



# BULLETIN

4 March 1988

Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign

10p.



## Home Office expedite appeal hearing

Last week the Home Office expedited Viraj's appeal hearing. In other words, the Home Office is pushing for the appeal to come up as soon as possible. This has to be looked at in the context of the vicious press campaign which the Home Office and its allies have initiated against Viraj. Those sympathetic with the Home Office have written articles in the Times, Police Review, Star, Express, and Manchester Evening News, calling for Viraj's forced removal from the sanctuary and deportation to Sri Lanka. The Home Office plan is simple: if the appeal court finds against Viraj, they would have a strong enough political initiative and enough racist forces calling for his removal to smash into the sanctuary with minimal losses to them. Like the Judicial Review before it, the Appeal Court judges, will be under immense political pressure to find against Viraj. Douglas Hurd said as long ago as March 1987 "I hear that the VMDC is now planning a sanctuary campaign which apparently has as its aim the encouragement of anyone who has a deportation order to seek sanctuary in a church. I cannot believe that this sort of tactic is welcomed by anybody who believes in upholding the law. Certainly David Waddington and I would find it impossible to let this sort of behaviour influence our decision." Douglas Hurd and the Home Office will be pushing forward this line saying that it is inconceivable for the British legal system to grant Viraj refugee status,

when politically this would mean a victory for sanctuary and therefore a defeat for the implementation of British immigration law.

Apart from this political pressure they will try and use the usual dirty tricks. As they did with the Tamil cases, the Home Office will no doubt select a date for the appeal which our QC cannot make. This trick of looking into the diary of our barrister is well favoured by the Home Office. The danger Viraj faces in Sri Lanka, quite apart from the 15 years he has lived here, will be pushed into the background. The British government says that the situation in Sri Lanka is simply "confused". At the same time the International Communities response can be measured by the fact that the Australian cricket team has withdrawn from playing in Sri Lanka, because of the "civil war". Australia has no specific interest or connection with the Sri Lankan regime, their actions reveal the outright lies of the British Home Office. To show our anger and the strength of our resolve VMDC is planning a National March on 21 May. On 11 July, 1987, we mobilised 4000 people onto the streets; on 21 May, 1988, we are calling for double that number. We ask all individuals and organisations to sponsor the event, and to mobilise for it. March with the VMDC behind the slogans "Defend the Sanctuary. Viraj Mendis will stay! Stop all deportations now!"

# Support grows

## Hulme and Moss Side rally round

In response to the police attack on the VMDC Friday march (see last bulletin), which resulted in the arrest of 8 people charged with assault, public order charges and obstruction, many people have rung the campaign and visited the sanctuary to offer help and witness statements. People who live in the Bonsall Street flats above where the march was attacked came out onto the walkways to support those who had been arrested.

A new banner is to join the Friday night marches announcing the new trend; TCK crew from Old Trafford have designed a piece called, "Mendis Mania". On Friday 4 March, as well as the TCK banner, 7 Church banners from Hulme and Moss Side will be joining the march.

### Taking a stand with Viraj

As usual this week the campaign received many many letters and donations of one sort or another. This week Billies restaurant in Chorlton has decided to pledge Viraj a hot meal every day until he wins the right to stay. Contributions have also come in to help cover the transport costs of hiring coaches to attend Viraj's appeal in London, when the date is announced. ACTSS Manchester branch, donated £50.

Many visitors have come to see Viraj as usual. On 5 March, Keith Vaz MP will be visiting the sanctuary and talking to Viraj and Father John.

The campaign this week attended a conference in London, called by the Tamil Action Committee. At the conference Amnesty International renewed its support for Viraj. This was done against the background



"Colin" signing a VMDC petition.

of information given out by people who have just returned from Sri Lanka, all of whom confirmed the absolute danger of deporting Tamil refugees and the bloodshed and confusion tearing the South of Sri Lanka apart.

