



REFUGEE SUPPORT
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It's a knock-out

It could've been a wash-out. The weather certainly wasn't on our side. But luckily CVS had plan B in action and teams from the voluntary sector lined up ready for the Year of the Volunteer 'It's a Knockout Tournament' at
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The victors (nearly) (right)



Editors

Annette Hughes,
David Mezzetti and
Jeremy Cushing

RSG management committee

Meetings are usually held on a Wednesday early every month at 7pm in Wat Tyler House (see above). Everyone welcome.

Every meeting starts by considering any proposals or requests put forward by asylum seekers, who are particularly welcome. Agenda items to the office if possible two weeks before the meeting, please.

ت ازى گروه حما
ي پناهندگان داوطلب م
ردى پند

ن گروه پناهندگان ازى
وابستگان ي تهاى مل
ومختلف

دى نمايت مى آنها را حما

شترى اطلاعات ب يبرا
با ما تماس

Exeter United in kick- it-out final



Anderson Jones writes: In glorious sunshine the final of the first Exeter FC Kick-It-Out Trophy was played. The two teams in the last match of the competition withstood rain, sleet and almost snow to get to the final. Dark Angel (Poland) and Exeter United, which included players from Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, West Africa and France, had earned the right to play on the hallowed turf at St James Park Exeter. After winning the Dark Angels kicked off. A mistake by an
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It's a knockout (continued from page 1)

Wonford sports hall on Sunday 5th June. RSG's team – Ali, Hussein, Gholam, Janat and Ben – oh with Annette as mascot and photographer – performed brilliantly throughout the day with skill and enthusiasm, and big team spirit. From balloon passing to egg and spoon, to three-legged water race and relays, it was unthinkable

that RSG wouldn't make the semi-finals. And what an event that was. Ali geared himself up for the ultimate challenge – Sumo wrestling against the CVS team. We needn't have worried, Ali was far too quick and RSG won hands down leading us nicely into the final.

or passing the baton!! So, alas, the Phoenix team pipped us to the post! But all was not lost with RSG coming 2nd place and receiving a cash prize and warm words from the Deputy Mayor. Well done guys!

[AH]



It was tough competition racing against the Phoenix volunteers in the final relay race. And this was no ordinary Relay race. Sumo-style it provided the audience with many laughs particularly as RSG got the rules a bit muddled and may have forgotten one or two vital components, such as



Exeter player goes for broke in crucial race (left)

Put in caption (above)

The ricin fiasco

Early in April the Wood Green 'ricin plot' trial ended. No ricin (or any other poison) had been found. No evidence was found of links to Al Qaeda. After a series of police raids in 2002 and 2003 ninety people had been arrested of whom nine were charged with attempted murder. One (Kamel Bourgass) was convicted of conspiring with unknown persons to commit a public nuisance with poisons. Four others were acquitted of any offence. The charges against the other four were then dropped. In a previous trial Bourgass had been convicted of murdering a Manchester detective, Stephen Oake, during one of the raids. He seems to have done so in a panic.

During the second (poison) trial the judge ordered a media blackout, which enabled David Blunkett to issue dark warnings along the lines of 'if you knew what we know ...' aimed at frightening the public

into supporting moves towards more drastic erosion of civil liberties. Charles Clarke called for ID cards. Tony Blair said it showed the dangers of WMD in the UK. (Ricin is not a WMD.) Colin Powell claimed it showed that Iraq was a danger to the international community. (No connection with Iraq was shown.)

Kamel Bourgass seems to have been a lonely, obsessive eccentric. DC Oake's family have reacted in what seems a proportionate way: they propose to pray for him. Duncan Campbell suggested an Asbo. Bourgass did possess recipes for producing poisons but they were wrong and probably could not have produced enough poison to kill even one or two people. Eight of the nine accused were Algerian, and some of the evidence at the trial was produced by a tenth man, almost certainly as a result of his being tortured in Algeria. Most of them were asylum seek-

ers. Algeria is a military dictatorship which tortures Muslim oppositionists; Bourgass said he hoped his poisons could be used against 'bandits' back home. However accounts of the case have created an impression that asylum seekers are somehow connected with Al Qaeda and creating fearful dangers to national security. Headlines warned of possible danger of mass attack in the Tube (no-one seems to know where that one came from). The defendants were a ring controlled from Iraq. And so on. None of it turned out to be true. No-one is issuing retractions of the alarmist material previously published. Our government doesn't want us to be calm on this subject: it wants us to agree to control orders, ID databases, limits on juries and so on.

