

# THE BIRMINGHAM SIX



Patrick Joseph Hill



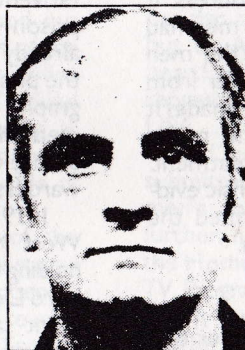
John Walker



Robert Gerard Hunter



Noel Richard McKenny



Hugh Callaghan



William Power

**FREE**  
**THE BIRMINGHAM SIX**  
**NOW**

## THE BACKGROUND

The Birmingham Six are six Irishmen who were convicted in August 1975 of the biggest mass murder in British legal history: the Birmingham pub bombings of 21 November 1974. Five of them were arrested on the night of 21 November 1974 as they travelled from Birmingham, where they lived, to Belfast for the weekend (the sixth, who had seen them off at the train station, was arrested the next day).

Police thought that they had the men responsible for the bombings after Dr. Frank Skuse, a Home Office forensic scientist, conducted tests on the men's hands and decided that two of the men had handled explosives. The men were taken to Birmingham where four of the six signed statements admitting responsibility for the bombings. At the men's trial, all six alleged threats and maltreatment at the hands of the police and claimed that the four statements had been obtained under duress. It was not denied in court that the men had been severely beaten, but since the men had been assaulted on their transfer from police custody into prison, this made it more difficult to prove that the men's injuries resulted from police maltreatment. The four statements, and the forensic evidence supplied by Dr. Skuse, formed the basis of the case against the men.

## DOUBTS

It was not until several years later that doubts surfaced publicly about the reliability of the forensic tests used by Dr. Skuse. The forensic evidence was shown to be faulty when test commissioned by the "World in Action" TV programme in 1985 indicated that positive results for the presence of nitroglycerine could also be obtained where the subject had been smoking or playing cards. Within a few days of the "World in Action" programme, Dr. Skuse was forced to take early retirement on the grounds of "limited efficiency". At an appeal hearing into the Birmingham Six case in November 1987, Dr. Skuse could provide no answer to the many discrepancies in his evidence and it was clear that the forensic evidence no longer stood up.

The statements accepted by the 1975 trial judge as valid confessions are contradictory, and make more sense as police views of the event than as authentic confessions. For instance, the statements claim that the bombs were placed in plastic carrier bags, and police believed this to be true at the time of the men's interrogation. But forensic tests showed later that the bombs had been placed in holdalls. On the other hand, MP Chris Mullin later tracked down men who he claimed had been responsible for the Birmingham bombings and these men had been able to provide a much more convincing account of the way in which the bombs had been planted. This confirms the men's claims that police maltreatment forced four of them to sign "confessions" concocted by police.

## MEN BEATEN

In June 1976, 14 prison warders were tried for assaulting the Birmingham Six on their arrival at Winson Green prison in November 1974. In their defence, the prison officers claimed that the men had already been beaten before their arrival at the prison. Dr. David Paul examined photographs of the men and confirmed that the men's faces bore obvious signs of injury before their beating at the hands of prison warders. The warders were acquitted.

In 1978, the Six obtained leave to sue the West Midlands police for assault. In upholding the police appeal against this decision, Lord Denning issued his now famous statement saying that he could not allow the action to go ahead because if the men won it would mean that the police had been guilty of assault and perjury. He has since admitted that he was wrong.

## WITNESSES

At the men's appeal hearing in 1987, various witnesses corroborated the men's claims of police assault including two former Police Officers who testified to the maltreatment of the Six in police custody. The appeal hearing also heard that the superintendent in charge of the interrogations, George Reade, had produced a schedule which had no purpose except as a means of falsifying the police record. The Reade 'schedule' is comparable with a



Photo AP/RN

Tens of thousands march in Dublin 1989

similar document which eventually led to the release of the Guildford Four. The Reade 'schedule' contains a scrubbed out reference to an interview which one of the men claims took place but which the Police deny. The men's appeal in 1987 failed essentially because, like Lord Denning in 1978, the appeal judges refused, despite the evidence, to believe the police capable of violence and perjury.

