I was saying, none other than whatever had taken place.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, let us move on to the date of the tragedy, Monday 25th of May. Did the Commissioner of Police – let us divide the day into three sections; let us say, morning, midday and afternoon – did the Commissioner of Police speak to you on his own account on the morning of 25th of May?

JANET JAGAN: No.

SUGRIM SINGH: Mrs. Jagan, did the Commissioner of Police speak to you on midday on Monday the 25th of May?

JANET JAGAN: No.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did the Commissioner of Police in the afternoon speak to you of his own impression regarding the Wismar incident?

JANET JAGAN: No.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now let us go back. Did you speak to the Commissioner of Police on the morning or midday of the 25th May?

JANET JAGAN: No, I didn't speak to him.

SUGRIM SINGH: Whom did you speak to?

JANET JAGAN: I spoke to Mr. Puttock.

SUGRIM SINGH: What is his position there?

JANET JAGAN: I believe he is the Assistant Commissioner.

SUGRIM SINGH: Could you help this Commission? Tell us about what o'clock you spoke to Mr. Puttock?

JANET JAGAN: Approximately 12.40.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you at the Ministry receive any information about the happenings at Wismar, before you spoke to Mr. Puttock?

JANET JAGAN: Yes. I was in the Senate that day.

SUGRIM SINGH: You were in the Senate when you got the information? You were a member of the Senate at the time?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Could you give us some idea about what time on that day, the 25th May, you received that information in the Senate?

JANET JAGAN: It was around 10.00 a.m.

SUGRIM SINGH: As a consequence of that information you spoke to Mr. Puttock. You tried to get the Commissioner and, not getting him, you said you spoke to Mr. Puttock at 12.40. Could you recall what you told Mr. Puttock? Now, I want to make it clear, Mrs. Jagan, I want to ask you to avoid any conclusion about Wismar. Just simply on what subject you spoke to Mr. Puttock?

JANET JAGAN: Well, may I say something to help you understand a little more? After I heard something of what took place at Wismar in the Senate – as I said I received a message that things were looking bad at Wismar from one of the members who had come from Wismar on Sunday to attend the meeting on Monday – I returned to the Ministry after the meeting and I attempted to get further information of what had taken place. I was unable at that time to receive any specific details that would assist me in evaluating the seriousness of the situation.

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On Monday, however, I received a telephone call, an indirect call from someone who received a call from Wismar, and then I had information as a result of that call. This telephone call was the first communication I had that things were moving swiftly. From the minute I received that call I tried, accordingly, to get the Commissioner of Police at many places. I called to have the answer as regards conditions at Wismar. I tried to get in touch with various Government Departments, but no one was available and it was lunch hour. I gave a call to the Force Control and asked who was the Officer-in-Charge there, but I was unable to get anyone; and finally I was able to speak to Mr. Puttock who was present then.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you tell Mr. Puttock that you had information that things were getting out of hand at Wismar?

JANET JAGAN: Yes, I told him that.

SUGRIM SINGH: He said anything in reply to you?

JANET JAGAN: Yes. He assured me that there was sufficient force there to contain the situation, and he gave me a break down.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did Mr. Buttock tell you at that time whether the Police had sent information that things were worse at Wismar when he spoke to you?

JANET JAGAN: He said that Mr. Isaacs had been sent out at approximately 12.00 noon to view the situation and report to the Commissioner, but he said nothing else to me on the subject.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did he say anything else of importance on the subject to you that you can recall?

JANET JAGAN: No, except the usual report.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now let us move forward. After this conversation which took place around 12.40 p.m., later in the day did you have any other conversation with the Police?

JANET JAGAN: I requested that an early meeting be arranged.

SUGRIM SINGH: You requested a meeting with whom? Was this an emergency meeting with the Commissioner of Police?

JANET JAGAN: I would have to check my records to be absolutely certain.

SUGRIM SINGH: Do you have your records here?

JANET JAGAN: No I do not have it with me. I could not say whether it was the regular meeting or whether I requested it.

SUGRIM SINGH: But in fact there was actually a meeting between yourself, the Commissioner of Police, and what other officer?

JANET JAGAN: Colonel King.

SUGRIM SINGH: About what o'clock.

JANET JAGAN: About 2.00 p.m.

SUGRIM SINGH: About 2.00 p.m. that day. How did you arrange that meeting? Now, where did that meeting take place Mrs. Jagan?

JANET JAGAN: In the Ministry.

SUGRIM SINGH: Before we deal with the meeting, that meeting was at your request?

JANET JAGAN: Yes. However, I wish to make this point of which I am not certain – if I requested a meeting or if it was a regular meeting.

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SUGRIM SINGH: In other words, in essence you are saying that it might have been a regular meeting of the Security Council or it may have been requested by you.

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now at this meeting, did you refer to the Wismar occurrences, or did you refer to the tension and happenings at Wismar?

JANET JAGAN: Yes. As soon as we arrived, we immediately discussed that.

SUGRIM SINGH: Wismar was the first subject, right?

JANET JAGAN: I suggested that it was a very urgent matter and asked the Commissioner of Police if it was not necessary to send troops in the area.

SUGRIM SINGH: Yes? And what was the answer?

JANET JAGAN: The Commissioner said at the time he had things in hand, and he didn't want to make any move until Mr. Isaacs had reported his findings to him.

SUGRIM SINGH: Was there anything else discussed in relation to Wismar at that meeting between you and Colonel King and the Commissioner of Police?

JANET JAGAN: Oh yes. A number of things in relation to Wismar.

SUGRIM SINGH: Can you tell us briefly?

