



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER ROCKIN' THE BOAT...

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JAILHOUSE SHOCK RACIST TREATMENT OF BLACK PRISONERS

This article was sent to SchNEWS by long term prisoner John Bowden. You can read an interview with him in SchNEWS issue 34. His current prison address is John Bowden 6729, HMP Edinburgh, 33 Stenhouse Road, Edinburgh, EH11 3LN.

The disproportionate imprisoning of young black people has always been an inevitable result of a criminal justice system inbuilt at every level with racist attitudes and an antipathy towards the black working class community. The facts speak for themselves; while black people make up just 2 per cent of the total population in England and Wales, the Home Offices own statistics for Feb 2003 showed that 16 per cent of all male prisoners are black and 25 per cent of all female prisoners were from the black population.

The reality of life inside prison for black inmates is a continuation of the racist treatment many of them have experienced at the hands of the police and courts, although in the hidden world of prison that treatment often takes on an especially vicious and brutal quality. While most black prisoners experience some form of overt discrimination at the hands of an overwhelmingly white prison staff, the very worst treatment is reserved for those who possess the courage and determination to resist and openly complain about the racist behavior of those managing and running the prisons. The experience of those black prisoners labeled "difficult" and "subversive" is truly horrendous and filled with frequent physical brutality, long stays in solitary confinement and endless transfers, usually to prisons geographically remote and inaccessible to friends and family.

FULL SUTTON PRISON BLUES

The predicament of **Sean Higgins**, a young mixed race prisoner from Birmingham, is an example of the sort of treatment dished out to prisoners perceived by staff as "uppity" and unreasonably proud, as well as the collusion of senior management necessary to allow such vicious repression. In the Autumn of 2005 the anti-racist organization **Black Britain** was contacted by a white ex-prisoner, John McGranaghams, who told them that Sean Higgins, then in the punishment block at Frankland jail in Durham, was being brutalized by prison officers and feared for his life. Mr McGranaghams said he believed Sean's treatment was motivated by racism and asked Black Britain to begin asking questions of the prison department on Sean's

behalf. After contacting Sean's lawyer, Vicky King, who confirmed that Sean had been frequently assaulted and injured by prison staff, Black Britain made contact with Sean himself who described a catalogue of abuse and maltreatment at the hands of racist prison staff, all of it is verified with medical reports and photographs and legal statements.

Sean said that in 1999 while in Swaleside Prison in Kent, several officers entered his cell, subjected him to racist verbal abuse and then physically attacked him, during which they tried to tie a homemade noose around his neck in a mock lynching fashion. He said "I was beaten to such an extent that the police, when they eventually came, refused to accept custody of me, insisting I be taken to the hospital first". The attack on him at Swaleside was one of many and always provoked by his personal complaints of staff racism and refusal to be silent and acquiescent in the face of it.

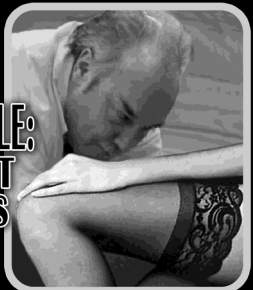
In the notorious Full Sutton segregation unit, a place where violence against prisoners has become an integral part of the regime, he was badly beaten after complaining about racist abuse, and then charged with assaulting prison staff, who required a justification for "restraining" him so violently. He was subsequently acquitted at Hull Crown Court. The jury's verdict in the case supported Sean's defense that he had been the victim of racist and physical abuse at Full Sutton. They found that he had acted in lawful self-defence when attacked by prison staff. When Sean again complained of racist abuse whilst in the segregation unit at Frankland jail in September 2005, he was systematically beaten up by staff, who then inevitably made a counter allegation that he had attacked them without the slightest provocation. Sean is now pursuing a civil action against the prison department for damages. The treatment of Sean Higgins typifies the reaction of the prison system to black prisoners who defiantly resist racism behind bars and is indicative of a whole culture of racism that permeates the prison system from the top to bottom.

