

RAND
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TRYING TO CLOUD THE ISSUE

THE NATIONALIST PRESS AND RADIO are propagating a good deal of what might be called Irish bull in their anxiety to reassure followers that there is really nothing wrong or even unusual about our system detention without trial.

Look at Ireland, they say. The British have introduced detention without trial because they realise this is the only way to deal with terrorism. We don't like it any more than they do but we, too, face an emergency situation.

The analogy, of course, is spurious. Northern Ireland is in the midst of a full-scale street war. There are barricades in the streets of Belfast and other cities; bombs are thrown almost daily; there are machine-gun attacks and ambushes and even pitched battles that go on for hours. Since August 9 when the trouble intensified and the Special Powers Act was introduced, 66 people have been killed and hundreds injured.

What a contrast South Africa presents. There are no barricades in the streets of Johannesburg. There is no shooting here. The last act of sabotage anywhere in the country was more than seven years ago. True, things are somewhat different along the Zambesi borders — and if that is where our Terrorism Act were being used we might feel somewhat different about it. But the detentions are taking place in our peaceful cities where there is no emergency and no justification for bypassing the normal processes of the law.

The emergency law in Northern Ireland is a temporary thing, reluctantly enacted. When the intensity of the crisis has eased off it will be repealed, even though there will probably always be a residual threat of terrorism from the IRA. But our Terrorism Act is a permanent part of our law, and its provisions have become standard procedure with the Security Police even in matters that seem to have little to do with terrorism.

The main difference, however, is that 17 people have died in our detention cells, and the Government adds to public suspicions about these deaths by refusing to investigate them publicly. And this is the point that propagandists are most studious in avoiding.

MONSTER IN OUR MIDST

by Bob Connolly



first edition, she said