JANET JAGAN: Well, as far as I remember, I expressed very fully my anxiety over the situation, and I didn't see why we should have to wait on Mr. Isaacs' report, as I felt the Officer-in-Charge of Wismar Police Station should have been able to advise on the situation. I was assured that the armed Police on duty at Wismar and armed Volunteers who had embodied on Sunday and Monday were sufficient. I, however, expressed my concern that the Volunteer Force personnel taken from the area who were relatives, friends and fellow workers of the people could not be properly expected to take firm action against such persons. I felt because of the close human relationship between the Volunteers and members of the community it would prevent any firm action by the Volunteers. I expressed my fears that the Volunteers and the Police Force could not cope with the situation and I strongly urge that British troops be sent up immediately.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, did any thing else transpire in the conference in relation to Wismar, Mrs. Jagan, as far as you can remember?

JANET JAGAN: No.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now after this meeting or conference – this was about 2.00 p.m. – later in the day did you have cause to speak to the Commissioner of Police?

JANET JAGAN: I would like to say that as soon as our conference was ended I received an indirect phone call, from a woman who told me that some relative of hers had telephoned from Wismar saying that she must telephone me immediately that the situation at Wismar was absolutely desperate. I then telephoned the Commissioner of Police who had shortly returned to the office, and I told him as far as I was aware the situation was totally out of hand, and I beseeched him to send British troops immediately to the area. He then replied to me that his information was the same as mine and that he was now making arrangements to dispatch troops.

SUGRIM SINGH: Mrs. Jagan, that was precisely what time?

JANET JAGAN: Around 3.00 p.m.

SUGRIM SINGH: Are you aware that British troops were flown to the area?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

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SUGRIM SINGH: And do you know the strength of the troops?

JANET JAGAN: I am not certain about that. But the troops did not leave for some reason or the other until 4.00 to 4.30 for Wismar.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now after the dispatch of the British troops to the area did you have any conversation after that with the Commissioner of Police on the matter?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: When was that?

JANET JAGAN: I wouldn't be able to say directly, but I had a telephone conversation with the Officer-in-Charge at Wismar in connection with the despatch of the refugees and he asked me to do several tasks involving sending the persons to Georgetown and make arrangements for their accommodation and all of that.

SUGRIM SINGH: Do I understand you to feel, Mrs. Jagan, that the Officer-in-Charge of Mackenzie Police Force in normal course should have communicated to Police Headquarters when the tension began to rise?

JANET JAGAN: Oh yes. I had thorough discussions, unsatisfactory discussions, with the Commissioner on that point. I pointed out to him that he should have known exactly from moment to moment what was happening from the very Volunteers and policemen who were on the spot.

SUGRIM SINGH: Do you share the view, Mrs. Jagan, that if the security forces had complied with your request by sending British troops when you made a complaint, do you share the view that the situation might have been contained?

JANET JAGAN: I would say by that time the situation was completely out of hand.

SUGRIM SINGH: My question, Mrs. Jagan, do you believe if the security forces were reinforced with British troops at Wismar when tension started it might have averted this tragedy?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Do I understand you to say, Mrs. Jagan, that in not keeping you at the Ministry informed in accordance with the rules we have referred to before, the Police and the security forces had not done what they should have done in keeping you informed?

JANET JAGAN: No, they did not keep me properly informed.

SUGRIM SINGH: Mrs. Jagan, might it have been that at the relevant time, 25th of May and the day preceding, the Police were heavily occupied in other parts of the country? I am not aware of any outstanding happenings, but there were sporadic eruptions. Might it have been that the Police were occupied elsewhere, or the Commissioner was busy?

JANET JAGAN: No, I wouldn't say so. No matter what circumstances existed they should have arranged to contend with the situation.

SUGRIM SINGH: Would you say that the Wismar and Mackenzie Police and the Volunteer Forces stationed at the Wismar area were adequate in relation to the population of eighteen thousand there?

JANET JAGAN: No, they were not.

SUGRIM SINGH: Do you share the view, Mrs. Jagan, that since the area is within reasonable distance from the city of Georgetown and, therefore, within easy reach of Police reinforcements, that tragedy should not have occurred?

JANET JAGAN: I believe that it could have been prevented by adequate control of the situation.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, again I will ask you, Mrs. Jagan – you said this before but I wish to make my question very clear. Let us say if it was an estate on the East Coast with a population of eighteen thousand

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people and having two Police stations within easier reach of Georgetown, do you think that the situation would have been controlled?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Without referring to specific occasions, do I understand you, Mrs. Jagan, that the situation was not in the past firmly handled by the Police?

JANET JAGAN: Yes, I expressed that in my resignation.

SUGRIM SINGH: Are you aware that members of the Police Force are trained and lectured as to when they should use firearms?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: And the elementary principles of how to handle a situation of impending riot?

JANET JAGAN: Yes, I assume so.

SUGRIM SINGH: And it is within your experience as Minister of Home Affairs at the time that in certain situations in the country the Police have actually fired shots in the air?

JANET JAGAN: Yes. You are speaking of the present situation?

SUGRIM SINGH: In simple cases of looting there is a specific case in which the looter was actually shot when disobeying the Police.

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: What I am trying to get at, Mrs. Jagan – I propose to ask the Commissioner of Police who I think is more familiar with the training in this respect – is your answer to a hypothetical question. If there is murder, looting, beating, arson and raping in the presence of the Police and Volunteer Force, are they justified in shooting?

JANET JAGAN: I should like to ask, Mr. Chairman, to explain something. When I said that the situation was not dealt with from the beginning in the proper manner, I mean there were not sufficient firearms.

SUGRIM SINGH: I agree that was what you meant.

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SHEPHERD: I don't agree.

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SUGRIM SINGH: Members of the Commission, I appreciate my friend's intervention, and actually I asked on occasions in the past, but there is no harm in the witness explaining an answer given before as to what she had in mind when she made that answer with respect to the occurrence at Wismar.

JANET JAGAN: When I was speaking in terms of policemen not acting firmly, you spoke in relation to firearms.

SUGRIM SINGH: I see. You say there is a circular from the Commissioner of Police on this question setting out the orders and under what situation these constables and policemen should use firearms.