FIGHT THE POWER

Solicitor Dan Rubenstein, whose firm specializes in prison litigation, has claimed that a strong culture of racism exists not just amongst basic grade prison officers but also within higher management of the prison dept. According to Mr Rubenstein the prison dept is notoriously slow in responding to letters detailing claims on behalf of prisoners. He says "They have never taken less than four months to respond". He describes follow

Fresh from his success on *Celebrity Big Brother* publicity hungry **George Galloway** has hit on another surefire winner for reaching out to the unpoliticised masses - the member for Bethnal Green is releasing a triple X-rated pay-per-view website...

GEORGE GALLOWAY
in
**INDEFATIGABLE:
HARD LEFT
SWINGERS**
OUT NOW ON DVD



Defending the use of black market blue movies for pinko propaganda a red-faced **George Galloway** told SchNEWS: "I want to attempt to connect with the politically untouched, the millions of people - most of them young people - who are completely turned-off by conventional approaches. It's the *Generation X-Factor*. We need to use new and innovative methods to put across our arguments. I'm determined that there are no no-go areas for us and I believe knocking out porn will be hugely successful for our ideals." Highlights include a scene where on his knees, he licks oil from the Syrian president's hands. Muslim leaders in his constituency are said to be 'cautious' about the project.

up action by the system into complaints of racial discrimination as being "very patchy indeed", and believed that higher management have been directly involved in racially discriminatory actions. He also claims that black prisoners who have made complaints of racial discrimination were constantly transferred; he added: "instead of the grievance being dealt with there and then they just pass the 'problem' onto someone else".

Felix Martin, ex-prisoner and chair of the Prisoners Race Discrimination Unit, told Black Britain that although complaints of racist abuse in prison were high they were probably the tip of an iceberg and unreflective of the true number - "A lot of black prisoners don't bother to report it and just learn to live with it", he said. Mr Martin said that racism in prisons takes many forms and vary from being given small portions of food in the canteen to receiving a behavior warning for pressing a cell buzzer to request a phone call. He said: "Some officers come out with racial insults and there are ones who really bully and pick on certain inmates. When a black prisoner decides to make a complaint that's when it turns into open warfare and the victimization comes pouring in".

The Commission For Racial Equality's (CRE) 2003 report stated that: "Some prison staff discourage or prevent prisoners from making race complaints" and those who plucked up the courage to speak out against discrimination "were punished or victimized for making the complaint".

However, while many welcomed the Commissions investigation there remains widespread criticism of the government's reluctance to instigate prosecutions against prison staff identified as perpetrators of racist behavior. Following the publication of the of the CRE's report, instead of seeking justice for ill-treated black and ethnic minority prisoners, the CRE joined

continued overleaf...

JAILHOUSE SHOCK *continued...*

forces with the government to implement an "action plan for reform", that includes a proposal to appoint prison officers as "mediators" of racial conflict in prison! Felix Martin said "This is a perfect way of ensuring that everything stays inside and nothing gets out. This proposal if implemented, will set the prison system back twenty years". Instead he recommends that prisons be "purged" of racism by legally empowering prisoners and making the system far more accountable. Another important way of challenging racism in prisons is to highlight and support the struggle of prisoners like Sean Higgins, who has remained isolated for years and able to call only on his own courage and endurance in his struggle against racist and violent prison officers tacitly backed up by the whole power structure of the prison system.

It took an ex-prisoner, John McGranaghan, a man who spent over a decade in prison for crimes he did not commit*, to highlight the treatment of Sean Higgins and encourage others to get involved in supporting Sean. It is a political and personal duty of all genuine anti-racists to support those on the inside who are engaged in what is often a life and death struggle against vicious state racism of the worst kind.

* Mr McGranaghan's life sentence conviction was quashed at the Court Of Appeal in October 1991 and is an accepted miscarriage of justice.

