

GENOCIDE

THE ruthless repression waged by the regimes of Iraq, Turkey, and Iran against the Kurdish people has escalated in recent weeks, and seems to have turned into a genocide campaign, aimed at the actual extermination of the Kurds.

The Kurds have inhabited the Zagros Mountains region since prehistoric times (they are first recorded there in 401BC). After the first world war the proposed treaty made Kurdistan a separate country but the one eventually ratified made no mention of Kurds, and put the borders, of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, through their territory, making it impossible to continue the annual migrations of their sheep and goats. Since then they have kept up a war of independence in three directions.

On 5 March Turkey, with the consent and co-operation of the Iraqi regime, launched a savage air attack, using 30 planes, against civilian villages 5 km inside Iraqi Kurdistan. During February, the Iraqi air force bombarded Kurdish villages for four days, and also bombed villages in the Iranian part of Kurdistan. Over 2000 are reported dead from these aerial operations.

In January, the Iraqi authorities returned the bodies of some 150 young people (aged 14 to 23) to their families in the city of Sulaimaniya, after payment by the families of 'execution and transportation' fees. Amnesty International published the names of 29 of the dead (AE Report of 25/2/1987) and identified them as among 300 young Kurds arrested over a year ago for the alleged political activities of their relatives. The returned bodies had marks of torture, some had their eyes gouged out, and some were drained of blood.

Our society urges international condemnation of these heinous crimes and support of the struggle of the Kurdish people for self determination. We call for urgent letters of condemnation to the Turkish and Iraqi regimes demanding an immediate halt to the massacre of the Kurds. We ask that our national day, 'Nawroz', the 21 March, declared an annual day of international solidarity with the struggle of the Kurdish people.

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THE RIOT

What did it achieve?

THE first achievement of the Broadwater Farm riot was expressed by a local councillor, 'the police got a bloody good hiding'. This of course is not a long-term political achievement, but neither is a riot a long-term political campaign. A sudden spontaneous uprising can only have immediate, simple objectives, and at Broadwater Farm the objective was attained - to take revenge on the bullies.

Victory could easily have gone the other way. Low-ranking police officers have complained during the trials that their commanders were indecisive, and made errors. For instance, the man who sent in the 'serial' to which PC Blakelock belonged thought they were a trained 'tactical support group', whereas they were ordinary beat bobbies dressed in riot gear.

The worst bullies among the police may not have been involved; they were probably plainclothes men anyway.

Blakelock, the one who happened to be caught and killed, had no reputation as a notorious bully, and for all we know had objected to the outrageous behaviour of some colleagues in the privacy of the police canteen. But it emerges from the trials that the police in Tottenham have great solidarity, and a collective 'them versus us' antagonism towards the various denizens of the Broadwater Farm estate.

The accidental, long-term achievement of the riot is that judges and legislators have come to recognise that their power is being usurped by the police, who are supposed to be their servants. Already the Metropolitan Commissioner, who at first blamed the riot on 'anarchists and Trotskyists', has sent officers from other London divisions to investigate the methods used in Tottenham to get confessions. Already there has been a discernible diminution of police power in

continued on page 3



THE RIOT

continued from front page

Tottenham, not by the passing of new laws to limit their activities, but by the pressure on them to keep their behaviour within the existing legal limits.

Again, things might easily have gone the other way. If the evidence produced by the police in court had not included the facts of blatant illegality, the net result might have been a legal increase in police powers. Evidently, however, the police, and strangely the prosecuting lawyers, assumed that judges and juries would share their opinion, that the murder of a policeman exempted the police from the legal restrictions to which they usually pay lip service. At one point in the murder trial, the judge sent the jury out, the better to give the man in charge of the investigation a piece of his mind. *Why were suspects, particularly juvenile suspects, denied access to a solicitor while they were being interrogated? Was it to make it easier to get a confession? Oh no, m'lud, that would be illegal. Was it because a solicitor might advise a suspect of his right of silence? Not that either. Why then? Well m'lud, solicitors might wittingly or unwittingly find themselves passing messages to people outside which could lead to the destruction of evidence or the disappearance of other suspects. Some solicitors are not above conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. A solicitor, an officer of the high court? Would you care to give an example of such disgraceful behaviour? Well sir, it's a well-known fact, though I can't think of an example offhand.*

Another policeman testified that he had banned a social worker from sitting in on an interview, after the social worker told him he would advise the juvenile suspect

of his right to silence. It was clearly part of Haringey council's campaign against the police, he said.

If one says to a three-year-old, 'you went to the seaside yesterday, didn't you', the child may agree, whether they went to the seaside yesterday or not. Remembering in fragments from my own childhood, I think the child reasons somewhat as follows: 'None of the activities I engaged in yesterday are such as I would hitherto have characterised as going to the seaside, but it appears from this grown-up's attitude that I did go to the seaside, so I must have been to the seaside and perceived it as something else.' If then pressed to say what happened at the seaside, the child will probably invent some details. Young children are too little acquainted with the world to make good witnesses.

There were no very young child witnesses in the Broadwater Farm murder trial, but some of the defendants were pupils at a special school for slow learners. The story which most excited *The Sun*, that the attackers of Constable Blakelock intended to cut off his head and stick it on a pole, was originated by a thirteen-year-old boy said to have a mental age of five.

This confession also stated that he had been commanded by the leader of Blakelock's attackers to 'cut' him, and he had cut him on the chest and the leg. Blakelock's colleagues who saw the murder testified that his killers were attacking 'like vultures', nobody taking time to give orders to anybody, and the pathologist testified that there were no cuts on any part of the body below the neck. The whole tale was plain fantasy. Yet the child was on remand for 17 months (in the care of the local authority since he is too young for prison) with no evidence against him except his ridiculous 'confession'.

Unsupported confessions are in fact the whole evidence against most of the defendants. Winston Silcott, now identified in the press as the 'leader of Blakelock's killers', was convicted solely on an alleged statement by himself, which he refused to sign.

Much has been made in the media of the fact that Silcott, a violent young man, was on bail charged with a different murder at the time of Blakelock's death. One might imagine a conversation in the police station: *Blakelock was one of ours, and I want his murderers found. Yessir, but the whole estate's clammed up. Well bring that bastard Silcott in for a start. I daresay he started it.*

Apart from the confessions, the evidence of Jason Cobham has been successful against some, including one who got seven years. Cobham, financially supported by the police, was completely discredited by cross-questioning at the murder trial. (A policeman told David Rose of *The Guardian*, 'Your coloureds make notoriously bad witnesses'.)

Of the thirty prosecutions already brought, ten have been lost because the jury did not believe the confessions, and two are to be retried because the jury could not agree. Some of the eighteen convictions may be quashed on appeal, especially those resting on Cobham's testimony. Forty-two more cases are still to come, unless the prosecution now decides to drop some.

Rioting is seldom, if ever, deliberate; it is a kind of lashing out in communal anger. Often it is counter-productive, resulting in quick defeat at the hands of the authorities and even more oppression. This time it was the authorities who lost at the time, and although there have been harsh prison sentences for some, the result for those not in prison may be a measure of relief. We hope so.

Plod

