

to have died as a result of falling down the stairs, of slipping in the shower, of falling over a chair. They are said to have committed suicide, or died of natural causes. It is difficult to escape the feeling that those 'natural causes' people die of in detention wouldn't have killed them if they hadn't been there. For the other side to the story of deaths in detention is the repeated allegations of torture which have been made by witnesses and accused in cases brought under the various security laws. These allegations are almost invariably dismissed by the judges. How else is it likely to be when one man stands up and says "I was tortured!", and six or eight Security Policemen stand up and say "It's all a pack of lies! We were all there, and not one of us laid a finger on him!" On the sheer weight of the evidence presented to him, what judge is likely to find against the police? And yet — people go on dying . . .

Have the repeated successes of the Security Police in refuting accusations of torture in Court convinced them that they have nothing to fear from the law and that their position is inviolate? After all, a great many people have now died while in their care, and not a single Security Policeman, to the best of our knowledge, has ever been convicted of having done anything to any of them.

If a potential security police torturer has nothing much to fear from the Courts, has he much to fear from his boss, the Minister? Or should we perhaps ask another question first? Who is now the boss, the Minister or the security apparatus he has created? We think that, if it isn't the apparatus yet, it very soon could be. It is true that, after the death of Steve Biko, the Minister told a newspaper that some Security Police "heads might roll", but for all we know that may simply have been an attempt to draw attention away from his own miserable part in the whole matter. Certainly prior to that the impression was growing that the Security Police had come to operate with impunity, secure in the

knowledge that nothing they did would earn one word of condemnation or a single rebuke from the Minister. If that is the point we have reached then Frankenstein is alive and well in South Africa and doing exactly as he pleases.

If the death of Steve Biko halts white South Africa in the drift to moral anarchy on which it seems embarked, where anything is permissible in the name of "security", some good may come out of it. Otherwise it will have been an unmitigated tragedy and disaster. His death under any circumstances was a loss that South Africa could not afford, but that he should have died in detention is something which South Africa will, we are convinced, live bitterly to regret. That Mr Biko stood for a radical re-ordering of South African society is not in dispute, but that he believed that that re-ordered society should be non-racial in concept everyone who knew him well is emphatic about. Everybody who does not have his head buried in the sand of apartheid ideology knows that radical change in South Africa is inevitable, and when it comes, how desperately we will need the kind of steadying hand that Steve Biko could have provided.

Mr Kruger told the world that Steve Biko's death "left him cold". Well, it leaves us cold too — cold with apprehension for the future to which Mr Vorster and Mr Kruger and the Frankenstein security machine they have created are leading us all, not least the people who gave them power. For one thing is quite certain, that security machine, no matter what methods it uses, has no prospect of winning a permanent home for Afrikanerdom in Africa. That will only happen when Afrikanerdom can persuade Africa that it should give it such a home. This, given the chance, Steve Biko might have been able to help do. Without him — and Albert Luthuli — and Robert Sobukwe — and Nelson Mandela? Who knows? □

2

RED HERRING

Mr Vorster has called a surprise general election almost eighteen months early. Why? Is it because the white opposition parties are in particular disarray? Does he want to show the outside world that, in the face of all its pressures, his electoral support stands firmer than ever? Did he want to divert attention from the death of Steve Biko and give his own doubting Thomases something else to think about? Does he want to crush his more reactionary critics once-and-for-all, claim an election victory as an endorsement of his new constitutional proposals, and go on from there, with the new powers with which it will invest him, to introduce changes which his own supporters won't much like?

These are some of the theories which have been put forward. There is probably something in all of them, but it is only the last which we would like to discuss here, and, as far as it is concerned, we would like to ask this question. Even if the white electorate gives Mr Vorster a more massive vote than ever before, and he takes that vote as

an endorsement of his new constitutional proposals, what prospect is there that those proposals could form the basis for a new South African political dispensation to which most people of all races could give their support? Unfortunately we think the answer to that question is — none!

The manner in which the new proposals were worked out was typically Nationalist. An all-Nationalist Committee was appointed and for months it worked in secret not talking to anyone else, hatching its plan. This Committee represented the views of, at the most, 10% of the population, and it was all-white. As a last-minute gesture to "consultation", Indian and Coloured leaders who work in apartheid institutions were called to Pretoria to be told what it was all about. At that late stage there was small chance of their views influencing the form of the proposals in any important respect and, as far as we are aware, no changes were introduced before the proposals were presented to the top councils of the Nationalist Party and, after them, to

its four Provincial Congresses. There they seem to have been swallowed without a murmur. Not one African person, urban or rural, was at any stage considered as having a view worth canvassing.