☛ Contact **Black Britain** c/o The Colorful Network, Culvert House, Culvert Road, London SW11 5AP, England. Tel: 020 7498 4020 or Helper@colourfulnetwork.net

☛ Next Saturday (28th) there's a **Prison Abolition Seminar**. Resisting prison construction, radical alternatives to prison and abolitionist theory past and present. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn, London 2-5pm. www.alternatives2prison.uk.com

PARK STRIFE

At 4:30am on Monday 16th January, eviction of protest sites in **Dalkeith Country Park** began. Police bailiffs have raided one of the sites, establishing a security cordon around the area but protesters are determined to resist the eviction. The first site was set up in October last year following the announcement that trees would be felled in the area to make way for the A68 bypass - and there were four camps, two have been evicted. The eviction is anticipated to last about two weeks and cost £1.4m. (For more about Dalkeith Park, and other current road protests see SchNEWS 522).

As SchNEWS goes to print, a 40-strong specialized eviction team have cleared out about half of the tree defences in a slow but so far peaceful process. Roads have been blocked to prevent supporters reaching the beleaguered site, but as anyone who's been to Glastonbury should know, nothings impregnable.

People are urged to come down and help out. Phone 077532 80009 or go to www.save-dalkeith-park.org.uk

Inside SchNEWS

Dutch Ploughshares activist **Turi Vaccaro** has been sentenced to six months following his disarming of two F16 bombers. His action was carried out to remember the 60th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. He also has to either pay 750,000 euro compensation for the damage he caused or spend a further year in prison. Send letters of support to Turi Vaccaro, HvB De Boschpoort, Nassausingel 26, 4811 DG Breda, The Netherlands.

☛ Three people in Sacramento, US, have been picked up and charged by the FBI, accused of planning to carry out **Earth Liberation Front** actions. The FBI claim the three intended to blow up power stations and Forestry Service buildings. See www.spiritoffreedom.org

SIGN ON YOU CRAZY DIAMOND

Apparently David Blunkett was decidedly mellow when it came to Incapacity Benefits cuts, at least he was compared to new Work & Pensions secretary John Hutton (weekly salary: £2,600). This week Hutton outlined his plans to introduce a range of penalties for claimants (weekly income: £58 a week) who show unwillingness to take part in 'work focussed' activities. It's a "something for something" approach he told a Work Foundation conference, "help will be matched by increased responsibility on the part of claimants." It's a pity John doesn't believe the rich as well as the poor should have share that responsibility. If he did he wouldn't have to be so worried about nicking money from poor people; he'd just make sure that UK plc paid its taxes.

The cost of the Incapacity Benefit is £12bn a year. That's quite a bit less than the £20bn of tax which should have been paid by the UK's top 50 companies. 'Mind the Tax Gap', a study backed by the Tax Justice Network, found that companies were doing their very best to avoid nuisances like Corporation Tax and VAT, preferring to line shareholders pockets instead. A range of legal blags are available to companies with good lawyers to avoid paying tax, all of which are far too boring to print here.

Nevertheless, the missing tax would be enough to bung every household in the UK £1,000. John Hutton, meanwhile, is far too stingy to actually pay proper money to run his harebrained scheme. Instead the voluntary and charity sector will pick up the work because, in work minister Margaret Hodge's words, "Going to talk to a voluntary organisation is not the same as walking into a Jobcentre Plus office!" Of course not its cheaper and Neo Labour and its corporate sponsors must make sure that the money keeps flowing in the right direction - i.e. into their coffers.

ROCK AROUND THE DOCK

This week there were violent clashes between 6000 Dockers and police during demonstrations at the EU parliament in Strasbourg, over the EU's 'Directive on Market Access to Port Services' proposal to 'liberalise' ports, allowing private contractors to use casualised labour, which will mean job and pay losses, and lower safety to dock workers across Europe. Putting cheap labour without sufficient training and experience in charge of dangerous dockside crane equipment is a recipe for disaster - see the story of Simon Jones killed at Shoreham docks in 1998 (SchNEWS 333). Dockers from 16 EU countries, and elsewhere, descended on Strasbourg for the demonstration where police sprayed tear gas and water cannons, as the dockers used firecrackers and stones to give the EU building's glass facades a make over - with 13 arrests, and 12 police injuries. Elsewhere some 50,000 port workers across Europe were on strike with the ports at Rotterdam, Antwerp and Le Havre closed down. The European parliament rejected this proposal three years ago, and when it went to a vote on Wednesday, it was thrown out 532 votes to 120.

