

Timol mystery haunts SA

Cape Argus

THURSDAY OCTOBER 30 2014

LATE one night, 43 years ago this week in Coronationville, Johannesburg, police stopped a yellow Ford Anglia at a roadblock. They arrested the driver and passenger, and handed them over to security police. After being tortured for three days, the passenger was transferred to hospital in a critical condition – and two days after that the driver was dead.

While it is common cause that Ahmed Timol fell from the window of the 10th floor of John Vorster Square police headquarters in Johannesburg, it has never been established if he was pushed – or if he had already been murdered and was thrown out the window to disguise this fact.

At the inquest, police maintained they had looked after Timol well. They had not tortured him; on the contrary, one had even bought him a meat pie and a soft drink. Experts were produced to say that the marks on Timol's body that might have indicated he had been tortured in fact before

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his arrest; and that the trajectory of his fall proved that he had dived from the window.

Timol had taken the opportunity to commit suicide after being confronted with a particular piece of evidence; this was consistent with a directive to communists to take their own lives rather than reveal information, they said – and the mag-

istrate believed their version.

In 1996, twenty-five years after Timol's death, a frail, Gujarati-speaking Hawa Timol appeared before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She pleaded with the commission to investigate the circumstances of her son's death.

But none of the security policemen involved in the interrogation of Ahmed Timol applied to the commission for amnesty, the commission did not have the capacity to investigate the matter further, and nobody has ever been prosecuted.

The police could afford to torture detainees because they had the safety net of laws.

Some detainees died. Timol was not the only one. Others included Looksmart Ngudle, Imam Haron, Steve Biko and Steve Aggett. They died for SA's freedom, but justice has never been done.

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