And on that point: it was a jury which refused to believe the prosecution's

CRUEL BUT NOT UNUSUAL

Torture and the 'war on terror'

'No state in the world admits to practising torture and yet Amnesty International received reports of torture or ill-treatment in 150 countries between 1997 and 2000.' These now include the USA in virtue of the behaviour of its armed forces and security forces across the world. There is evidence that the UK is being drawn into this policy too.

Kick-it-out final (cont from page 1)

Exeter player allowed in Dark Angel but they blasted high and wide.

Shortly after that Dark Angel broke into the Exeter danger zone and shot and scored 1-nil to Dark Angel. Exeter threatened after the goal but could not break down a stubborn defence and was caught out on the break and one-on-one with the keeper Dark Angel scored to go 2-nil up and one hand on the trophy.

In the second half Exeter pressed for the equaliser but were caught out high on the pitch and with Exeter totally exposed in the defence, Dark Angel scored again. Exeter refused to be beaten but it was difficult to see a way back for them with time running out fast and the Dark Angel keeper in defiant mood. A good throw from the keeper released Dark Angel down the Exeter right and they moved the ball swiftly to the left and scored again. This was surely the end for Exeter. Unfortunately they were again caught on the break and lost another goal. That was surely it – 4-1 and no way back. Exeter attacked again, however, but the whistle sounded for full time and the Dark Angels jumped with joy at becoming the champions. Exeter had to concede after a hard-fought match. Well done, Dark Angel! [AJ]

Torture has long been illegal in the UK and was banned in the USA by the 8th amendment to the US Constitution, which outlawed 'cruel and unusual punishment'. In the 20th century it became illegal in international law as well. The 1950 Geneva Convention of 1950 banned the ill-treatment of civilians or captured soldiers in wartime. Then in 1987 the United Nations agreed a convention banning torture outright. It was ratified by the UK in 1987 and has since been ratified by the vast majority of UN member states (including the USA in 1994). In spite of this, torture is in fact now an acknowledged part of policy for the USA in its world-wide 'war on terror', and the signs are that other governments (including ours) are being influenced by this.

Nine-eleven was, of course, a traumatic shock to the USA, in spite of the fact that its governments had been inflicting worse atrocities on people in other parts of the world for decades (9/11/73 in Chile, for example). Very early on the consequences for US policy became apparent. In February 2002 President Bush issued a secret memorial stating that 'none of the provisions of Geneva apply to our conflict with Al Qaeda'. When the US began collecting captives in Guantánamo they hoped to evade the strict provisions of US domestic law by using Cuban territory. They also evaded the provisions of international law by claiming that the detainees were 'enemy combatants'. (Geneva applies to civilians and those who have laid down their arms, not to soldiers who are still fighting.) It is now too widely accepted to be worth discussing that many sorts of ill-treatment are

also but also at other US prison facilities, e.g. at Bagram and Kandahar in Afghanistan and Abu Ghraib and Camp Cropper in Iraq.

This has not been enough for those in the US who believe that the urgency of securing information on possible new acts of terror is such that any methods are permissible. The practice has developed of 'renditions', which means passing detainees to other countries where what you might call 'real' torture is routinely practised and which might be expected to help the US security services (e.g. Pakistan, Syria or Egypt). The product of such interrogations is then passed back to the US.

Even this does not seem to be sufficient, however. It is thought that the CIA is developing its own facilities in places where international supervision is absent. In Afghanistan, for example, although the main bases at Bagram and Kandahar are increasingly open to scrutiny there are at least 20 other 'forward operating bases' which are not. At least five people are known to have been tortured to death by US interrogators worldwide.