JANET JAGAN: I believe in 1963. . . .

SUGRIM SINGH: Now Mrs. Jagan, are you aware that around that time, the 25th May, the Police had in their possession tear gas or tear smoke as a device for quelling crowds and disturbances and that tear gas was used in various parts of the country whenever the occasion arose to quell disturbance or quell riotous groups? In the first instance, Mrs. Jagan, do you know whether any tear smoke was used by the Police stationed at Wismar or Christianburg on the crowds of people who went about burning and looting?

JANET JAGAN: I don't know anything about that.

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SUGRIM SINGH: But is it within your information that Police at Wismar had their complement of tear gas in stock?

JANET JAGAN: I wouldn't know.

SUGRIM SINGH: Very well, Mrs. Jagan, do you know if the Police or Volunteer Force during those disturbances fired any shots in the air or towards anybody?

JANET JAGAN: On this question I had conflicting reports of eye witnesses and the Officer-in-Charge of the Volunteer Force. I don't know which is the truth.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you get any information, Mrs. Jagan, from witnesses who were actually present – reliable witnesses – of women being raped at the riverside?

JANET JAGAN: Well, we were discussing this matter yesterday.

SUGRIM SINGH: You got that report?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now my question to you was: did you get any information of women being raped by the riverside; and do I understand your answer to say that you got information from people who actually assisted and rescued these women?

JANET JAGAN: I said that one eye witness who saw what took place on the opposite side of the river, as well as a witness who came to me; he was a man – a non-Indian – and said to me that he had rescued one of the women, and he hates to tell me, but he now regrets having done it, because since he attempted to rescue the woman he was chased out of Wismar. On this pain it is an ordinary occurrence for people to lose their household possessions and, in some cases, their entire property for rescuing victims of the disturbances.

SUGRIM SINGH: Can I help you? Is that the manager of the Singer Sewing Machine Company?

JANET JAGAN: No

SUGRIM SINGH: As a result of his intervention to rescue he suffered the same fate of having to leave the area?

JANET JAGAN: It will not be fair to say something which might seem as a means of identification, though, of course, I could mention the name to the Commission.

SUGRIM SINGH: Were you informed that a member of the crew of the Sanguenay ship that stood alongside the Wismar side actually had to fire a shot?

JANET JAGAN: No. I was told that a man from the Sanguenay ship had rescued someone.

SUGRIM SINGH: Were you informed, Mrs. Jagan, that actually a man and his wife and his sister, as a result of the violent attack, had jumped into the river swimming towards the Mackenzie side and the man and his wife were rescued by a passing boat and the attackers swam out and pulled the sister and raped her on the beach?

JANET JAGAN: No

SUGRIM SINGH: Are you aware, Mrs. Jagan, of a strike – a temporary strike – which followed at Mackenzie against one responsible official who referred to the attackers as hooligans?

JANET JAGAN: Yes, so I was told of this.

SUGRIM SINGH: Let us move on to another subject and be specific. I am trying to get at the cause of the disturbances. Let us look at the cause under two heads – the remote cause and the immediate cause. Do you share the view, Mrs. Jagan, that the happenings in other parts of the country from the beginning of the year resulting in killing both Indians and Africans did raise hatred to the highest point around the time of the strike? Mrs. Jagan, will you share the view that so deep was this race hatred and in such

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magnitude that Indians and Africans in large numbers moved out from certain areas with all their belongings and squatted in other areas where they felt they were safer?

JANET JAGAN: We have seen this.

SUGRIM SINGH: Do you agree with me that from observing this phenomenon the principle of moving was that where there were more Africans and less Indians the Indians moved out, and where there were more Indians and less Africans the Africans moved out.

JANET JAGAN: In the areas where it took place this was the pattern.

SUGRIM SINGH: And do you share the view that it was not as a result of panic but actually burning and beating of their respective groups in those areas that caused them to remove?

JANET JAGAN: From my own experience there were some areas where some people were hearing and not seeing. They panicked just from what they heard and not actually from what they have seen taking place.

SUGRIM SINGH: You know of some cases when they removed because of panic?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now do you agree that the incident of Friday 22nd of May when two people were killed at Buxton – Mr. and Mrs. Sealey – in any way directly or indirectly influenced the Wismar tragedy?

JANET JAGAN: From the time I received that information it appeared that those events had some bearing on what took place at Wismar.

SUGRIM SINGH: Mrs. Jagan, would you agree with me that by and large there is, to put it in legal terms, there is a presumption which is rebuttable that almost all East Indians in this country are members of the P.P.P. Perhaps I put it too high – let me make myself clear. Do you agree with me Indians are generally members of the P.P.P. with a few exceptions?

JANET JAGAN: That is the general impression.

SUGRIM SINGH: In the same way, Mrs. Jagan, do you agree with me that by and large all Africans in this country with a few exceptions again are looked upon as members of the P.N.C.?

JANET JAGAN: That is an impression, not a reality.

SUGRIM SINGH: In other words, whatever the cause, the situation today is that there is a sharp division on the basis of race among the two political parties, the P.P.P. and the P.N.C. Do you agree with that, Mrs. Jagan?

JANET JAGAN: That's the impression everybody seems to have.

SUGRIM SINGH: Are you aware of any political party holding any meetings immediately preceding or on the day of this tragedy?

JANET JAGAN: I haven't had any reports of any meetings.

SUGRIM SINGH: Are you aware, Mrs. Jagan, of any group or groups having gone to the area inciting any section of the population there to violence?

JANET JAGAN: I got this information.

SUGRIM SINGH: Again, you got this information. You don't know it of your own knowledge?

JANET JAGAN: No.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, can you tell us of the groups inciting?

JANET JAGAN: I am aware of the representative of that area going to the district. My information is that he spoke to persons in groups.

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SHEPHERD: Is this line of evidence relevant?

CHAIRMAN: It is very much in line with terms of reference to ascertain the causes of the disturbances.

