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So this then is terrorism!

THE DEAN'S TRIAL did nothing to support the claim, so dear to some politicians, that South Africa is in grave peril from terrorism.

Appeal has been allowed. The issue is still before court. It would be improper to discuss specific points in it. But it would equally be contemptuous of the judges of appeal to suggest that they might be influenced by any general observations made here.

So it seems appropriate to say that after all the ignominious detention and interrogation of a senior churchman, the raids associated with his arrest, and the trial itself with its damaging effects on South Africa's reputation, there wasn't much to be actually scared of. Except, say, an address to northern suburbs ladies. Or giving money to families who, because their relatives are disreputable, cannot get much other help.

But then this is what the Terrorism Act makes inevitable and what makes it a tragically ludicrous statute. It says terrorism is any act (not crime, but act) done with intent to endanger law and order. And to escape its consequences you have to be able to prove that when you performed that act you did not mean it to have disruptive results.

The Terrorism Act is woolly in its definitions and is bad law because it takes away from the courts their powers of discretion in imposing sentence. Judges have no option but to administer it as they find it. But surely it is time that Parliament drastically revised or repealed a piece of legislation which not only seems superfluous but is also capable of damaging national security, in its widest and most real sense, more than it could ever safeguard it.

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