

The Ecologist

CAMPAIGNS

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Tribunal Condemns Asylum Practices



A PEOPLES' tribunal organized by refugee support groups has demanded drastic improvements in the treatment of people seeking political asylum in Britain. The tribunal called for an end to detentions under immigration laws and for the government to protect refugees from persecution rather than protect Britain from refugees.

The People's Tribunal on Immigration Rights and Asylum, held in London, was addressed by many refugees and representatives of campaign organizations. The Tribunal's report reveals that Britain detains many asylum seekers for long periods with minimal judicial process. Immigration Minister Nicholas Baker claims "Detention is a necessary part of firm but fair immigration control", but witnesses at the Tribunal pointed out that government policy is to make conditions so hard that people are deterred from seeking asylum in Britain.

Britain received 22,000 asylum applications in 1993, less than half those received in 1991. Of these, some 600 people are currently being detained; the average length of detention is 154 days, nearly three times as long as criminal remand prisoners. Several otherwise customary legal provisions are withheld from refugees under immigration law, including a presumption of innocence, the option of bail and a time limit on detention.

New legislation introduced in 1993 has made it difficult to appeal against the decisions of the immigration authorities who, at present, allow only about five per cent of asylum seekers to stay in the country. Britain's asylum policy is strongly influenced by its relations with governments in the asylum seekers' countries of origin: for example, nobody from India has ever successfully claimed asylum in spite of the political persecution in Kashmir, Punjab and elsewhere.

The Tribunal heard how womens' rights are particularly undermined by immigration law. Women who claim residency in Britain because they marry a British citizen must stay with their husband for at least one year, even if they are abused. Hemlata Patel told the Tribunal that she was faced with a stark choice:

"either to stay with my husband and face continued violence and abuse, possibly ending up dead, or [to] listen to the Home Office and go back to India."

The Tribunal panel demanded that, in such cases, women should not be forced to return to their country of origin, but should be granted refugee status. Other demands included an end to immigration law detentions, the inclusion of refugee organization representatives on panels which decide asylum status, and independent committees to monitor the actions of immigration officials.

Tribunal panel members stressed that immigration detainees are more likely to be released when they have mass support behind them. Eight Algerian refugees, for example, were released from Pentonville prison on the same morning as a support demonstration outside the jail. Throughout 1994 there were a number of protests, including hunger strikes by imprisoned asylum seekers. Many of these were at Campsfield House, a detention centre near Oxford with 200 asylum seekers.

Naheed Ejaz, who was twice threatened with deportation before winning the

right to stay in Britain, appealed for more action to help prevent asylum-seekers being mistreated: "we have had enough of silence, we should be out on the street shouting, refusing to let this happen".

ON AFRICA Liberation Day, 27 May, there will be a march in London linking immigration and asylum issues with British exploitation of Africa through aid, trade and other means.

FOR DETAILS of the march, or for the report of the Peoples' Tribunal, contact: Campaign Against Immigration Act Detentions, 6-20 St John's Mews, London WC1 2XN, Tel: 0171 254 9701.



● In December 1994, a similar tribunal was held in Berlin to assess asylum practice in all European Union member states.

Among other joint measures, EU governments cooperate on border controls, share data about asylum seekers and apply sanctions against airlines which bring people into the EU without proper visas.

FOR MORE DETAILS, contact: Basso-Tribunal, c/o ASa TU Berlin, Marchstraße 6, 10587 Berlin, GERMANY, Tel: +49 30 312 13 98.

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CAMPAIGNS

This section highlights current campaigns, suggests how to support them and gives updates on feature articles. Send details of any campaigns to:

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"Cancer Awareness" PR Condemned

THE US Cancer Prevention Coalition (CPC) has condemned the Breast Cancer Awareness Month, held each October, because it is sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry. The CPC has also released a report showing a significant increase in cancer rates for women living near nuclear facilities.



The CPC criticizes the National Breast Cancer Awareness Month for its sponsorship by British pharmaceutical multinational Zeneca (formerly part of ICI), the largest manufacturer of top-selling breast cancer drug Tamoxifen (see *The Ecologist*, Sept/Oct 1993). The Month's promotional material says that breast cancer is caused by heredity, diet and hormones, omitting to warn women of occupational and environmental dangers such as pesticides or nuclear radiation. Judy Brady of the CPC commented that the Month "is a public relations invention by a major polluter which puts women in the position of being unwitting allies of the very people who make them sick".