It is therefore not surprising that this new scheme has been rejected by every African leader of any consequence. It has also been rejected by the majority party in the Coloured Representative Council and, we have no doubt, is regarded as irrelevant by that large body of Coloured people who refuse to have anything to do with the CRC. Indian leaders have either rejected the scheme or are non-committal.

The proposals, as we see them, are a simple device to draw the Indian and Coloured communities into a white-dominated camp, in which they will be given a semblance of power-sharing, and in which their participation will commit them to support white South Africa in any future conflict which may develop with black South Africa. No doubt there will be some Indian and Coloured politicians who will be drawn by their own fears or the lure of high salaries and big motor-cars to climb on to this bandwagon, but we hope there won't be many, for the whole scheme seems to us to rest on a series of untenable propositions.

The first is that, by putting more power in the hands of one man, the President, our problems will somehow be more

easily resolved. This is a dangerous delusion, especially when that President is destined to be the nominee of that 10% of the population which has drawn up the constitution. The second is that a white-dominated Cabinet Council will continue indefinitely to control 87% of the land area of South Africa and a comparable proportion of its developed wealth. The third is that it is possible to postulate a solution for South Africa's future political shape in which 80% of its population, the African people, have had no say whatsoever.

Mr Vorster will no doubt win the election easily and then tell the world that this means that South Africa stands firm behind him and his constitutional plans. He will probably also tell white South Africa that its future is safe in his hands, for we assume that he will be the President. Both claims will be nonsense. Will he and his supporters never face the simple and, to us, so obvious fact, that the only sure foundation for white survival and acceptance here is by persuading the black people of our country and the continent that a white presence here will be an asset to them both. These new proposals, so contemptuous of African opinion, will not help one bit to do that. All the constitutional contortions that man can dream of will not save white South Africans from one, hard, basic fact of life in Africa. That in the end they will only stay here if Africa wants them to stay. □

3

STOKING THE FIRES

As we have noted often enough before, the Nationalist government seems bent on leading South Africa to disaster and Afrikanerdom to suicide. What other conclusion can one come to when one considers some of the things done recently by its officials in the sacred name of apartheid?

In Soweto, where pupils, parents and teachers have surely made it more than clear that they have had enough of Bantu Education, the sensible thing to do, one would think, would be to sit down with the representatives of these groups and work out with them how to phase out Bantu Education and bring black schools into an integrated education system. Unfortunately what is obvious to everyone else is too often anathema to the Nationalists. So their answer to Soweto's cry for change has been to close down the schools, take them under direct government control, and tell all children they must register again for admission. The result has been that less than 3 000 out of 27 000 secondary school pupils have registered, a mass resignation of teachers has occurred, and another area of conflict has been aggravated.

On the outskirts of Cape Town the demolition of squatters' homes has gone ahead despite all protests. In the middle of one of the wettest winters in memory hundreds of families have sat huddled with their possessions in the rain, watching their homes being flattened by bulldozers. Their offence? They had erected illegal houses on somebody else's land because they couldn't find anywhere else to live. Their other offences? That they had responded to two of the primary injunctions of Christian teaching. The first, that the honourable thing for a man to do is to go out and find work so that he may support his family — which is

precisely what many squatters have come to Cape Town from the Transkei to do. The second, that the right place for a woman and her children to live is with her husband — which is just why whole families have followed their migrant husbands and fathers to Cape Town. Most of these families, having watched their homes destroyed, then disappeared into other people's shacks somewhere else, or into the bushes of the Cape Flats. Some of them were given accommodation on Church property, where government officials again descended on them, usually in the night, charging them with being illegally resident there and chivvyng them on again.

In Natal a directive has gone out from the Department of Bantu Administration to African attorneys telling them they have a year in which to remove themselves from their offices in the centres of towns and set themselves up in the dormitory townships of Kwa-Zulu. Most of these attorneys have practised from their present premises for years. As far as we know this has never led to a single 'incident' of any importance. To the central areas where these offices are situated clients from all points of the compass gravitate, not just people from one township. The principal courts are easily to hand. Advocates and colleagues are close by for briefing and discussion. Reference libraries are available. None of this will apply in a township. The convenience of their clients and the livelihood of the attorneys is to be sacrificed on the altar of doctrinaire apartheid.*

So there you have it, from Soweto, from Cape Town and from Durban, a few more ingredients for a recipe for an explosion. □

* Since writing, this decision has been rescinded.