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## 1. Hunger Strike

The old anti-detention cry of "Charge or Release" has been given dramatic new impact these past months by the detainees' hunger strike.

As Gandhi demonstrated, the hunger strike is the most potent weapon in the non-violent armoury. The only person it can hurt is the striker. The courage and endurance it requires become obvious even to the striker's opponents. It makes people not previously interested in the issues involved begin to think about them. It gathers increasing publicity as it proceeds. And it places those against whose actions it is directed in a most uncomfortable dilemma. For them, there are only two possible responses.

They can let the strikers die, as Mrs Thatcher did in Northern Ireland and, as one suspects, some of our previous rulers would have done here; or they can make some concession to the strikers' demands.

Mr Vlok, the Minister of Justice, has chosen the second

course, however grudgingly, and we must be grateful for that. This is partly because the Nationalists are not quite the same as they used to be, and partly because the world around them has changed. They are anxious to improve their international image. Their conduct over Namibia has made that possible. They cannot afford to lose that gain by letting detainees starve themselves to death.

So Mr Vlok has charged some detainees and released a considerable number of others. They have not, however, all been released to lead a normal life again. The most active have had severe restrictions placed upon them.

The hunger strike may have brought to an end the era of prolonged detentions without trial, which would be a major victory, but it may have ushered in a new one of massive bannings of individuals, reminiscent of the 1960s and 1970s. □