JANET JAGAN: What I wish to say is that as Minister of Home Affairs I had three reports of movements of the same persons last year which led to disturbances in the area.

SUGRIM SINGH: I am talking about the 25th May or a week or so before. Do you have any information that this representative did anything to create a situation?

JANET JAGAN: No. What I just said was in relation to a time prior to this disturbance.

SUGRIM SINGH: I did ask you to refrain from previous happenings. Let us confine ourselves to the present. You said you have information that immediately before the 25th of May that this representative did what?

JANET JAGAN: He talked to persons in groups in a manner which would cause hatred.

SUGRIM SINGH: Let us leave it there. Now did you have any information, Mrs. Jagan, that an outside group or outsiders who don't belong to Mackenzie went up there and made their contribution in inciting the indigenous population there to violence?

JANET JAGAN: Yes. I raised this matter of having been notified that Banga Mary had in fact gone and was found in the area and had not been arrested.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, Mrs. Jagan, do you agree with this statement in the press made by the Chairman of the local authority at Wismar, published on the 29th May, 1964, four days afterwards. This is what he says. The Chairman, meaning Mr. Festus Adams, the Chairman said that he had witnessed some of the incidents which occurred during the three days of trouble and had come to the conclusion that everything was done by strangers. Quote in his own words, "I saw some of the fellows myself on Monday and I have never seen them before in my life." Do you agree with this statement from the Chairman?

JANET JAGAN: I would not be able to say anything on this point.

SUGRIM SINGH: Let us move on to the immediate cause of the outbreak of violence. Did you hear, Mrs. Jagan, that the rumour went around on the morning of the 25th that an Indian man kicked an African boy?

JANET JAGAN: No. I did not hear about that.

SUGRIM SINGH: Were you told of any actual happenings in the Wismar district at the relevant date, the 25th May, or immediately preceding which touched off this outbreak? Have you heard of any immediate happening?

JANET JAGAN: No. I may say that my opinion finally was that I don't believe anything was said on that Monday to touch off the disturbances.

CHAIRMAN: In view of the fact that opinions are not wanted I propose to stop the line of examination at this stage.

SUGRIM SINGH: I appreciate your intervention, sir. We have witnesses who would testify as to the causes and, in view of this fact, I propose to stop at this stage and ask the Commissioners leave to call Mrs. Jagan again.

SHEPHERD: Mrs. Jagan, were you one time a student of economics? You are aware of economic principles?

JANET JAGAN: I have never claimed to be an economist.

Transcripts – Day 2

SHEPHERD: You, however, understand economics. In running your home and as a housewife you will have to know the elementary principles of economics. You cannot spend more than you earn. Do you agree with me?

JANET JAGAN: Practically, yes.

SHEPHERD: British Guiana has been for many years a very poor country economically. In spite of these efforts, British Guiana has not been able to have a Police Force as large as or powerful as it would have wished.

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

SHEPHERD: Did you receive a minute on the 23rd May, Mrs. Jagan?

JANET JAGAN: Yes.

—

SHEPHERD: These are instructions you see. I can't say what I really don't know.

CHAIRMAN: Was it sent by hand or post?

—

SHEPHERD: You see a Minister of Home Affairs has responsibility. Now, Mrs. Jagan, won't you agree that it was an extraordinary shrewd action on the 23rd and 24th?

JANET JAGAN: I had no powers to take actions on what I did not know. I know at 2 o'clock I asked that the British troops be sent to Wismar.

SHEPHERD: Was that two days later?

JANET JAGAN: If I may say, yes. You must remember that the Commissioner of Police said that it was necessary at the time when I suggested at the beginning of the disturbances.

SHEPHERD: After the British troops arrived at 6.00 p.m. that evening, violence started to subside. Can you give me any information on the "Sun Chapman" disaster?

—

SUGRIM SINGH: Members of, the Commission, according to my records, Mrs. Jagan gave evidence before you that she resigned on the 1st June. This occurrence in the "Sun Chapman" incident took place on the 7th July. I would suggest that the opinion ventured on the "Sun Chapman" incident is as a citizen and not as being made in the capacity Minister of Home Affairs.

—

SHEPHERD: As citizen. Would you tell us what you know of the disaster of the "Sun Chapman"?

JANET JAGAN: I know what was reported in the newspaper and that it was a terrible explosion resulting in the number of persons being destitute and shortly after there were incidents which took place at Mackenzie and Wismar.

SHEPHERD: What was the nationality of those who were principally damaged and injured in the "Sun Chapman" incident? Now can you tell the Commissioners if you have the information? Can you give the information of the disaster of the "Sun Chapman"?

—

SUGRIM SINGH: Member of the Commission, I will object to any such question because an answer from the witness placed before this Commission will be incriminating.

SHEPHERD: The answer will be incriminating, maybe. I don't see why my friend should worry about being incriminating.

SUGRIM SINGH: In a sense this matter is *sub judice*. People lost their lives and, for the sake of argument, if Mrs. Jagan says that John Jones blew it up, she will be incriminating herself.

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SHEPHERD: Now, Mrs. Jagan, this is an entirely new matter. As Minister I'd better ask you as to the best of your information of the Police, were a large number of East Indians saved by the Police?

JANET JAGAN: At the Police Compound.

SHEPHERD: I think you will agree, don't you, with that the protection they gave was in every way adequate and sufficient in the circumstances to the large number of East Indians who were in the Compound.

JANET JAGAN: I am not sure because they were removed shortly.

SHEPHERD: And you will agree that the refugees went willingly to the Police station Compound for protection.

JANET JAGAN: I won't be able to comment on this.

SHEPHERD: I do not hold any brief for any of the political parties but I do hold brief for the security forces.