A new study released by the CPC shows a significant increase in breast cancer rates

among women living near nuclear plants in the US. A survey of 268 counties within 50 miles of five military facilities and 46 civilian nuclear power stations showed a 10 per cent increase in cancer mortality rates compared with 4 per cent nationwide.

Near five military facilities which emit long-range, beta radiation particles, breast cancer mortality rose by 41 per cent.

The study comments: "This explains why cancers not related to smoking have risen so alarmingly in areas of the US and other developed countries since the nuclear age began, even though the externally measured gamma radiation doses are generally much smaller than those due to natural background sources such as radium and radon."

The Cancer Prevention Coalition, founded in 1993, is composed of doctors, organized labour groups and activists concerned about the environmental causes of cancer, which is contracted by one third of US citizens and killed 500,000 of them in 1993.

CONTACT: Cancer Prevention Coalition, 520 N. Michigan Ave., #410, Chicago, IL 60611, USA.

Contaminated Land Regime Weakened

AFTER MASSIVE lobbying from industry, banks and insurance companies, the British government has abandoned plans for comprehensive public registers of contaminated land (see *The Ecologist*, Sept/Oct 1993). In November 1994 it announced new, weaker measures to replace the requirement in the 1990 Environment Protection Act that local authorities must prepare public registers of Britain's estimated 75,000-100,000 sites that are contaminated by industrial use.

Under the Environment Bill, currently before parliament, local authorities will retain the primary responsibility for identifying land which is significantly polluted. The new law will be weaker than its predecessor, however, as registration will be based on proven, rather than likely, contamination and will reveal little about the condition of contaminated land, or the results of local authority surveys.

Authorities can ask the polluter or the landowner to clean up the site, but only as it comes up for redevelopment and only to the level necessary for its intended use. The Bill is also weak where it states that a local authority will only need to specify "things it considers reasonable", taking account of the costs of remedial action.

The government announcement that neither local authorities nor the private sector will need to find new money to implement its contaminated land plans has prompted suspicion that the initiative will not be taken seriously. Concerned individuals and groups will continue grassroots pressure to prevent the siting of unwanted industrial plants in their area and to ensure that local authorities take action to remediate contaminated land.

CONTACT: Friends of the Earth Cymru (Wales), 33 The Balcony, Castle Arcade, Cardiff, CF1 2BY.

Arun Violations

THE WORLD BANK'S new Inspection Panel has recommended a full investigation after finding "apparent violations of policy" in the World Bank's preparation of a loan for the Arun III dam in Nepal (see *The Ecologist*, May/June 1994).

The Inspection Panel (see pp.228-9 this issue), which assessed the dam after a request by Nepali NGOs, recommended further investigation after finding "clear-cut problems" over compliance with Bank policies on "information disclosure, indigenous people, environmental and social impacts and involuntary resettlement". The three-person Panel also found that, although the Bank has been preparing the loan for many years, it has not properly assessed alternatives to Arun III, which will cost as much as Nepal's annual national budget.

A *CITIZENS GUIDE* to the World Bank and Indigenous Peoples is now available from the Bank Information Centre. It details World Bank policies relevant to indigenous peoples, including those on cultural property, environment and resettlement. The Guide is free to indigenous peoples and NGOs in the South, US\$3 for North American NGOs and \$7 for European NGOs.

CONTACT: The Bank Information Center, Suite 522, 2025 "I" Street NW, Washington DC 20006, USA, Tel: +1 202 466 8191, E-mail: bicusa@igc.apc.org

Narmada Fast

IN DECEMBER the Indian Supreme Court threatened to order a halt to construction of the Sardar Sarovar dam, after a 26-day fast by Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada) activists.

The Supreme Court ordered the Indian government to respond to serious criticisms of many of the dam's supposed benefits, or face an order to stop construction in January 1995. A review, commissioned by the Indian government in August 1993, cast doubt on resettlement plans, the amount of water in the Narmada river and the likelihood that the project can bring water to Gujarat's driest regions. The Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister has also threatened to veto further construction if thousands of people threatened by submergence next monsoon are not resettled by January 1995.

CONTACT: *The Ecologist* for details of campaign contacts in India and other countries.

Pergau Victory

IN NOVEMBER 1994 the World Development Movement successfully argued in the High Court that the British government's decision to fund the Pergau dam in Malaysia from the aid budget was illegal. The government has since admitted that three other projects funded under the Aid and Trade Provision part of the overseas aid budget could be deemed illegal in the light of the ruling.

