

Nat. paper raps Govt. over death

By ANTHONY HOLIDAY
Political Reporter

NEWSPAPERS throughout South Africa — including the Nationalist supporting Rapport — have voiced deep concern over the recent actions of the Security Police and the death in custody of Mr. Ahmed Timol.

'Security police action not restricted' cables to PM over Timol's death

Staff Reporter

IT SHOULD not be surprising that the Security Police overreacted, as they were left to operate in a procedural vacuum, Dr. Denis Worrall, senior lecturer in international relations at the University of the Witwatersrand, said yesterday.

Dr. Worrall was writing a special article in the Nationalist Sunday newspaper, Rapport.

He said: "Most of the reaction to the widespread search of last weekend — whether critical or favourable — focused on the Security Police. On the critical side there was the leader of the Progressive Party's reference to the Security Police as 'Mr. Vorster's bull-lyboys', and the Rand Daily Mail's 'echo of jackboots' description of their methods.

"Natural as this reaction may be — many people, let me stress, are deeply and justifiably upset — it is misdirected.

"The criticism should be directed at the legislature which has failed to introduce the sort of provisions which apply in other societies, leaving the Security Police to operate in a procedural vacuum. What constitutes a security threat is left almost entirely to their determination, as is their response."

The net effect of the present arrangement was the reinforcement of the authoritarian image this country had in the world, declining confidence within our own society in the judicious interpretation of security threats and of responses to them (not limited to the Left, but shared by the right — such as the Smeerbrief); and the danger of an unobtrusive and gradual erosion of freedom in our society.

In an editorial yesterday, Rapport said the wave of raids last weekend had been followed by a feeling of unrest in wide circles, even among people who strongly support Government policy.

"There rests on our police, especially those who are charged with the security of the State, a heavy double responsibility. They must protect the State in dangerous and often painful circumstances and they must not leave themselves open to serious charges that the totally extraordinary powers which exist for this purpose are being used unnecessarily widely."

Of the death of Mr. Ahmed Timol the newspaper said that the event was guaranteed to do a maximum of harm to South Africa's relations both inside and outside the country.

It added that Security Police silence about the death awakes "at the very least an impression of unfeelingness."

SOPHISTRY

"The best thing would have been to immediately and with regret announce the death of a prisoner with the assurance that a full and open legal inquiry would take place as soon as possible," said the newspaper.

The Sunday Times, in an editorial, accused the Prime Minister, Mr. Vorster, of "sophistry and double talk" in his attempts to defend the Security Police.

"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," said the newspaper.

The Sunday Tribune deplored Mr. Vorster's decision not to appoint a judicial inquiry into Mr. Timol's death. "The air needs to be cleared. Suspicion needs to be dispelled as only an independent inquiry could dispel it," said the newspaper.

The Daily Dispatch wrote in an editorial last week: "What is going on? What sort of people does the Government think we are, that they obviously believe that this type of activity can go on without an adequate explanation?"

Political Reporter TELEGRAMS demanding the recall of Parliament over the spate of detentions by the Security Police and the death of Indian detainee, Mr. Ahmed Timol, are to be sent to the Prime Minister today.

They will come from Mr. Phillip Middleton, national chairman of the Young Progressives, and Mr. Ken Costa, chairman of the Witwatersrand University's academic freedom committee.

Mr. Costa said the detentions had had an unsettling effect on students writing exams. The students felt particularly concerned about the fate of those of their fellows who had been detained and would not be able to write.

AWRY

"It is not only students who feel that something has gone awry, but also members of the public who have a right to a full explanation.

"It has become a matter of extreme urgency that at this critical point the Prime Minister should approach the State President for an immediate recall of Parliament to allow elected representatives of the people to discuss this crisis and demand an explanation of the death of Mr. Timol," he said.

The telegram from the Young Progressives will also demand a total repeal of the Terrorism Act and all legislation empowering the police to detain people without trial.

Mr. Middleton added no amount of investigation could erase the fact that the circumstances which led to Mr. Timol's death could not have arisen had the Security Police not been given almost unlimited powers.