## Letters

12/2/88

Dear Friends,

During our team sessions we were informed about Viraj Mendis and his struggle against deportation.

We feel that this struggle is also very important for the destiny of others, both in your society and in ours, that are threatened by the lack of Human Rights.

We wish to express our greatest respect and sympathy with you and Viraj, and with those that are campaigning with you.

We hope and expect that your suffering will not be in vain. We wish you personally good health and endurance,

10 signatures from the Rotterdam Urban Mission.

14/2/88

To the Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign, We as members of the Northern Regional Methodists' Student Societies' wish to express our sympathy and support for Viraj in his fight against deportation and the Immigration laws. We also wish to applaud the PCC and the Rector of the Church of the Ascension, Hulme, Manchester, in offering sanctuary to him, and your own campaign for raising awareness of his plight and for supporting him.

We hope that justice for his case will soon prevail,  
Yours, S.B, Northern Methsocs Conference.

19/2/88

Dear VMDC

I am writing to thank you for the very useful account of Decembers meeting on sanctuary.

Our race group in the Chelmsford Diocese is to meet on this subject and we shall find the material very useful. There is a growing interest in the sanctuary movement within this diocese, most notably in the boroughs of Newham and Waltham Forrest where the needs are so great. It may well be that sanctuary will be offered by one of the churches in the near future and we shall certainly be drawing on your experience when the time comes. I wish you every success with your continuing work. Yours sincerely, C.L, Community Initiatives Adviser.

# Sri Lanka - drive towards fascism

Earlier this year, 5 January, a press release from the Indian High Commission, recorded in "India News", attempted to print a rosy picture of recent events in Sri Lanka and cover over the crimes the Indian army have committed against the Tamil people. They described the situation as nearly "normal". Below is a breakdown of this "normal-

## ● Displacement and destitution

Security Minister Athulthudali, gave figures to Parliament in January, that identified an incredible 800,000 displaced people. 270,501 families are crowded into the appalling refugee camps. Each refugee shelter, approx 30 foot in diameter contains 30 to 40 families. Each family lives on the equivalent of £2.40 a week. Contagious and crippling diseases like Malaria and malnutrition are rampant. Jaffna still remains without water or electricity, and Batticalloa in the East, is starving to death; successive harvests have been destroyed and 3000 cattle killed by widespread diseases like Rinderpest.

## Innocent People's Killing Force

The hated Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF), is widely called the army of occupation or Innocent People's Killing Force. When the Indian army attempted a publicity stunt by opening a complaints bureau in late January, 4000 complaints had been filed by the beginning of February. The unit was forced to close, unable to deal with the deluge. The Sri Lankan press widely reports accounts of Indian rape, looting, murder and intimidation. A staggering example of the IPKF bloodlust, took place on 21/10/87, when Indian soldiers attacked Jaffna Hospital. An eyewitness described the incident to the United Nations High Committee for Refugees:

"At 4pm. Sikh soldiers walked into the Hospital shooting at random. When I heard Dr Sivapathasuderam had come to help I tried to come out of the room [where I was hiding]. The Dr and 2 nurses were walking with their hands up shouting, 'We are doctors and nurses we surrender.' They were shot. We tried to get the identity of those killed but it was humanly impossible because of the mutilation and blood. In all 62 bodies were found inside the hospital and another 25 outside, along Stanley road."

## Crisis in Sinhalese society

On 23 December, Harsha Abeywardene, the chairman of the ruling United National Party (UNP) was assassinated. In January, Ronnie De Mel, the finance minister resigned



Tamil refugees

complaining that there was no democracy in Sri Lanka. On 16 February, Vijaya Kumaranatunge, one of Sri Lanka's best known Sinhala film stars, and prospective candidate in the presidential elections was shot dead. On 2 March, the Chairman of Sri Lanka's state run bank, Mr S G Fernando, was the victim of an assassination attempt. These resignations, threats and assassinations, mark the deepening divisions cutting across Sinhalese society. Those named digni-

taries who have died have been mourned publically. But the silent murder of thousands of Tamil people goes ignored.