SUGRIM SINGH: Members of the Commission, I don't wish to interrupt my friend. I apologise, and I hope I don't disturb his train of mind in the proceedings, but I wish to make it clear that after objection was taken to this resignation speech by Mrs. Jagan, particularly the paragraphs in which she categorically and specifically states that people were murdered, and that there was any reason, and so on, we hope we shall refrain from making those statements until the actual people who witnessed and experienced these happenings are called later to confirm reports about what actually they witnessed, and Mrs. Jagan would be recalled.

SHEPHERD: Gentlemen, I haven't referred to the methods in her resignation speech to which I took objection yesterday. What I referred to is her opinion as Minister. Now Mrs. Jagan, did you receive any direct or indirect telephone reports of the disasters or the personal calamities? Can you explain what you mean by indirect telephone reports?

JANET JAGAN: Oh. I received a telephone call from Wismar.

SHEPHERD: Oh. From someone who wasn't officially charged to inform you.

JANET JAGAN: No. The first call was from a minister of religion; second from a relative of a person who was being attacked. I did not receive any direct phone call from Wismar.

SHEPHERD: It wasn't an official call?

JANET JAGAN: No.

SHEPHERD: Now, in the light of what happened were you wrong to have been influenced by these indirect calls from people? You have probably unreliable sources of information.

JANET JAGAN: Well, the first call was from a very reliable source in the community. For that person's protection I would call a name.

SHEPHERD: Mrs. Jagan, people who give information don't usually want to take it back. Mrs. Jagan, I am quite prepared to tell the Commission in confidence and I am quite certain that the Commission on hearing such information would agree with me completely. No doubt it would be written down on a piece of paper and handed up by you, but as Minister, Mrs. Jagan, in the light of this don't you agree that it would have been better to the confirmed reports from the Police rather than be guided by individual calls? Wouldn't it have been wiser to wait?

JANET JAGAN: Just a minute

Transcripts – Day 2

CARTER: Mrs Jagan, you said you were told of the strike at Mackenzie which resulted from the Demba employees referring to persons as hooligans and cannibals.

JANET JAGAN: Well, I wouldn't say what the word was. I really can't.

CARTER: Do you know on what day this happened?

JANET JAGAN: No.

CARTER: Do you know what section of the plant went on strike?

JANET JAGAN: I was told it was one of the workshops.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, Mrs. Jagan, just one question on re-examination. May I perhaps jog your memory because this has been our instruction It is a well known fact in the area that a responsible employee of the Demerara Bauxite Company who referred to the behaviour of the attackers at Wismar had referred to the attackers as hooligans or cannibals, one of the words I believe, which touched off a temporary strike at Demba immediately after the Wismar disturbances.

JANET JAGAN: I am not aware of that.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, Mrs Jagan, we will call you again at a later stage.

CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, for the benefit of the press, we have agreed to exclude the evidence of the Sun Chapman disaster. It does not fall within our terms of reference. It is now engaging the attention of the coroner.

SUGRIM SINGH: Commissioners, I appreciate the reminder from the Chairman on this very important point, and I shall refrain from now on to make any reference to the Sun Chapman incident.

CARTER: You can make reference generally but not specifically.

SUGRIM SINGH: Much obliged.

MR. EDWARD BISSOON is sworn in and he states as follows:

SUGRIM SINGH: Your name is Edward Bissoon?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: You now live where?

BISSOON: Bush Lot, West Coast Berbice.

SUGRIM SINGH: You have a wife and children?

BISSOON: A wife and six children.

SUGRIM SINGH: You used to live at Wismar up to the 25th this year?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: And you were employed as an operator at the Demerara Bauxite Company?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: And along with that employment you had a general store which was run by your wife and two other employees?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

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SUGRIM SINGH: And this general store was situated where?

BISSOON: Lot 18, Silvertown.

SUGRIM SINGH: That would be on the southern side of the market?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now these business premises of yours were housed in the lower flat of a two-flat concrete building?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: And you and your wife and children resided in the upper flat?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: And this property was destroyed by fire?

BISSOON: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Was it on the 25th of May?

BISSOON: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Your property was destroyed by fire and you lost all your stock, furniture and everything?

BISSOON: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: And you were evacuated to Georgetown on the morning or midday of Tuesday the 26th of May?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: What time?

BISSOON: On the first trip of the "Barima". The Tuesday morning.

SUGRIM SINGH: There were two boats, the "Barima" and the "R.H. Carr" later on. Briefly, Mr. Bissoon, what do you estimate the value of your loss, including the building and the stock?

BISSOON: Around forty thousand dollars.

SUGRIM SINGH: You have lived at Wismar for how many years?

BISSOON: Seventeen years.

SUGRIM SINGH: And you have developed your fortune to that extent?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, when you were evacuated did you get anything to bring away from Wismar?

BISSOON: Nothing at all.

SUGRIM SINGH: Was your premises insured?

BISSOON: Yes sir. I had only four thousand dollars on premises and eight thousand dollars in stocks.

SUGRIM SINGH: Was that ordinary fire insurance or insurance for civic commotion or riot?

BISSOON: Ordinary fire insurance.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you get any money from the insurance company?

BISSOON: No sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: On your insurance – is that because you are not insured for riot?

Transcripts – Day 2

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: And you are now seeking shelter where?

BISSOON: In Bush Lot, West Coast Berbice.

SUGRIM SINGH: Doing what for a living?

BISSOON: I am not working with anybody. I am just doing a little peddling.

SUGRIM SINGH: And I take it, Mr Bissoon, that in connection with your business you have incurred a considerable amount of debt in Georgetown stores which supplied you with your goods.

BISSOON: Yes sir. Plenty.

SUGRIM SINGH: Roughly how much?

BISSOON: Around nine thousand dollars.

SUGRIM SINGH: Can you remember your creditors?

BISSOON: William Fogarty, A. Majeed and Sons, S.M. Singh and Sons, Beepat, Jaigobin and Sons.

SUGRIM SINGH: Among these different suppliers of stocks, you have a total of around nine thousand dollars in debt. So Mr Bissoon, you are penniless with nine thousand dollars owing? Right?

