

The Cape Times

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 1976

The Abraham case

AS AN illustration of the refined cruelty of the banning system, the case of Mr Eric Abraham deserves attention. This young man is a journalist, running a news agency and contributing to the Guardian, London, and the British Broadcasting Corporation. His father is a senior officer in the navy. Some days ago he was issued with a banning order which forbids him to practise journalism or authorship of any kind and places him under house arrest. He is confined to his quarters in Mowbray from dusk to dawn and for 24 hours a day on Saturday, Sunday and public holidays. Apart from his mother, his father and his doctor, HE MAY RECEIVE NO VISITORS.

He must thus endure a species of periodic imprisonment without trial, in solitary confinement, by edict of the Minister of Justice. There is no question of a trial. The order, which also requires him to report to the police once a week, confines him to the magisterial districts of Wynberg and Cape Town and prohibits him from attending any gathering of any kind. Neither may he engage in teaching or instructing pupils. In such circumstances, Mr Abraham is being sentenced to a living death and, unless he is an individual of extraordinary inner resources, is being subjected to a species of mental torture which could cause grave psychological damage. If Mr Abraham has committed an offence, this is vicious punishment-without-

trial. As Mr Abraham is a journalist, the immediate suspicion here and abroad will be that he has been silenced to prevent him doing his job and that this, in fact, is the fundamental reason for his banning. The Minister of Justice must bear the odium for imposing such a frightful punishment on someone against whom no charge has been proven — or even brought. Unless he is prepared to give an explanation that is acceptable to reasonable men, Mr Kruger must also bear the stigma of interference with the freedom of the press. What redress has someone in Mr Abraham's position? None. He can leave the country — if the authorities allow him to, of course. They have already seized Mr Abraham's passport. But his only other option is to endure.

The argument against the banning system is formidable. Hence the authorities, we presume, must have powerful grounds for acting as they do. They must believe that they are acting in the public interest. Why, then do they not give their reasons? Is banning being used as the preventive detention provision is being used — to stop its victims from taking action in the future which the Minister believes they might undertake? Is some policeman's view of a citizen's possible intentions an adequate reason for such savage and punitive measures? The public is entitled to a detailed explanation from the Minister of Justice.