Jayewardene's regime itself now only maintains power through terror and rigorous security. 150 Green Tigers, deadly terror squads, are appointed to each UNP parliamentarian. Rural administration has become impossible with the mass resignation of UNP officials. According to the Times, 31/1/88, the Special Task Force (STF), trained by Britain to terrorise the Tamils, is now being used against the Sinhalese themselves to brutal effect. Opponents of the UNP and the Indo Sri Lankan Accord were previously encouraged by the UNP to attack and murder Tamils and their supporters: Premadasa, the Prime Minister has said on 23/6/86, "Unless we kill every Tamil militant all talks are useless." (Source: Tamil Ealam Support committee)

## No deportation to Sri Lanka

The international communities response to Sri Lanka can be measured by the fact that the Australian cricket team has withdrawn from playing in Sri Lanka because of the "civil war". If the Australian cricket team which has no connection with the regime fears for its safety, why is the British Home Office deporting Viraj Mendis and the Tamil asylum applicants?

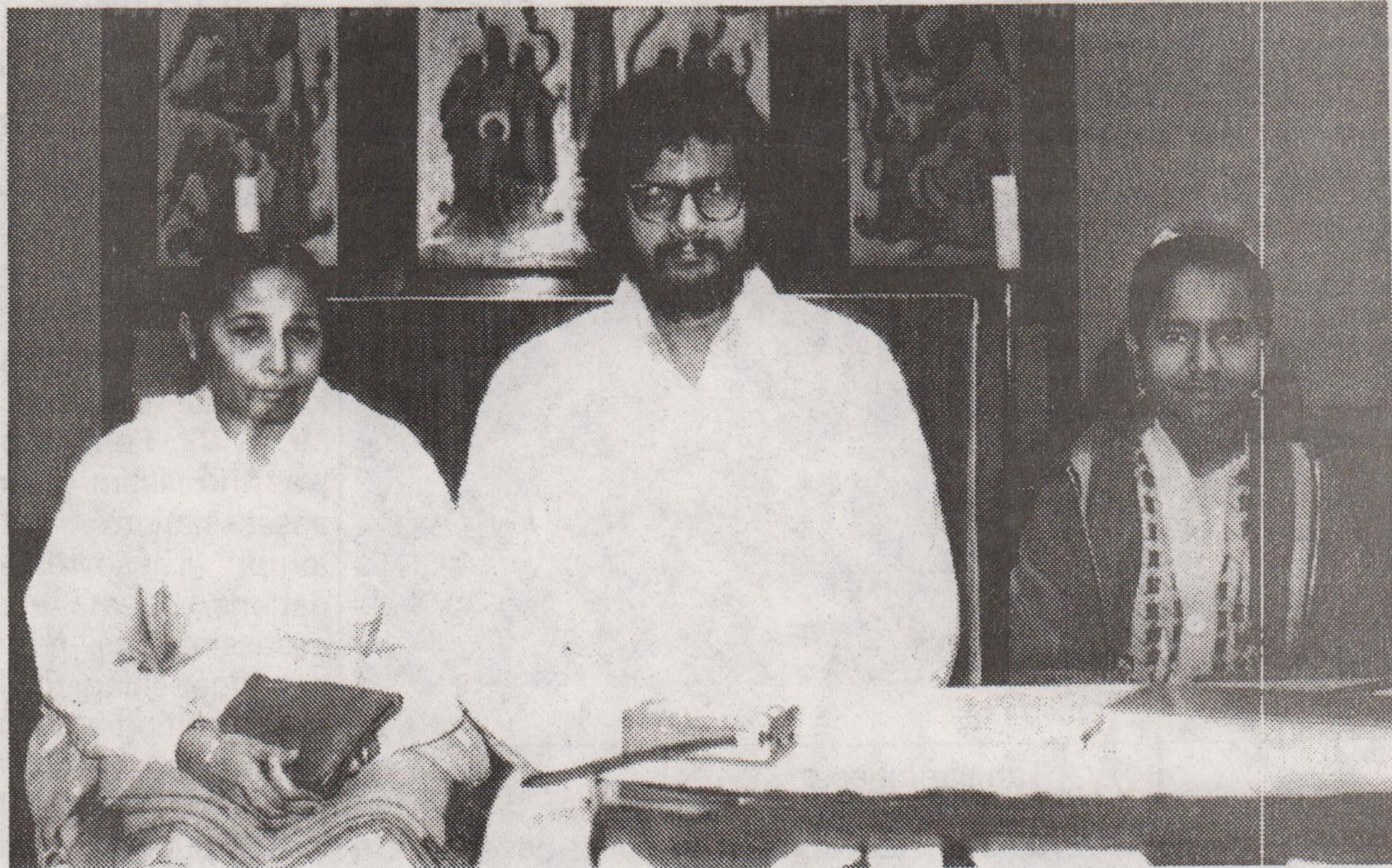
Switzerland too has now reversed its decision to deport asylum applicants back to Sri Lanka. Peter Aabenz, the undersecretary for refugee affairs has been forced to halt his plan of deporting 1500 Tamils by April.