BISSOON: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: And the land on which those business premises were, have you any transport or your legal title to the land?

BISSOON: No. Government leased land.

SUGRIM SINGH: For which you pay roughly?

BISSOON: Thirty-six dollars a year.

SUGRIM SINGH: Have you since gone back to Wismar?

BISSOON: Last month, sir. I went back to court.

SUGRIM SINGH: How distressing it might have been with you. Did you visit your premises that were destroyed?

BISSOON: Yes sir. I went there I asked the Police to take me to see my place.

SUGRIM SINGH: Under Police protection you went to see your place. And you saw your place?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: What was its condition?

BISSOON: Everything burnt flat. I saw everything burnt – bed, sewing machine. Everything burnt to the ground.

SUGRIM SINGH: Alright now, let us move down to the disturbances. Now, when first did it dawn you that something was coming up in the nature of violence?

BISSOON: Well, when the shooting took place at Buxton.

SUGRIM SINGH: Was that on the Friday, the 22nd May, when a husband and wife – two people – were shot?

BISSOON: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: What happened at Wismar at that time?

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BISSOON: Well, there was a rumour going around that Indians shooting Negroes and they were going to take revenge there.

SUGRIM SINGH: That was the Friday.

BISSOON: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Let's move on to the Saturday. As a matter of fact, any acts of violence happened on the Friday that you know about?

BISSOON: Friday night a home in Silvertown was bombed.

SUGRIM SINGH: Yes, anything else.

BISSOON: Yes. On Friday night the house was bombed and people got injured.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, let's move on to Saturday. Can you remember anything that happened on Saturday?

BISSOON: On Saturday, wild rumours were going around that had thing will happen.

SUGRIM SINGH: Was there any burning or beating on Saturday that you know of?

BISSOON: There was some burning up the hill tops. I saw the fires.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now let us come to Monday morning, 25th. What happened on the morning?

BISSOON: I woke up and opened my business and started to sell and we saw people running on the street.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now you are employed at Bauxite Company, but on that day, the 25th May, were you on the day shift or the night shift?

BISSOON: I was on the 11.00 p.m. to 7.00 a.m. shift.

SUGRIM SINGH: So you were home on the morning?

BISSOON: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, you opened your business up to what o'clock?

BISSOON: Around 8.00 a.m.

SUGRIM SINGH: And then around 8.00 a.m. what happened?

BISSOON: Negroes running and looting in the market and beating the Indians on the road.

SUGRIM SINGH: Neighbours ran into the store and told you to close up.

BISSOON: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: As a result of that information did you close your store?

BISSOON: Right away.

SUGRIM SINGH: And where did your wife and children go?

BISSOON: I sent them right away upstairs to go into the middle room in the upper flat.

SUGRIM SINGH: Well then after that what happened?

BISSOON: I was outside watching out to see what would take place.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did anything take place.

BISSOON: Yes sir. A large crowd coming from the market side coming my way to Silvertown area.

SUGRIM SINGH: That is, they were travelling from Silver City market side to Silvertown.

BISSOON: Yes sir.

Transcripts – Day 2

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, can you come down here and look at the map and imagine as is you are facing Georgetown. Wismar would be on that side. Can you show on this map which is Silvertown? [*Silvertown is identified.*] Alright, get back on the witness box. Sirs, I wish to tender this map as “Exhibit C” in the proceedings. When you saw this crowd coming towards your side, what happened next?

BISSOON: They came right in front of my place and shouted, “Edward Bissoon, we come to take this place.”

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, this crowd Mr. Bissoon, was approximately about how many persons?

BISSOON: About eighty persons.

SUGRIM SINGH: Not a hundred?

BISSOON: Could be, because they were plenty.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now when they said “Edward Bissoon, we come to take your place”, what happened next?

BISSOON: Well, I got afraid and I stood up to see what will take place. Then a man who was in front turned back and pointed right away into the business.

SUGRIM SINGH: Just a minute. Like a traffic inspector he turned and gave the signal that way? That’s to your building, right?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: And in obedience to this improvised traffic inspector, what happened?

BISSOON: They were armed with sticks, stones bottles, and wood.

SUGRIM SINGH: Yes. And when this signal was given, what happened?

BISSOON: They started to pelt down the windows upstairs, with stones, bottles, and sticks,

SUGRIM SINGH: Were the windows destroyed?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, just at this point while they were destroying your premises, did you see anybody pass?

BISSOON: Yes, people were passing.

SUGRIM SINGH: Apart from people, did you see any Police pass?

BISSOON: No Police at that time.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did the Police come up later?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: About how long after?

BISSOON: About four to five minutes after.

SUGRIM SINGH: While the crowd was there?

BISSOON: Yes, the crowd was there.

SUGRIM SINGH: The crowd was still there pelting?

BISSOON: When the Police came the crowd dispersed. They came with a jeep. I saw a Police jeep taking Mr. Hobbs, the Superintendent in charge, and Sergeant Chalmers, and two other policemen.

SUGRIM SINGH: About how many in all?

BISSOON: About six.

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SUGRIM SINGH: Did the Police come into your premises?

BISSOON: I saw the jeep coming and I ran downstairs to meet them. They said "Good morning, Mr. Bissoon," and I said "Good morning." I said "Look what happened to our house," and they said, "Let's go upstairs and see what happened." And they went right away upstairs and saw the bottles and stones.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you ask Superintendent Hobbs anything?

BISSOON: He said he can't do it now because his hands are tied there are fires all around.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did he say anything else to you? Did he suggest to you to remove to the Police station?

BISSOON: No, not at that time.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did he later suggest to you to go there? Did you see any policemen for the balance of the day on the road?

BISSOON: Yes sir. One policeman was left in front of my shop patrolling.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did the crowd return to your store while the policeman was there patrolling?

BISSOON: No sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now while you were at your building, did you see any fires around?

