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EDITORIALS

1

RICHARD TURNER

The assassination of Dr Rick Turner, following closely as it did on the death of Mr Steve Biko while in the custody of the Security Police, has come as a heavy blow to all South Africans who cherish the ideals of truth, justice, and liberty. The memorial service in Durban, primarily one of celebration, though also one of mourning, was attended by a thousand people of every kind and condition, many of them young.

Rick Turner had been isolated from public life for nearly five years, but it was manifest that he was remembered with an intensity of admiration and devotion that is given to few to inspire. REALITY joins in these tributes, to the honesty and clarity of his mind and the courage and strength of his spirit.

These two deaths raise profoundly disturbing doubts in the minds of those South Africans who have a concept of justice that is not to be identified with the security of the State but has much more to do with the security of the individual, and the right to protection from violence to his life and person.

Dr Turner's death raises certain fundamental questions to which no confident answers can be given. Is any person who is known to reject racial discrimination, racial privilege, and compulsory racial separation, given this protection in the same measure as any other person? Has South Africa reached such a stage that a violent crime against the militant and articulate opponent of Apartheid is more likely to go unsolved than other kinds of violent crime?

The fact that persons responsible for violent attacks on militant opponents of Government policy are seldom brought to trial gives rise to the fear amongst certain people that they themselves may figure on a list of persons who may be assassinated with a measure of immunity.

If these fears and suspicions are true, then justice in South Africa is in a sorry state. That which should be safe and sure is indeed variable and inconstant. Many of us become increasingly uncertain in our attitudes towards Parliament, the Courts, the Police, the Prisons. But especially are we uncertain in our attitude towards the police. We have been forced, most of all by the revelations of police treatment of

Mr Steve Biko, to distrust those whom we should regard as the custodians of the law, the protectors of ourselves and our homes, and the implacable opponents of all kinds of illegal violence.

At the head of the great hierarchy of justice stands the Minister of Justice, and above him the Prime Minister. Neither of them has said one word about the revelations of inhuman treatment of Mr Biko. Do they approve of the keeping of a prisoner naked in detention for long periods of time? Or of the transporting of a prisoner naked in a police vehicle for a distance of over 700 kilometres? The harsh truth is that we do not know. And therefore we are compelled — some willingly, some with great reluctance — to assume that the Prime Minister and his Minister of Justice just do not care, or at least do not care enough, to make a statement that would reassure the public.

The Prime Minister, or his Minister of Justice, or both, should have said publicly that the Government would not tolerate inhuman treatment of any prisoner, detainee or otherwise. This would not only have reassured many South Africans, but would have done a great deal to lessen the incalculable damage that the Biko inquest did to the reputation of South Africa abroad.

Do not the repeated accusations of police assaults in political trials suggest that laws which allow detention without charge, but above all, detention without access,

can lead to one result, and that is that some policemen feel free to use secret and illegal methods, which could cause the death of some of the persons in detention? That some of these methods will be brutal and inhuman, is certain. Mr John D'Oliviera, in his recent biography VORSTER — THE MAN, writes this sentence of the Prime Minister — "if his policemen had to err, then he would prefer them to err in the direction of excessive zeal in protecting the interests of the State."

What is excessive zeal? Is it the kind of zeal that allows the security police to treat a prisoner in such a way that he dies? That is what many of us fear. And it is a fact that many white South Africans who should know better, believe that if a prisoner dies in detention it is because he has behaved in a manner so intolerable that death was the just consequence of his acts.

Does our Government want to be recognised as part of the world that respects the rule of law? It has no hope of this so long as it retains its present laws of detention in their extreme form. That there are other governments as bad or worse is no argument in our defence. It is a terrible thing when a life of 36 years duration, a life devoted to the pursuit of reason and justice, can be destroyed in one minute by a thug with a gun. But more terrible is the fear that the assassin can sleep well at nights, confident that he will never be discovered. □

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EARLY DAYS OF '78.

For thirty years now it has become steadily more difficult to wish any opponent of apartheid a "Happy New Year" with any conviction that that is the kind of year he is about to enjoy. With whatever faint hopes for better things one might have embarked on any new year after 1948 it usually only needed the opening of Parliament in January to put an end to them.

This year we did not even have to wait for the opening of Parliament. Before then Dr Rick Turner had already been murdered and the 10,000 residents of the Unibell "squatters' camp" had seen the Government raze their homes to the ground.

The murder of Rick Turner is only the latest and most monstrous of many attacks on critics of apartheid which the police seem unable either to prevent or solve. The destruction of Unibell is only the latest in a long series of attacks on settled communities carried out with deliberate violence, by those with power against those with no power, in the sacred name of apartheid. The only difference in the case of Unibell is that the community seems to have been destroyed in defiance of an undertaking given to the Transkei government that this would only happen once alternative accommodation for the victims had been

provided. So much for any ideas any Bantustan leaders might have had that by accepting independence they would gain leverage to improve the lot of the black people they have abandoned in white South Africa. Unibell has shown that they have no such leverage.

Shortly before Parliament opened the Nationalists made two announcements. The first of these was that Dr Connie Mulder had been appointed to succeed Mr M. C. Botha as Minister of Bantu Administration. Is this going to be important? We doubt it. Dr Mulder may not be as reactionary as Dr Treurnicht, who was also tipped for the job, and he may be more "human" and "approachable" than his predecessor ever was, but everything he has said since his new appointment has emphasised that he will do nothing which goes outside the limits of apartheid policy. So what better chance has he of ever satisfying black aspirations than had the disastrous Mr Botha? The second announcement was that PISCOM, the Internal Security Commission, will go into action this year. Consisting of politicians the Commission will meet behind closed doors to 'investigate' people and organisations the Government doesn't like. Under its jaundiced eye the prospects for those who refuse to toe the apartheid line are grim.