It is clear that what the Home Office refers to as "confusion" spells death for Viraj Mendis and the Tamil refugees. VMDC recognises that a victory for us will be a victory for all the Tamil asylum applicants.

**Adrian**

# Fighting the immigration law

## Unity of sanctuary campaigns



Mrs Singh, Viraj and Salema

On Wednesday 17 February, Salema Begum, her family and campaign, fresh after their victory, spoke alongside Rajwinder Singh's family, after Rajwinder had come out of sanctuary the previous Sunday, at a press conference held in the Church of the Ascension. They all stated that their own sanctuary campaigns had been inspired and aided by Viraj and VMDC. Salema's campaign said: "We celebrate Salema's victory as an advance in the struggle for the rights of black people in this country. But

Salema's family is just one of thousands pressurised by the immigration policies of the Home Office. The forthcoming Immigration Bill will only serve to increase the suffering of such families. Many more people will be forced to take sanctuary." Renouka Lakhani and her campaign from Leicester could not attend the conference, but sent this message of solidarity to Viraj and the campaign: "I wholeheartedly support Viraj in his struggle to escape injustice. I know how it feels to be in sanctuary, a virtual prisoner, and uncertain about the future for so long. A truly humanitarian society surely cannot allow this to continue. That is why I would like to appeal to the Home Office not to break the sanctuary and to please allow Viraj to stay." In pledging their support for VMDC, they have shown that all four sanctuaries are united against the Home Office and will continue to fight back until Viraj is VICTORIOUS!!!! **Jackie**

### Unite Begum with Iqbal

A new campaign is being established in Cheetham Hill, with the assistance of the VMDC. The Home Office are denying the right of Iqbal Choudhary to enter Britain to join his wife, Begum. They married in Pakistan in 1985 and were interviewed in Islamabad in 1986. Iqbal has been denied entry under the notorious 'Primary Purpose Rule', used to prevent Asian people in Britain marrying the partner of their choice. To justify their decision that the primary purpose of the marriage is Iqbal's entry into Britain, they have used such arguments as a) Begum proposed to Iqbal, not vice versa; b) she was divorced; c) Most disgustingly he was unlikely to have genuinely wanted to marry her given the effect of a skin disease on her looks. The campaign will hold its first meeting in mid February and will lobby Begum's forthcoming appeal hearing which is expected in March. For further information, please contact VMDC. **Chris**

### Tinu and her children must stay

Tinu Olowokanga and her six children have been settled in this country for nearly four years. She has a full-time job and has made a home for herself and her children in Manchester. The children are all well settled in school.