In 1991, the government promised £234 million for the Pergau dam as part of a deal linked to weapons and construction contracts for British companies. Since the decision to fund Pergau, British companies have secured arms sales to Malaysia worth £1.3 billion, British multinational Balfour Beatty has won the main construction contract for the dam, and 200 British companies have obtained work on the project.

The High Court judge ruled that such wider interests could not justify the use of aid money for Pergau—a project which is “economically unsound”. He found that the government has infringed the 1980 Overseas Development and Cooperation Act, which stipulates that aid must be used for the economic benefit of another country or for the welfare of its people.

The judge ruled that the aid money spent so far on Pergau should be returned to the aid budget and that no more aid should be spent on the dam. The government, however, has refused to refund the £34 million already spent and has pledged to continue funding the project from Treasury reserves.

The three other aid projects which Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd has since admitted may be illegal are a television studio contract in Indonesia, an agreement to provide flight information facilities in Botswana and a contract for a metro in Turkey. Campaigners are now examining other projects funded under the Aid and Trade Provision, which “helps British companies win projects in other countries”.

The World Development Movement has set a precedent with the first legal challenge on behalf of taxpayers to the government's use of public money for aid projects in another country.

CONTACT: World Development Movement, 25 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR, Tel: 0171 737 6215.

Soya Patent Challenged in Europe

A CANADIAN NGO is challenging a patent which gives US company Agracetus exclusive rights to all genetically-engineered soyabeans. The Rural Advancement Foundation International (RAFI) has filed legal opposition to the patent with the European Patent Office.

Pat Mooney, executive director of RAFI, argues that “a patent granting a single corporation monopoly control over genetic research on one of the world's most important foodcrops — soya — is a threat to world food security and demonstrates that the patent system is recklessly out of control”.

In March 1994, Agracetus, a company wholly-owned by US multinational W.R. Grace, was awarded a patent which covers all forms of genetically-engineered soyabean plants and seeds, irrespective of the genes used or the transformation technology employed. RAFI's claim against this, supported by 17 other organizations worldwide, argues that the patent does not establish novelty, does not meet the necessary technical criteria and that its scope is too wide.

RAFI also believes that such broad patents should be rejected on ethical, as well



as legal, grounds because they ignore the role of informal, non-commercial plant breeders and will deter further innovation. Such patents would, for example, outlaw farmers who harvest, save and re-plant modified soyabean seed on their own land.

Although soya is a relatively minor crop in Europe (grown on about one million acres), it is one of the world's most important food crops. The European patent only affects countries which are signatories to the European Patent Convention, but signatory states could legally block imports of transgenic soyabeans, or even products derived from transgenic soyabeans (such as oil or animal feeds containing transgenic soya) from countries that fail to recognize the patent. The recently approved GATT treaty makes this sort of restriction more likely.

Agracetus also holds a patent on all varieties of genetically-engineered cotton (see *The Ecologist*, Nov/Dec 1993), but both the Indian government and the US Patent and Trademark Office have recently begun measures to revoke this.

CONTACT: RAFI, Suite 504, 71 Bank St., Ottawa, K1P 5N2, CANADA, Tel: +1 613 567 6880.

UK to Allow Plundering of Human Ova

THE HUMAN Fertilization and Embryology Authority has decided that more human ova may be made available for embryo research and infertility treatment in Britain, despite clear opposition by respondents to its recent public consultation on the use of donated ovarian tissue (see *The Ecologist*, March/April 1994).

Over 9,000 groups and individuals gave their views on the taking of human ova from women, cadavers and aborted fetuses. Some 35 per cent of respondents opposed any increase in the supply of ova for infertility treatment, while only 7.5 per cent were in favour. On the use of living donors' ova for infertility treatment, 26 per cent were opposed, with only 12 per

cent in favour, and on the use of fetal ovarian tissue for embryo research, 58 per cent of respondents were opposed, with only 7 per cent in favour.

Yet the Authority concluded that ovarian tissue may be used for embryo research from either women, cadavers or fetuses, and that living donors' eggs may be used for infertility treatment.

There is concern, however, that, once embryo research techniques to mature ovarian tissue taken from fetuses and cadavers have been developed, there will be pressure to use such tissue for *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) procedures.

DONATED OVARIAN Tissue In Embryo Research and Assisted Contraception is available from the HFEA, Paxton House, 30 Artillery Lane, London E1 7LS, UK.

Major Shake-up for UK Road Plans

SOON AFTER paying £2 million to evict campaigners against the M11 Link Road in London, the British government announced that much of its multi-billion pound roads programme will be reappraised and some schemes dropped.