☛ For more see www.labournet.net

SHAC YER BOOTY

In another financial blow for besieged vivisectioners **Huntingdon Life Sciences**, US company American Century have sold their 90,000 shares in the laboratory. HLS have taken potentially illegal measures to prop up their share price. Huntingdon have pulled this stunt several times recently when a shareholders have offloaded their stock and the company panicked about a potential share price crash. SHAC said "What a sure sign that we are on track and just what a mess Huntingdon are in financially". Three major customers and over 100 suppliers were dissuaded from dealing with HLS in 2005.

☛ For more see www.shac.net

SchNEWS in brief

National Demonstration calling for **Justice for British residents in Guantanamo Bay**. Saturday 21st Assemble 12 noon Tothill St nearest tube St James Park. ** **'Venezuela - Bolivarian Revolution, Coal Mining and Indigenous Resistance.'** Report back and film night next Tuesday (24th) 6pm @ The Cowley Club, 12 London Road, Brighton O1273 696104 www.cowleyclub.org.uk ** **'Social centres and autonomous spaces in the UK: where next after Gleneagles?'** Meeting next Sunday (29th) at the Common Place social centre, 23-25 Wharf Street, Leeds www.thecommonplace.org.uk ** **'Shut Them Down!: The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the Movement of Movements'** is out now! For details of how to get copies www.dissent.org.uk ** **'Bury my Heart in Palestine & SchMOVIES 2005'** will be showing at the Duke of Yorks Picture House on 1st February at 6.30pm ** **SchNEWS invites all readers** to send in your stories of events, protests, local struggles, community events etc etc - and feedback or updates about anything SchNEWS has covered is always welcome. 01273 685913 schnews@brighton.co.uk**

TROUBLED WATER

Six years ago the Bolivian city of Cochabamba erupted in riots against Bechtel (see SchNEWS 339), the California-based multinational that had bought up their water and was selling it back at extortionate rates, often more than half of people's monthly incomes. The water privatization was forced on Bolivia by the World Bank as a loan condition back in 1997. After riots left more than a hundred wounded and a 17-year-old boy dead, Bechtel legged it but together with their Spanish partners, Abengoa, sued the country for £23m in 'lost profits'. This week representatives of the Bechtel Corporation and its co-investor, Abengoa of Spain were in Santa Cruz to sign an agreement which will lead to them dropping the case for a token payment of 2 bolivianos (50p). As people win the fight against corporate power, attention has now turned to the victory of the indigenous Evo Morales who won last December's Presidential elections. Morales has been promising to nationalise energy supplies. Whether he keeps his promise is another question, but investors in Washington are naturally concerned and that more or less guarantees future battles to come.

☛ See <http://bolivia.indymedia.org> for more info.

...and finally...

Broadcast last Tuesday on Al-Jazeera, Osama Bin Laden's latest release "*On your knees infidel, before the wrath of the mujahadeen*" has been slammed by industry critics as disappointingly 'samey' and having a 'derivative' feel. Although eagerly awaited for over a year it has already been compared unfavourably to earlier undeniable classics such as "*Hostility toward America is a religious duty*" and seminal sleeper hit "*America, the power of Allah will turn your Empire to dust*". One jihadist pop picker told SchNews "It only seems like yesterday that Osama's call for the faithful to rise up and obliterate the Great Satan felt fresh and 'edgy' but what started in a blaze of originality in the early 90s has just spawned a host of imitators and now it seems as if everyone with a camcorder and an RPG launcher is in on the act. Perhaps like Bowie in the Tin Machine years he's become stuck in an artistic rut or maybe it's just that difficult third fatwa but I personally preferred his earlier stuff, while he was still political". Osama's agent said he was 'disappointed' by the project's reception and was working at an undisclosed location on a forthcoming greatest hits compilation which he hopes will 'crack the all important American market'.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers that appearing on reality TV shows will get you no respect... Honest!

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