Tinu came to Britain to join her husband in 1984 and expected to return to Nigeria as a family, but her marriage broke down in 1986, due to her husband's brutality. Since then he has returned to Nigeria and Tinu has continued to maintain and support her children on her own.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF TINU AND HER CHILDREN ARE DEPORTED?**

"I cannot go home, simply because my life is in danger. Both I and my husband come from the same village. My children will stop schooling and become street traders, because I wouldn't be able to pay the school fees."

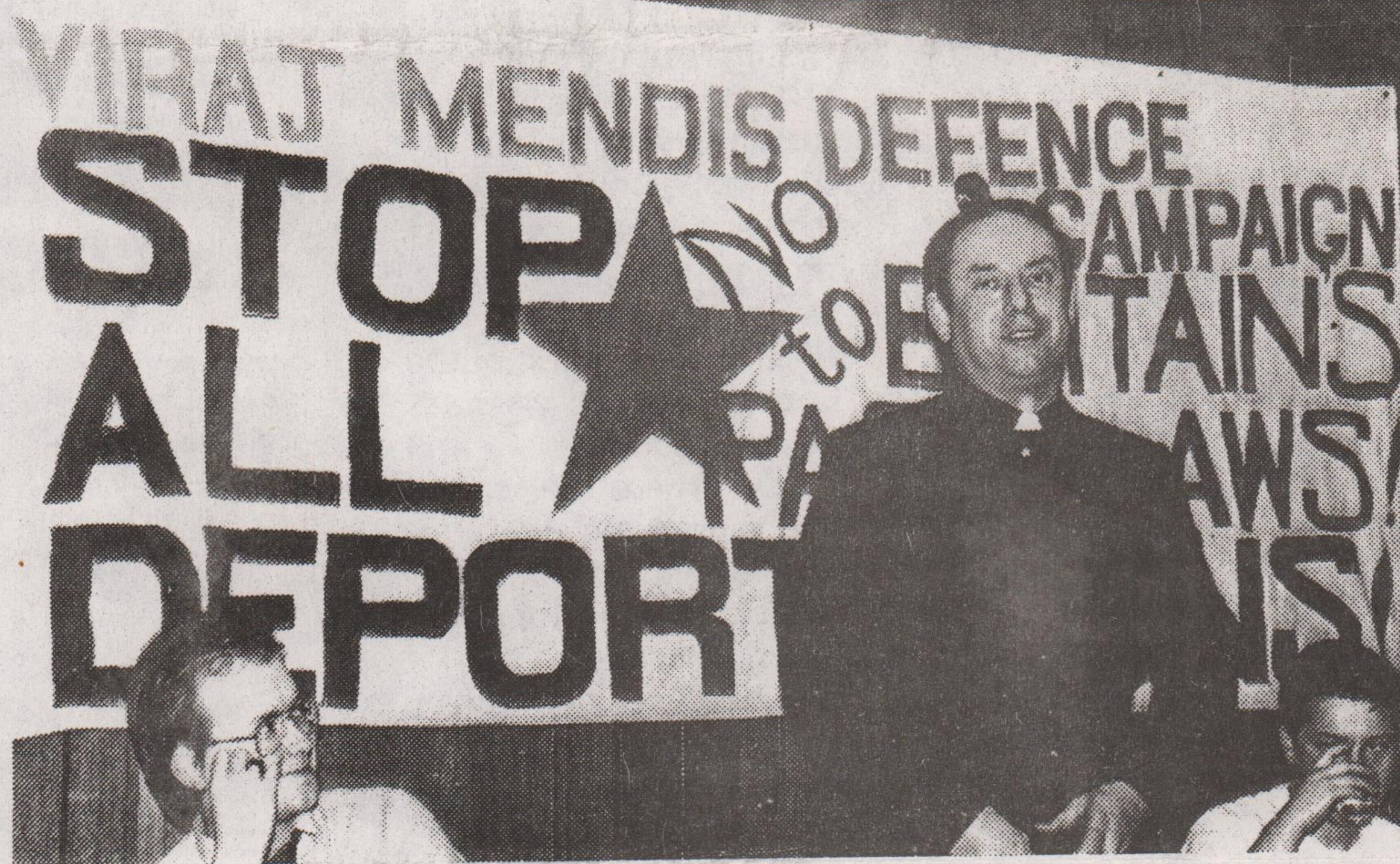
Tinu is also concerned about the safety of the children, given her husband's past violence and brutality towards the family. If Tinu and her family are returned to Nigeria she will not only be exposed to further danger and economic hardship, but there is also a strong possibility that her husband will gain lawful custody of the children.