BISSOON: Yes sir. There were many fires all on the hills and in Silvertown.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now let us leave fires. Did you see any beating of Indians by Negroes?

BISSOON: Later on.

SUGRIM SINGH: When was that? What o'clock?

BISSOON: Around 12.00 to 1.00 or 2.00.

SUGRIM SINGH: Opposite your place.

BISSOON: Yes sir. While people were on their way getting away from their homes to go to the station, passing my shop, Negroes beating the Indians.

SUGRIM SINGH: Apart from beating, did you see anything else?

BISSOON: I saw they were taking away their jewels and money they had.

SUGRIM SINGH: This is of your own knowledge, not what you heard?

BISSOON: I am talking about what I saw.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you see any raping?

BISSOON: No sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you see anyone murdered?

BISSOON: No sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you see anyone setting fire to anybody's house near to you?

BISSOON: Well, I saw while hiding in my house, men went in to the hotel, which is at the back of me, and started to break up and then I saw fire starting to blaze.

SUGRIM SINGH: That was whose hotel?

BISSOON: Mr. Hackim Khan.

SUGRIM SINGH: You saw Hackim's hotel and Samseer's shop at the back of you go up into flames after these crowds entered in the premises?

Transcripts – Day 2

BISSOON: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, after you saw Samseer's shop and Hackim's hotel burning, did you leave your premises? Rather, at this point, did you still have your wife and children in the upper flat?

BISSOON: No. I have three children who are attending Mackenzie High School. I sent across a message and brought them across, and then I spoke to the Police on the road keeping guard. I asked him what would be our situation here today. He said he is advising me to take my wife and children across to Mackenzie.

SUGRIM SINGH: And you did so?

BISSOON: I did so because they would have come in for injuries.

SUGRIM SINGH: But you were left on the Wismar side?

BISSOON: Yes.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, let us move on after. After seeing Hackim's hotel on fire did you leave your premises and go anywhere?

BISSOON: Not yet.

SUGRIM SINGH: When did you leave it?

BISSOON: In fact they came over from Hackim and started to break my back door.

SUGRIM SINGH: How many people were there?

BISSOON: Three persons were there who I know by names and faces.

SUGRIM SINGH: Can you name those persons?

BISSOON: First one was Clifford John, Leslie Cort, and Boogie, the collector of the Sun Chapman launch.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, what did these three do to your back door?

BISSOON: They tried to open the door. The door did not open and they took a rail and started to punch the concrete block and made a big hole and then went in the lower flat and opened the door. They then started to loot. A crowd of persons went in and started to loot.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did Boogie and two other men assist in the looting?

BISSOON: They were the first set that started to loot.

SUGRIM SINGH: After looting, what did they do?

BISSOON: The Police and the Volunteers were standing in front of my house.

SUGRIM SINGH: The Police and the Volunteers were standing in front of your building while people were looting at the back of your premises?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you speak to them?

BISSOON: No. I was hiding because the crowd was very big.

SUGRIM SINGH: Where were you hiding?

BISSOON: In De Franca's house.

SUGRIM SINGH: While this looting was going on the Police were on the road? Did you see the Police go anywhere?

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BISSOON: No sir. Suddenly I saw two policemen running with revolvers – Police Detective Griffith and Roberts. They fired some shots in the air. Detective Griffith said, “Get out from here and leave everything.”

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, did the crowd remove?

BISSOON: Those who were looting at the back got away, but the crowd was still plenty in front of the building.

SUGRIM SINGH: Were they looting in front?

BISSOON: No. They were watching on.

SUGRIM SINGH: Yes. What happened next?

BISSOON: And then I came out and met the Police and they advised me to go to the station, because they cannot be in there all the time to watch me. And I asked them if they can't take me to the station; and I asked them for protection. They said that they can't protect me because they have to save lives.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, at that time, did you see another policeman come up with a rifle and say anything?

BISSOON: Yes sir. The policeman said they should have shot these people long ago.

SUGRIM SINGH: He was speaking to the two detectives, Griffith and Roberts, who were there?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

—
CARTER: Just a slight clarification. Do I understand those people to be the looters or the Indians?

BISSOON: The people that were looting.

—
SUGRIM SINGH: Well, after this fair policeman, who came in with the rifle and said this to the two detectives, did the detectives say anything?

BISSOON: Nothing at all.

SUGRIM SINGH: Nothing at all?

BISSOON: The Police took Mr. De Franca and his wife and carried them to the ferry boat, and they went across to the plant.

SUGRIM SINGH: Yes?

BISSOON: And myself, Detective Roberts and Detective Griffith stood up in my yard, and he said that I must go to the station or go over to Mackenzie quickly.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you go?

BISSOON: No. I said I would rather go to the station. I said I am not going alone because I am afraid to walk on the road – because there were big crowds standing on the road.

SUGRIM SINGH: Then, did they escort you?

BISSOON: Yes, and they left me at the station.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did anything happen at the station?

BISSOON: Yes sir. We were afraid to stand up there at the station.

SUGRIM SINGH: Why?

BISSOON: Because the crowd was so big at the station.

SUGRIM SINGH: Are you saying that the Negroes surrounded the station?

Transcripts – Day 2

BISSOON: They were moving and some were coming and some were going and some were passing at the back.

SUGRIM SINGH: About how many people?

BISSOON: Around forty to fifty.

SUGRIM SINGH: At what part of the station you were standing? At the top, bottom, or where?

BISSOON: At the bottom in the yard.

SUGRIM SINGH: When you arrived there, can you say how many East Indians were there?

BISSOON: About 400 East Indians,

SUGRIM SINGH: While you were at the station, 400 of you, did you know that an attempt was made even to bomb you all at the station, or interfere with you all at the station?

BISSOON: I didn't see any person, but I heard "Look out! Look out!" and everybody bawled.

SUGRIM SINGH: Stop there. First you heard noise, "Look out! Look out!" while you were at the station and everybody bawled. Now is it true at that time when they said "Look out! Look out!" someone fired a shot.

