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OPINION

# Memo to Vaderland and Vorster: Go ahead, inquire

DIE VADERLAND, a Nationalist newspaper in Johannesburg, this week called for a commission of inquiry into the reports and comments of several newspapers on the death of a detainee, Mr. Ahmed Timol, while in the custody of the Security Police.

Among the papers attacked were the Rand Daily Mail and the Daily Dispatch, in East London.

In response to the call, the Daily Dispatch publishes the following leading article today:

A Nationalist newspaper, Die Vaderland, calls for a commission of inquiry into reports and comments in certain newspapers, including the Daily Dispatch, on Special Branch activity with particular reference to the death of Ahmed Timol and others while under detention.

The Daily Dispatch would welcome such an inquiry, which would constitute an appropriate occasion for placing on public record our profound unease and suspicion over the methods of the Special Branch.

We therefore challenge Die Vaderland to keep on calling for this inquiry, and we challenge the Government to institute it. At the same time we warn Die Vaderland and any Government representatives who pronounce on the matter to watch their wording carefully.

## ERRORS

Nationalist newspapers seem particularly prone to falling into the errors of defamation, and a couple of Cabinet Ministers have recently shown that they too would save themselves money by getting their lawyers to scrutinise their words before publication or utterance.

Die Vaderland is, of course, a peculiar publication, being subordinate to party politicians, and it generally follows the Nationalist Party line with nauseating predictability.

It has its own approach to journalism, evidently seeing nothing odd in printing comment and comment headlines in news columns, which to those of us more accustomed to strict separation between comment and news is strange journalism — to put it mildly.

## Normal

Another peculiar characteristic about this publication is its apparent inability to comprehend normal democratic values — to the extent that it seems puzzled about the disquiet of orthodox newspapers over the Timol affair.

It cannot understand why we should express concern over the circumstances surrounding the violent death of a man who was in police custody, or over the fact that he is the 17th — yes, the 17th — person to die while under detention without trial.

Die Vaderland has the impertinence to imply that such disquiet constitutes a smear of the country.

On the contrary, it is the subservient, unchallenging, permissive attitude of papers like Die Vaderland that smears the country and is a blot on the record of South African journalism. They close their eyes to many questionable things going on in our country and, like those ja-broers of the Kremlin, Pravda and Izvestia, they evidently think their government and its political police must always be given the benefit of any doubt.

## Probing

What an attitude for men who claim to be journalists — members of a profession dedicated to reflecting, questioning, probing and exposing all instances of actual or potential maladministration.

For the benefit of Die Vaderland, Pravda, Izvestia, or any other ja-broer party-lining publication that prefers to echo, rather than challenge, authority we, as an independent newspaper, will explain what we don't like about the present Special Branch set-up.

We don't like political police having powers only judges should have. We don't like jailing without evidence. It is too much like communism, and it shares with communism, nazism and fascism the principle that individual freedom is subordinate to what politicians — not judges — decree to be the interests of the State.

## Bluster

Like the early custodians of our democratic tradition, who compelled the signing of Magna Carta as far back as 1215, we don't like rulers to take over the functions of law courts. We trust judges more than party politicians and their underlings. And no amount of bluster from such politicians, or their tame newspapers, will change our views.

The more Die Vaderland bleats about our questioning of questionable incidents and trends in our country, the louder we will address to them the advice they have obviously never had the nerve to give to their political bosses — go to hell.