

Tuesday, 18. November 2003

About 200 marchers I guess. We proceed about 50 metres when riot police attack with batons ... I am whacked four or five times with a baton across my back and thighs ... we are loaded into a Landrover Defender, joining our detained colleagues (Civic leaders).

1.30 pm Central Police Station Harare

At Central we are made to sit down in the courtyard with many comrades including those leaders of the ZCTU (Gewerkschaften) who had been grabbed earlier. We are 45 men and 7 women. ... We demand to know what we are being charged with. "POSA" we are told. "That is not a charge", we counter, but are ignored. Names, ID numbers and addresses are written down ... eventually we are led off to the cells.

1.00 am Wednesday

... Each cell is about 5 × 2.5 metres with 3 cement bunks a toilet in the corner with no flush but a tap that splashes to one side and spills onto the floor if it is turned up too high. We are counted regularly. We must stand up against the wall, no sitting down ... we are determined not to use the toilets ... the stench is overpowering ...

The women ... have been reduced to two articles of clothing each, ... they are kept in a cell together with ... assorted shoplifters, fraudsters, common criminals. The night passes slowly - my soft, middle-class body is not used to the hard cement floor ... I become aware of parts of my anatomy I had forgotten about!

The day passes slowly. We talk. We eat. I do the crossword ... We sing. We dance. The more energetic play 3-a-side soccer using water bottles for goal posts and plastic bags compressed into a ball. The ref's whistling can be heard on the street we later learn. Time passes slowly ... we know our colleagues will be spreading the news around the world.

Thursday arrives

... The police attempt to write "profiles" detailing our personal histories, political affiliations etc. We are apprehensive. We know we have to appear before a magistrate within 48 hours, but the deadline passes ... (Eventually we are led down to the Property Office where we sign for our phones and money.) Are we to be released or charged? ... and then we are conveyed to the magistrates' court.

3.30 pm Thursday Magistrates' Court

... Our lawyers debate upstairs with the prosecution. The State cannot decide the charges. 51 hours after our arrest, the four leaders are charged under POSA. (After some haggling they are bailed out at Zim-\$ 20 000.) We learn that we are to be charged under the same offence. (Free bail the magistrate says and we erupt in cheers. The police are glum, the magistrate smiles discreetly ...) We have achieved the original destination of Tuesday's march but we don't stop to confront the police since we all want to get back to our families.

11.00 am Friday

Back to the courts ... eventually we are before the magistrates. The prosecutor rises. The State withdraws all charges for, "lack of evidence" and we are free!