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POLITICAL SUICIDE

THOSE who believe there are dark happenings in Security Police offices will point to the grave of Ahmed Timol.

They will point to 16 other graves.

The 30-year-old Roodepoort schoolteacher was taken from his home on Friday night. By Wednesday night he was dead.

“He committed suicide,” Brigadier P. Kruger assured the Press immediately.

The Security Police were there. They know. And the Brigadier must have had good reason to make his announcement before the decision of the inquest court.

Murderers, robbers, rapists and the criminally insane do not commit suicide at a comparable rate.

At most of the major political trials there have been claims made of torture.

The nature of our law does not enable the courts to take these claims into account while they consider other offences.

Some of the claims have been brought to the civil courts. But the Minister of Police has settled out of court. Judges have not been able to rule on the affidavits.

The courts have ruled that, in the spirit of the political laws, detention is intended

to be harsh.

Bernard Wrangmore believes it is time to take another look.

His supporters point out that one of the primary apologies given for 180-day detention was the protection of State witnesses.

The highest courts would confirm that it is the prime duty of a policeman to protect suspects — even confessed murderers and terrorists — until they are brought to trial. It is the very basis of the modern legal system. Justice must be seen to be done.

The Security Police — undoubtedly short-staffed in the national fabric of manpower shortages — are obviously having a tough time of it. And a remedy must be found.

It is difficult for Mr. Vorster to nurture dialogue abroad while political prisoners are dying at home.

Either the State must ensure that detainee deaths are kept from public notice. So that the public is kept from causing an outcry.

Or they must take the more modern view and call a commission of inquiry to hear all the evidence and lay down new rules.

Or they must end detentions and use normal process of law.