

# Sunday Times

THE PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE

## HE DAREN'T INQUIRE

IN SEEKING TO DEFEND THE SECURITY POLICE, Mr. Vorster is back with his familiar brand of mixed-up logic. Replying to complaints that the police may be doing something irregular, he "proves" their innocence by proclaiming that "they have strict instructions to act within the provisions of the law".

This kind of sophistry and double talk is not helpful. Nobody has accused the Government of *instructing* the police to break the law, and that is not a charge Mr. Vorster has to answer.

The real charges — and they are serious — he has carefully evaded, and these still remain unexplained.

How did Mr. Ahmed Timol come to fall to his death this week from the tenth floor of John Vorster Square?

How did 21-year-old Mr. Mohammed Essop come to finish up in hospital after being detained for only a matter of days?

If the police have strict instructions "to act within the law" and are carrying out those instructions, why should they refuse to allow Mr. Essop's father to see his injured son?

Why were the nature and extent of Mr. Essop's injuries concealed from the father?

Why were scores of people all over the country raided at dawn last Sunday morning?

Is it not remarkable that at least ten detainees have so far committed suicide while in custody?

What kind of instructions were the police obeying when they detained a brother and sister — Alfred and Gwendolyn Wilcox — for nine months?

The Wilcoxes were not called as State witnesses and they were not charged with any offence. If the police were acting according to law, public alarm springs from the fact that we now have a law which makes it "legal" for two innocent people to be de-

prived of their liberty and held incommunicado for nine months. During that time, in effect, they were wiped off the face of the earth.

Most people must by now be familiar with the long list of shocking, ghastly allegations that deal with the sufferings of detained people. There are enough of these charges to indicate that something is seriously wrong with the system.

Mr. Vorster should know about all these things better than anyone else. He should know of the havoc being caused to innocent people in the hunt for communists and subversives. He should know of the extent to which people, innocent or guilty, have been robbed of their most elementary rights to seek the protection of the law.

In the light of all these events and in face of mounting evidence that casts at least some suspicion on police methods of interrogation, the best that Mr. Vorster can do is to come up with a phoney debating point that will fool nobody.

The main question, as far as we can judge, is not whether there should be a judicial inquiry, but whether Mr. Vorster is a fit and proper person to be in charge of this administration. Either he has lost complete control, and the police feel free to do as they please; or he is not prepared to discourage this kind of activity — and, of the two possibilities, it is difficult to say which is worse.

There will be no judicial inquiry, largely because the Prime Minister's control and direction of events do not bear examination. He has no wish to go into the dock. It is he, rather than the police, who must be held mainly responsible for a deteriorating situation. The traditional standards of individual liberty and the rule of law are rapidly being snuffed out by a process that appears to us far worse than the terror it is ostensibly trying to stamp out.

## UNHAPPY COUNTRY

IN THE ARTICLE ABOVE, WE DEALT WITH MR. VORSTER'S painfully inadequate reply to widespread public alarm over police raids and detentions. It will not stop people from continuing to ask what sort of country South Africa is becoming.

The latest burst of activity started last weekend when a number of Indians were rounded up. This was followed by a series of raids before dawn on Sunday morning on the homes of a number of people in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Pietermaritzburg, East London and Grahamstown. With all this strong-arm melodrama and upheaval the ordinary man might have supposed that the police were at least on the track of an arms cache or a bomb factory. They appear to have been looking for typewriters — and documents.

Then came the two shocking incidents which gave a new and very ugly turn to the story — the death of the Indian Mr. Timol, and the hospitalisation of a young Indian detainee, Mr. Essop, whose parents were denied access to him or even adequate information about him.

The Security Police have a black record as far as the safety of their detainees is concerned. Mr. Timol, so it has been reported, is the seventeenth to die in custody and the tenth to commit suicide. His death comes on top of renewed indignation over the case of the Imam Haron, which was again brought to public attention by the Rev. Bernard Wrankmore's hunger strike. How long can Mr. Vorster continue to stand by and do nothing while the record gets blacker and blacker?

Even without these shocking events we have already reached a sorry state. A typical example of ridiculous harassment was the experience the other day of Mr. Peter Magubane, formerly a well-known Press photographer, who cannot carry on his work because he is under a ban. He exchanged a few words in public with Mrs. Winnie Mandela, also a banned person, in the course of doing her children a good turn. That was a technical offence, and the magistrate accepted that it was an innocent meeting and imposed a suspended sentence. But, however innocent and technical, it did not prevent Mr. Magubane from having to stand trial. Nor did it prevent the Security Police from promptly raiding Mr. Magubane's room in Soweto and taking the names of his visitors. What has all that got to do with terrorism?

Occasionally, as in the case of Mr. Timol, there is a public outcry, whereupon senior police officers clam up, start passing the buck and are conveniently "not available for comment."

These methods cannot be tolerated if South Africans are to be able to hold up their heads without shame. Furthermore, the Prime Minister is quite wrong when he claims that these methods are criticised in order to undermine the police. No reasonable person underestimates the importance of the police in protecting the country against subversion, but we are surely strong enough to fight subversion without creating even worse evils in the process. It will be a very poor bargain if the conquest of subversion leads us into becoming a police state.