Six years after woman's death at hands of deportation squad in London

Joy Gardner's mother issues writ for compensation

Tania Kent
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Myrna Simpson is the mother of Joy Gardner, a Jamaican mother of two who died after being bound and gagged in her north London home by deportation officers six years ago. On Monday she issued a writ against Home Secretary Jack Straw, and Paul Condon, the metropolitan police commissioner, seeking compensation from the Home Office for depriving Graeme Burke, Joy's 11-year-old son, of his mother and causing him psychological damage.

On July 28, 1993 five police officers and an immigration official forced their way into Joy's home in the early hours of the morning to deport her and Graeme, then five years old, to Jamaica. Joy was forced onto the ground, bound with leather belts around her wrists, ankles and waist and then gagged with 13 feet of surgical tape. She suffocated, suffering massive brain damage and never regained consciousness. On August 1, 1993 her life support was turned off. Her son Graeme witnessed these brutal events.

Joy was the first immigrant to die in Britain during a deportation and her killing sparked mass protests throughout the country. A huge cover-up operation was mounted by the Tory government followingJoy's death. This centred on a hysterical media campaign against immigrants in Britain, which was never opposed by the Labour Party or the trade union bureaucracy. Not until November 23, 1994 were three of the officers involved in deporting Joy charged with her manslaughter. They were acquitted on June 13, 1995.

In November 1995 the Socialist Equality Party convened an Independent Workers Inquiry into Joy's killing. Using evidence presented at the police officers' trial, and testimony supplied by Joy's family, the inquiry proved that Joy's death was the direct result of the actions of the deportation squad. Furthermore, her brutal treatment was the result of a concerted offensive by the British government against immigrant workers and democratic rights.

Mrs. Simpson made a submission to the inquiry, clearing the name of her daughter, which had been vilified through the press, and appealing for the unity of black and white workers in the face of this attack.

She spoke to the *WSWS* about the significance of the writ she has taken out on Graeme's behalf.

"I have been denied any justice in the death of my daughter. My aim has always been to win this, never just compensation. But this is a right, and I have to protect Graeme's future. I am taking care of him and he has been denied his mother because of this brutal system.

"He has suffered for years. He is still suffering, having nightmares. He witnessed the whole thing and has been taking counselling to come to terms with it.

"An article in the press today claimed my daughter was an illegal immigrant. Six years after her death they are still printing lies. She was not an illegal immigrant; she was fighting for her right to stay here. They never told her that she was going to be deported.

"In any case, this does not give them the right to murder people. Last month the police killed another man in Tottenham. He was not an 'illegal immigrant'. There have been many deaths in police custody. The police are getting away with it; murdering people, and then there is no justice. We have to fight to change this

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so they can't get away with things that they did to my daughter.

"I don't know how I will get on with the writ but I want people to support me. They should pay for what they have done."

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