Both Tinu and her children are under threat of deportation simply because of the breakdown of her marriage, and without support, the Home Office will not grant Tinu and her children the right to stay in this country on compassionate grounds. Tinu's campaign meet every Tuesday, 7pm at Abasindi Co-op, Moss Side People's Centre, St. Mary's St., Moss Side, Manchester. Tel (061)226 6837.

# National round-up by Annie, Jeremy and Nick

## London VMDC in action!

Nearly 100 people attended a lively meeting in London on February 18 in support of Viraj Mendis, who has been in sanctuary since December 20, 1986. Father John Methuen was greeted with a standing ovation and showed the meeting personal glimpses of life in the sanctuary. Paul Weller, author of "Sanctuary- A New Movement?" and vice chair of Christians Against Racism, joined the powerful platform which included Sarah



secretary of the Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign and Simone Dewhurst, speaking for the RCG, who has recently been involved in a massive legal action against police from Cannon Row station for assault. Ken Hughes of "Aluta!" sang a new song he wrote this year for Viraj.

## Nottingham SG forges ahead

Support for VMDC has existed in Nottingham since 1986 when Nottingham Anarchists joined the "Long March" as it passed through the East Midlands. A support group emerged in July 1987, and began holding regular meetings. We began taking collections and speaking about VMDC at political meetings in the area, and secured mailing facilities and donations from a variety of local groups and organisations.

In November, we began mobilising for the "Sanctuary Conference" and the One Year In Sanctuary weekend. We had articles about VMDC and the other Sanctuaries published in "Peace News" and a local magazine, "New Citizen", where they were translated into Urdu and Punjabi. We gained access to local press and radio networks and collected over £200 for the Anniversary Weekend, which we all attended in person.

In January, Trent Poly extended their support for VMDC by offering printing and office facilities to the Campaign, enabling us to organise an all day event for VMDC on Sunday February 21st. A Public Meeting at the Indian Community Centre was addressed by Father John, Keith Vaz M.P., Sonia from VMDC, local

## VMDC taking to the streets

On Saturday 4 February, London support group held a four hour street rally in Wood Green. Shoppers and residents in the area were treated to a traditional VMDC spectacle which included street theatre, music from the Horns of Jerico and singing by the City Group singers from the Non-stop Picket outside the South African Embassy. The event was supported by nearly 50 people, and was a great success. Over £100 was collected as well as hundreds of signatures on our petition for Viraj, proving the mass support that the VMDC has won, not just in Manchester, but across the whole country.

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activists and speakers from Nottingham Black Sections. In the evening a Benefit at the Marcus Garvey Centre featured reggae band "All For One World", activist and poet Martin Glynn, Christine Belle, D.J. Paul Moore, Ben from VMDC and an Asian youth group called the Bhangra Possi who, in less than a week, had already collected over 100 names on the petition in their schools. The event was supported by over 200 people including members of Renouka Lakhani's Campaign in Leicester. Many people came forward wanting to take a more central role in VMDC.