BISSOON: Yes sir. An officer of the Volunteer Force who was working at the Singer Company.

SUGRIM SINGH: Where was he?

BISSOON: He was at the Police compound. The station was guarded right away round.

SUGRIM SINGH: How many shots he fired?

BISSOON: One load.

SUGRIM SINGH: After this officer fired one load did you see in what direction he fired this load?

BISSOON: He fired the load towards the northern side of the Police station.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you see persons or a crowd on the northern side of the Police station in the direction of the school?

BISSOON: Yes. Plenty people moving in that direction.

SUGRIM SINGH: Did you gather from the crowd there afterwards that this shot was fired either from the Volunteers or the Police or for that matter from any source while you were standing there? Did you gather that an attempt was being made to throw a bomb at the station while you all were there?

BISSOON: This was the same time they were trying to bomb us at the station.

SUGRIM SINGH: You know what happened to that Volunteer who fired that shot?

BISSOON: The Volunteer has since left and is working in Georgetown.

SUGRIM SINGH: I am not talking about now Mr. Bissoon. I am talking about the very day as soon as the shot was fired. Did the crowd do the Volunteer anything?

BISSOON: I heard the crowd say that he would have to leave the district.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, the chairman of your group, Mr. Festus Adams, made a statement in the newspaper four days afterwards. He said: "Those burnings, beatings, and rape, have been caused by strangers. I have come to the conclusions that everything was done by strangers. I saw some of the fellows myself on Monday and I have never seen them before in my life."

SHEPHERD: I suppose Mr. Festus Adams would be called to say in his own words.

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SUGRIM SINGH: Oh yes, Mr. Festus Adams would be called – must be called. Do you agree with Mr. Festus Adam's view?

BISSOON: No sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: Was anything done by outsiders?

BISSOON: No sir. They had outsiders, but the majority was from Mackenzie.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, did you observe anything while you were going to the station on the 25th? Some well known criminals in the crowd?

BISSOON: They had few of them I know.

SUGRIM SINGH: Were they taking part in the disturbances?

BISSOON: I know two of them who were stoning down my house.

SUGRIM SINGH: Those two were?

BISSOON: I don't know their names, but I saw them at Wismar.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, tell me, you tried to seek shelter at your neighbour's residence at any stage during the Monday 25th?

BISSOON: When my family left I was alone at home, and after the crowd came back I had to run to my neighbour, De Franca.

SUGRIM SINGH: Were they Portuguese?

BISSOON: His wife is East Indian.

SUGRIM SINGH: They didn't put you out.

BISSOON: No sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, tell me Mr. Bissoon, while you were at your home, on the road or at the Police station, did you see people with cans moving up and down Wismar – cans in which you are used to see gasoline or kerosene stored?

BISSOON: No sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, did you hear a rumour at Wismar on the morning of the 25th, Monday, that an East Indian man – a big man – kicked an African boy?

BISSOON: I heard the story after I was in the boat while I was coming to Georgetown. I heard the story occurred in a boat because they were beating the man.

SUGRIM SINGH: Were there many people with injuries and actually bleeding at the Demba Trade School?

BISSOON: No. The persons injured went to the hospital.

SUGRIM SINGH: Well, you stayed at the Demba Trade School for the night until next morning. You left for Georgetown by the "Barima"?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: And since then, you only went back to the place a month ago?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

Transcripts – Day 2

CARTER: Just one question, when you were at the Trade School, did the Company supply you with refreshments?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

MOOTOO: So at that time when Mr Hackim's house was burning, about eight Volunteers were there? Did they try to save the building?

BISSOON: No.

DRAYTON: Just one thing, Mr. Bissoon, your insurance on your property. You said it is insured for how much?

BISSOON: The building carried \$4,000, the stock carried \$8,000.

DRAYTON: Your estimated loss is \$40,000. Why you didn't take out more insurance?

BISSOON: Sir, we didn't expect trouble to happen. We just took that to stand by in case anything should happen to us. Because it is hard to keep up.

DRAYTON: Were you there in 1963?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

DRAYTON: They didn't trouble your business?

BISSOON: We had a slight trouble because they did break some of my windows and the next morning they said that they don't know how this happened and promised that it wouldn't happen again.

MACDONALD: Now, Mr. Bissoon, you at one time said that they were looting at you back door. Were you at your neighbour's residence? And you could have seen the crowd looting at the back and the security forces in front. Would it have been possible for one standing in front to see at the back?

BISSOON: No sir.

CHAIRMAN: Now, Mr Bissoon, did you do anything? There were policemen in front of your building.

BISSOON: No sir. The place was so hot that I couldn't come out. There were crowds all around.

CHAIRMAN: But at the time of looting, the policemen were there.

BISSOON: Police were not there all the time, and if I had reported, when the police left the crowd would have attacked me.

SUGRIM SINGH: Prior to the 25th May, do you know of a businessman whose premises had, been looted, and he fired a shot injuring three persons?

BISSOON: Yes sir. That is just near to me.

SUGRIM SINGH: What is the name?

BISSOON: Mr. Sewnarine.

SUGRIM SINGH: And the looting stopped. There were no deaths, but the looting stopped. But there were injuries in the faces of the looters?

BISSOON: Face and back.

SUGRIM SINGH: Now, Mr. Bissoon, can you remember in relation to May 25th, the day when this happened, how far back this shooting happened?

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BISSOON: That is last year during the 80 days' strike.

SUGRIM SINGH: Was Sewnarine burnt out this time?

BISSOON: He sold out because he cannot stay there.

SUGRIM SINGH: As a result of that shooting he had to sell out and vacate Wismar?

BISSOON: Yes sir.

SUGRIM SINGH: That is all, Mr. Bissoon. At this stage, Members of the Commission, I wish to ask for an adjournment.

[*Session adjourned*]

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