Since the appeal hearing, one of the arresting officers, Fred Willoughby, has stated publicly his belief in the men's innocence. His statement came after a series of revelations about the West Midlands Police Serious Crime Squad because of evidence that police fabricated confessions. In July 1989, the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad was disbanded after a series of cases where defendants were acquitted because of allegations of police fabrication of statements. Nine of the officers who took part in interrogating the Birmingham Six were members of the Serious Crime Squad. In August 1989, more than fifty Midlands CID officers were moved to non-operational duties after some crucial papers went missing. A police inquiry was set up into the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad, but it will only look at cases after 1984 and will not make its findings public. Many prominent people, including senior politicians and

churchmen, have called for the inquiry to include the Birmingham Six case. Concern has also been expressed not only in Britain but by Amnesty International, the European Parliament, the Irish Government and representatives of the Soviet Union and USA.

In December 1989 fresh evidence was submitted to the Home Office by the men's solicitors and in February 1990 a further, limited, inquiry was announced by the Home Office. In March 1990 a Granada TV Programme 'Who Bombed Birmingham' clearly indicated the men's innocence.

The Guildford Four were released following police fabrication of evidence and the suppression of information about an IRA unit which accepted responsibility for the bombings. In the Birmingham Six case, the "World in Action" team has shown that soon after the conviction of the Six, the police had information linking other men, jailed for other offences in Ireland, with the bombings.

The men have now been in prison for nearly sixteen years for a crime which they deny they committed, because of faulty forensic evidence and unreliable statements. **THEIR CLAIMS OF INNOCENCE MUST BE EXAMINED - URGENTLY.**

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Find out more information by writing to the Campaign at the address below, or read Chris Mullin's book on the case "Error of Judgement".
- Affiliate to the Campaign individually, and if you belong to any organisations get them to affiliate.
- Write to the Home Secretary, Mr. David Waddington, and ask him to free the Birmingham Six and completely exonerate the men.
- Write to your MP pointing to the recent developments in the Birmingham Six case asking him/her to write (if they have already written, to write again) to the Home Secretary urging him to free the Birmingham Six and completely exonerate

the men and set up a full and independent inquiry.

- Sign the Campaign petition calling on the Home Secretary to free the Birmingham Six and completely exonerate the men (copies of the copies of the petition can be obtained from the address below).
- Raise the case wherever you can. If you are a member of an organisation, get it to pass a resolution of support for the Birmingham Six and a demand for an independent review of the case (copies of the model resolution are available from the campaign). Please send copies of any resolutions to the Campaign.
- Please send money to help finance the Campaign for the men's release.

**THE CAMPAIGN FOR THE BIRMINGHAM SIX  
HAS NO AIMS OR AGENDA BEYOND THE RELEASE AND  
EXONERATION OF THE BIRMINGHAM SIX.  
IT IS NON PARTY POLITICAL  
IN BRITAIN CAMPAIGN GROUPS EXIST IN LONDON,  
BIRMINGHAM, GLASGOW, THE NORTH-WEST, ROCHDALE  
SHEFFIELD, DERBY, NEWARK, OXFORD, LUTON,  
SOUTHAMPTON, NOTTINGHAM, STOCKPORT  
AND LEEDS.**

To find out more about groups near you, please send off the coupon to:

**Nottingham Campaign for the Birmingham Six,  
c/o Nottingham TUC, Box 5, 118 Mansfield Rd. Nottingham 3  
or National Campaign for the Birmingham Six, c/o Birmingham  
Trades Union Council, 8 Milk Street, Birmingham B5 5TS.**

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I/We would like to find out more about the Birmingham Six Campaign.  
I/We would like to affiliate to the Campaign (£3 waged £1 unwaged £5 organisations  
I/We would like to donate the sum of £.....to the Campaign

Name.....

Address.....  
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