

Twenty-five years since the death of Joy Gardner

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On the 25th anniversary of the death of Joy Gardner, the Socialist Equality Party extends its sympathy and solidarity to her family, especially her mother, Myrna Simpson, and son, Graeme Burke.

Joy, a 40-year-old Jamaican mother of two, was the victim of a brutal state murder.

At 7.40 a.m. on July 28, 1993, officers from the secretive Aliens Deportation Group (ADG)—part of Scotland Yard’s SO1(3), specialist operations branch—arrived at her home unannounced to deport her and Graeme, then five years old.

Forced to the floor, she was restrained with a body-belt, handcuffs, leather straps across her thighs and ankles, and gagged.

By 8.04 a.m., police had called an ambulance because she had collapsed and stopped breathing. Taken to hospital, she was taken off life support four days later, on August 1, 1993.

Behind the actions of the police officers involved, Joy’s killing was the result of deliberate government policy.

Joy was born in Jamaica on May 29, 1953—nine years before the British colony was granted independence on August 6, 1962.

When Joy was seven, her mother, Myrna, had joined the tens of thousands of Caribbean worker migrants that—between the 1940s and 1970s—were to answer appeals from the “mother country” to fill labour shortages caused by the Second World War. Like other mothers in her situation, Myrna left Joy to be looked after by her own mother.

It was not until 1987, when Joy was a mother herself and about to give birth to her second child, Graeme, that Joy joined Myrna in England.

Changes in immigration law meant that, while Joy had entered the country legally, her status was

precarious. Up until 1981, Joy would have had the right to British citizenship through her mother, but this had been removed by the British Nationality Act of that year.

Joy consistently sought leave to remain but was rejected. In 1990, she and Graeme were first threatened with deportation and a long appeals process began. Joy, now studying journalism, had to regularly report to police. Her appeal for “compelling compassionate circumstances,” including that many of her family were in the UK and her son had been born here, was also finally rejected.

It subsequently emerged that the day of the raid, two letters had been sent to Joy’s solicitor from the Home Office. Dated July 26, the first said that arrangements to deport mother and son would be made “shortly.” The second, dated only a day later, said the arrangements would be made “now.” The letters had been timed to arrive after the raid, to prevent further legal appeals.

In May 1995, three of the police officers involved stood trial for Gardner’s manslaughter. Detective Constable John Burrell was acquitted on the directions of the judge, and the two other officers—Detective Sergeant Linda Evans and Detective Constable Colin Whitby—were found not guilty.

No disciplinary action was taken against them. There has never been a coroner’s inquest or a public inquiry in Joy’s death.

The International Communist Party (ICP), forerunner of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP), took up the fight to uncover the truth about Joy’s death and its broader ramifications through a Workers Inquiry. It fought for this against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy, who not only refused to lift a finger to get justice for Joy and her family but whose own support for immigration controls had emboldened the then Tory

government's anti-migrant measures.

At the same time, the ICP opposed the proponents of identity politics, especially those organised around Bernie Grant, then Labour MP for Tottenham, with the support of the Nation of Islam, the African Reparations Movement and the Socialist Workers Party. Their promotion of racial politics expressed the interests of the upper-middle class and served only to confuse and divide the working class.

On November 4-5, 1995, the Workers Inquiry convened. The two-day public hearing reviewed the events that had occurred in Joy's home, the medical and police evidence and heard powerful testimony from Myrna refuting the campaign of lies against her daughter.

It also examined the wider context of Joy's death—especially the changes in immigration law and their connection to the overall strengthening of state repression. Submissions to the inquiry included:

- Grace Nnalue, originally from Nigeria, whose husband Joseph died during an immigration raid on their London home in October 23, 1993.
- Olamide Lapite, also from Nigeria, whose husband Shiji died in police custody on December 16, 1994. Cause of death—asphyxia.
- Sarah Ewin, whose husband David, was shot on February 28, 1995 by officers in Metropolitan Police's SO19 firearms unit and died 17 days later.
- Marge Harris, whose son Mark died in police cells on July 9, 1994.

The account of the Workers Inquiry, published as *A State Murder Exposed: The truth about the killing of Joy Gardner*, is of enormous contemporary relevance.

In one of her statements, Myrna Simpson had called for unity to “Stop this barbaric thing that is happening in this country. They are building racism from the top ... It is regenerating. It is regenerating across Europe. That's why they have these laws.”

Twenty-five years on, the powers-that-be have gone much further in their orchestrating and “regenerating” of racism and xenophobia—including the return of concentration camps to European soil.

The deliberate creation of a “hostile environment” against migrants has even ensnared the so-called Windrush generation. Despite having lived, worked and raised children in the UK for decades, an untold number of Caribbean workers have been denied health,

housing, education, pensions—and even deported.

The Findings of the Workers Inquiry published December 14, 1995 warned:

“Workers must reject the notion of ‘illegal’ immigrants. They must regard every attack on foreign workers, asylum seekers and refugees as an attack on the democratic rights of all workers. The working class must take responsibility for the defence of immigrants; fighting for the closure of all detention centres and for full citizenship rights for all people—irrespective of country of origin—including full access to welfare, health and education.”

A State Murder Exposed: The truth about the killing of Joy Gardner can be purchased here for £10, including postage (in the UK).



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