

THE BIKO INQUEST

The presiding magistrate in the Steve Biko inquest may have found that “no act or omission involving an offence by any person” was responsible for the death of Steve Biko. All we know is that he was a healthy man when he went into the hands of the Security Police and he was dead when he came out of them.

“We don’t work under statutes” – thus Colonel P. Goosen, head of the Port Elizabeth Security Police, under cross-examination, when asked in terms of which statute he had the right to keep Mr Biko in chains in detention. His reply suggests the answer to the question we posed in REALITY two months ago, “Who is now the boss, the Minister or the security apparatus he has created?” If the Minister does nothing this time it would seem that it is the apparatus and that its members now feel free to do as they please. Either the Minister no longer knows what they do, or he does know and doesn’t care, or he does care but has neither the will nor the authority to stop them.

Whatever the answer, the Biko inquest has served notice on those who didn’t know it before that our security laws have created a monster and let it loose amongst us. For no

words can describe adequately the conditions under which the Security Police themselves admitted that Steve Biko was held for interrogation – nauseating, revolting, depraved, none of them is bad enough. Those conditions present a picture of utter degradation, not of the detainee but of his interrogators. How many other people are lying naked and chained in our interrogation chambers at this very moment? How many other Security Policemen, apart from those who testified in the Biko Inquest, have come to regard it as right and proper that the people they detain for questioning should be treated in this way? How many steps is it from that state of mind to the ultimate dehumanisation enjoyed by Hitler’s custodians of the gas-chambers? Surely not many. How far is the move from where it seems right and proper to keep the people who won’t fit into one’s scheme of things naked and chained, to the point where it seems right and proper to eliminate them altogether?

And to what end is all this? It is, our rulers tell us, to preserve a “Christian” way of life here. Who, having read the Biko inquest evidence, can now doubt the blasphemy of that claim? □

DURBAN: DECEMBER

by Vortex

As I drive through the city
on a sultry summer’s night,
I look up at the street decorations
erected for Christmas –
an illuminated Santa Claus,
Christmas trees and flickering lights,
a dazzling ball, a fragile bell,
stars and angels, and much more –
and I think of Steven Biko,
in his lonely prison cell,
dark and smashed upon the floor.