In December the government released a report by an independent committee which says that new roads increase traffic, thus invalidating the government's methodology for planning new roads (see *The Ecologist*, July/August 1994). In response, Transport Minister Brian Mawhinney dropped seven roads and ordered "extra assessment" for 270 of the



360 in the current programme.

The dropped schemes include the A13 Wennington-Mar Dyke road improvement in Essex and the A34 Newbury bypass, Berkshire where a diverse set of environmental groups had united in opposition.

Transport campaigners are concerned, however, that other axed road schemes may now be built with private capital, including the A30 Honiton-Exeter route, the A564 Doveridge bypass, and junction widening on the M40.

ROADALERT has moved to: PO Box 5544, Newbury, Berks. RG14 5FB, Tel: 01635 521 770, Fax: 01635 521 660.

Philippine Power Plant Protest

REPRESENTATIVES of Philippines groups went to Tokyo in December to lobby the Export-Import Bank of Japan against funding the Masinloc coal-fired power station in Zambales province.

The Export-Import Bank says it will not fund the project while local people oppose it. Due to opposition from local community organizations and international supporters, the Bank has not released the money it promised in 1990. The Philippine National Power Corporation has repeatedly asked the Bank for more time to persuade people to leave the site.

The Masinloc community opposes the plant, among other reasons, because compensation for the loss of fertile, mango-

growing land is inadequate; the plant would extract groundwater that is needed for local uses; the plant's effluent would pollute a bay where fish spawn; and air pollution could damage human health and crops.

In August 1994, community organizations passed resolutions against the Masinloc project. Filipino groups are asking that international finance for their energy sector go to rehabilitate existing plants and on energy-saving measures rather than expensive new power stations (see *The Ecologist*, Nov/Dec 1993).

CONTACT: Philippine Resource Centre, 84 Long Lane, London SE1 1AU, Tel: 0171 378 0296, Fax: 0171 403 3997.

Bhopal Tribunal Recommends Charter

THE PERMANENT Peoples Tribunal (PPT), which met in London in December on the tenth anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, recommended the adoption of a new Charter of Rights for Workers and Communities.

It also recommended that "communities exposed to or affected by the consequences of industrial hazards should have access to international commissions independent of government and industry", in particular the International Medical Commission of health experts.

The PPT on industrial hazards was addressed by trade union, environmental

and other groups from around the world, examining workplace practices in the chemicals industry and some of the estimated one million chemical accidents every year.

Among many other topics covered, were river pollution from factories in Buenos Aires, lead poisoning in Nicaragua, and women's work with chemicals tested only for effects on men. Many of the witnesses discussed possible reforms of the chemicals industry.

MORE INFORMATION, including the Charter, is available from the PPT, c/o The Pesticides Trust, Eurolink Business Centre, 49 Effra Road, London SW2 1BZ, E-mail: pesttrust@gn.apc.org.

US Reactors Halted

THE "LAST stand for nuclear power in the US" has been announced by the head of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), a government agency which ordered 17 nuclear reactors in the 1960s.

Only three reactors are currently in operation; in December the Authority announced that, during 1995, it will halt work on three of the four reactors it is still building, including one which is 88 per cent complete.

TVA chair Craven Cowell explained that the TVA's \$26 billion debt "has been driven by nuclear construction" and that "it just costs too much to build a nuclear power plant".

IN BRIEF ●●●●●●●●●●

● GREAT WHALE SHELVED

Quebec has shelved its controversial C\$13bn (£5.8bn) Great Whale hydro-electric project (see *CAMPAIGNS*, March/April 1994) indefinitely, according to a November announcement by Quebec premier Jacques Parizeau. Cree indigenous people, who have been campaigning since 1985 to save their lands from this project, believe, however, that Hydro-Quebec may continue to seek authorization for Great Whale, while waiting for a more favourable political climate to start construction.

The Cree and their supporters are therefore demanding that the project and all preparation work be permanently cancelled and are also continuing to campaign against Hydro-Quebec's James Bay and SM-3 dams.

CONTACT: Eastern North American Native Forest Network, PO Box 57, Burlington, VT 05402, E-mail: peacejustice@igc.apc.org

● EU BANS BST TILL 2000

In December, European Union Agriculture Ministers decided to extend the ban on BST milk hormone until the year 2000 (see *CAMPAIGNS*, May/June 1994). The hormone, already introduced in the US, has sparked protests by opponents who point out that it increases illness in cows and boosts milk yields when there is already a milk surplus (see pp.202ff. this issue). No decision has yet been taken on whether to ban dairy products with BST-milk from outside the EU.