The UK government

Our own government has not yet permitted the use of torture by its agents (as far as is known). But it is nevertheless complicit in the general moral slide. *Firstly*, we accept evidence obtained by torture, provided it is done by someone else. In August 2003 the Court of Appeal ruled that this was not against British law. Lord Justice Laws said that he could not see why the UN Convention prevented the Home Secretary from using evidence

Cruel but not unusual (cont from previous page)

UK 'unreservedly condemned' the use of torture, but went on to say 'it would be irresponsible not to take appropriate account of any information which could help protect national security and public safety' – another example of the coarsening of the British legal and political system by the government's determination to treat terrorism as (unlike German bombs) having the potential to destroy our nation.

Secondly, the Home Office's hard-line policy on failed asylum seekers is to send them back home even to countries where they are highly likely to be tortured. In the Hany Youssef case (see last November's issue) Tony Blair expressed impatience at the Home Office's attempts to get guarantees from Egypt that Mr Youssef would not be tortured. This impatience has paid off, and the Home Office these days is much less squeamish. Recently the UN High Commission for Refugees publicly condemned the UK's policies in sending people back to countries regarded as unsafe by the UN. 'Our primary concern is, on what basis are you going against UNHCR advice? Why is it safe to return these individuals? It's a question we find puzzling.'

Thirdly, the Home Office's treatment of people who claim, on applying for asylum, that they have been tortured amounts to a deliberate policy of disregarding torture. In February 2004 Amnesty International published 'Get it Right' and extensively analysed the way applicants were dealt with. The overall impression given [read it yourself and see] is that it is in no official's or politician's interest to improve the very low standard shown. (For example, Home Office interviewers did not seem to be aware that numerous countries have developed methods of torture which leave no scars.)

Fourthly, it has become obvious both

Belmarsh and subsequently under various forms of control orders, has such serious effects on mental and to some extent physical health that by any reasonable definition it constitutes abuse.

The British government is in denial on these issues. If you write to the Foreign Office about torture they do not reply. Nor does the PM's office. The Home Office insists on the mantra that the UK is 'committed to the protection of genuine refugees who seek asylum' and that 'we only enforce the return of those we are satisfied are not in need of protection'. It is increasingly obvious that both these statements are untrue.

The problem with torture

Most people would agree that torture is morally unacceptable, and moreover that it should be broadly defined. (The USA has tried to introduce a definition of ill-treatment which does not amount to torture.) However not everyone agrees that it should be unconditionally prohibited in all circumstances.

The possible benefits attributable to the practice of torture by states are that it may be seen as the only way of extracting information from suspects. The classic argument is that, if you have to choose whether to torture someone or to allow a major act of terrorism to occur, you ought to accept that torture is the lesser evil.

However, many people (including many law-enforcement professionals) consider that evidence obtained by torture is not reliable. Victims will admit to anything to stop the pain. It is also usually not checkable by cross-examination in court. (In the case of the tenth man in the ricin trial (see p 2 above), UK police officers were given a list of set questions and not allowed to diverge from them. His evidence raised many questions which they were unable to follow up, and which

probably helped to persuade the jury to reject it.)

Torture also has a political dimension. If the West uses methods which are illegal in its own judicial systems, it undermines the Bush strategy of weaning dictatorships onto western-style democracy or at least moderating their worst excesses. The whole Arab world now knows about systemic abuse in Western-controlled jails: our protestations are unconvincing.

Torture by our armed forces and security forces also invites retaliation on British and UK citizens and particularly members of our armed forces who are captured.

A much wider argument is that torture degrades the societies which practise or even tolerate it. Systematic lying by both the US and UK governments on the subject is only the start. Once governments abandon the most stringent prohibitions, low-level operatives begin to use more and more extreme forms of brutality. People higher up (as in the recent Abu Ghraib and Basra trials) routinely lie or cover up to avoid being implicated. The idea that torture is implicitly acceptable spreads. Judicial standards slip (as in the recent Court of Appeal judgement). Eventually it has to be feared that there will be a general deterioration in moral standards and no-one knows where that might stop.

It has often been pointed out that we are all capable of brutality given the right circumstances. Examples of this occur throughout history, like outcroppings of some dark underlying layer of human nature. It is probably safest to assume that only constant vigilance can keep these from growing and spreading. At the moment, dismayingly, that vigilance in our governments and judiciaries is weakening day by day.

[JC]