# Join the fightback

## Paving the way

The 24 page report booklet of the sanctuary conference held on December 12 is out now thanks to a group of supporters in Nottingham. It looks good, sells at £1.00, and is a thoughtful, useful and challenging piece of campaigning literature. Along with transcripts of the speeches by Rev. Ken Leech, the Chair of the Runnymede Trust ("the church cannot do other than stand with the racially oppressed today, like it didn't do in Nazi Germany."), Paul Weller, Christians Against Racism and Fascism (roots and overview of the sanctuary movement), Clare Sobers, Committee for the Caribbean Community (fiery utterances of a black grandmother), Father John, Church of the Ascension, (The Bishop, the Pope, and Robert Bradnock), and Viraj (sanctuary movement, communism and christianity, Castro, Immigration Law). There are reports of the workshops that took place, reports on the other sanctuaries, a booklist, and a challenging forward. Because VMDC is a broadbased campaign it is as important for non-religious members to read this booklet as it is for religious members to read FRFI and the Left press. People should consider how they can use this booklet, particularly in challenging local churches to step out in the anti racist movement and to open their doors to those who will be needing sanctuary after the Immigration Bill becomes law.

Judith.

*You can obtain a sanctuary pamphlet from the VMDC, cost: £1.00. Take the pamphlets into your local place of worship and discuss it with them. Get them involved in the sanctuary movement.*

### Future events

Marion Gaima will be holding a picket offer Judicial Review, 10.00am, 16 March, High Court, The Strand, London.

Som Raj will be holding a picket of his immigration appeal, 10.00am, 22 March, Thanet House, 231 The Strand, London.

For transport details from Manchester, please contact VMDC immediately.

## Dossier extracts

With Viraj's appeal court hearing imminent, we are starting to print extracts from our Dossier. These deal with the Judicial Review farce in July 1987. These questions are central to Viraj's case.

Was the question of Viraj Mendis's safety properly considered?

The home office always denied Viraj's claim for asylum purely on the basis of a letter from the Sri Lankan High Commissioner stating that Viraj is free to return, and is not wanted for any offence. The worth of this letter was questioned by Justice Mann himself:

"What would happen to him if he went back?...he may be free to go back but is he going to be in Jeopardy, is he going to disappear?"

When rejecting Viraj's appeal, Justice Mann did not even bother to refer to the question he himself had put, let alone reply to it. He disregarded sworn affidavits from such bodies as Amnesty International.

Additionally he said of the letter:

"What I think about this letter is more important than what the Secretary of State thinks."

However in his summing up he contradicted himself completely:

"It is for the secretary of State to decide the weight to put on the letter."

Justice Mann clearly changed his position between the hearing of the 15 and 16 July and the verdict on the 27 July. We believe that this was due to the fact that he was subjected to considerable political pressure.

## Rallying for the clause by Tony

On 20 February, Manchester saw the biggest demonstration in defence of Lesbian and Gay rights in this country. The event, organised by the Northwest Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Equality attracted over 20,000 people. The VMDC contingent had four banners and our noisy chanting encouraged others to join us. Tony spoke for the VMDC and made links between the oppressions of homophobia and racism.

The current Government attacks on the Gay community were, only a few years ago, being championed by a handful of extreme right wingers. Today, Selwyn Gummer, Douglas Hurd and Margaret Thatcher have all joined in a moral crusade. At the beginning of February, Douglas Hurd criticised members of the Church of England Synod by saying: "What society most desperately needs today is a clear, definite and repeated statement of personal morality." In other words Hurd wants the Church to adopt an openly anti Gay position. **Join the fightback with VMDC Lesbian and Gay group!**

**The VMDC marches every Friday at 5.00pm at Piccadilly Gardens, to the sanctuary, Royce Road, Hulme, Manchester. The VMDC meets every Sunday at 7.30pm at the Church of the Ascension, Hulme, everyone is welcome.**

Please return this slip to: VMDC c/o North Hulme Centre, Jackson Crescent, Manchester, M15 5AL. TEL (061)234 3168.

Name ..... Phone number.....

Address.....

I want to join the VMDC.....

I/We wish to make a donation to VMDC £.....p

I/We wish to sponsor the VMDC National March, 21 May £.....p