

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. □

2

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.

Add to these events we have mentioned above the "No-Change" speech made by Mr Vorster at the opening of Parliament and it is obvious that those committed to the white laager offer no more hope for the future in 1978 than they ever have done. From outside the laager, however, there have been one or two encouraging signs. The new alliance between Kwa-Zulu's Inkatha movement and the Coloured Labour and Indian Reform Parties represents a sensible coming together of people pledged to fight apartheid from within its structures. Inkatha itself scored its overwhelming victory in the Kwa-Zulu election on a radical platform calling for the release of all political

prisoners, the return of exiles, and the creation of a society in which people of all groups would enjoy equal rights throughout a united South Africa. This is the kind of society we would like to see in South Africa and it is the kind of society the new black leadership of the townships would like to see. What is needed now is an accommodation between all those who hold this vision of the future to work together for it. Does Chief Buthelezi's recent successful visit to Soweto mean that such an accord might now be possible? If it does, then something good may yet come out of 1978. □

3

MONTY NAICKER

Dr Monty Naicker, former president of the Natal and South African Indian Congresses died in Durban in January. We applaud his brave fight against apartheid over many years, a fight he carried on despite gaol, detention and repeated bannings. We will miss him. □

COMMENTARY

by Vortex

UNIBELL

The bulldozer trundles along
and knocks down
the house made of corrugated iron.

The police watch,
their dogs growl.
The squatters weep or sing.

What does it all matter?
It is only people who are suffering.
It is only homes which are collapsing.
It is only love
which is ploughed under
into the fertile earth.

ACADEMIC QUESTION

"At which university
did you gain your experience,
your sense of heaven and hell?
Perhaps at Unilever?"
"No. At Unibell."