Charges dropped

Unite Against Fascism’s (UAF) joint secretary, Weyman Bennett, was arrested at UAF’s counter demonstration against the English Defence League in Bolton in March 2010. He and Rhetta Moran faced charges of conspiracy to commit violent disorder and were briefly subject to bail conditions which prevented them attending UAF meetings. These charges were dropped in November 2010. Another demonstrator, Alan Clough, had a charge of assaulting a police officer dropped after video evidence emerged which did not support the allegation. The Independent Police Complaints Commission will be investigating this discrepancy as part of its investigation into the Bolton demonstrations.

● Russell Fraser

Tough on torturers

A

n Argentine judge has petitioned the Spanish Government to request confirmation as to whether Spanish courts are investigating cases of torture, murder and disappearance of Franco’s political opponents during his dictatorship.

Human rights defenders from Spain have sought assistance from Argentina since recent attempts by lawyers in Spain to investigate the innumerable allegations of human rights abuses, which date from 1936 until the dictator’s death in 1975, have so far been unsuccessful.

In 1977, two years after Franco’s death, an amnesty law was passed in Spain covering crimes committed while carrying out political repression before 1976 by ‘authorities, civil servants and agents of public order’. Judge Baltasar Garzón, the Spanish judge who famously requested the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet’s extradition whilst in the UK, is being tried for distorting Spanish law for his attempts to investigate the human rights abuses of the Franco dictatorship. The prosecution of Garzón led to large demonstrations in Spain and Argentina earlier in 2010 supporting the steps Garzón had tried to take.

Argentina has been a leader in Latin America in bringing successful prosecutions against the perpetrators of human rights abuses during its military dictatorships in the 1970s and 1980s. It has repealed its own amnesty laws and the country now tries suspected human rights abusers. On 22nd December 2010, the notorious military dictator Jorge Videla was sentenced to life in prison by an Argentine court for his role in the torture and murder of at least 31 political prisoners. A massive crowd of families and supporters of the victims cheered on the streets outside. The court had already sentenced a group of former military officers who had served in Videla’s Government to life in prison for crimes against humanity.

● Marcela Navarrete

British complicity in horror

O

n 18th November last year, over 80 people squeezed into a classroom at BPP in central London to hear Gareth Peirce, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Haldane Society, speak on ‘torture’. Gareth’s calm, controlled delivery makes the horrors she is describing even more vivid.

She spoke of the Guantánamo litigation and of how disclosure of documents dragged out of the British Government had shown the British Government’s complicity in torture.

She also spoke of the use by both the British and American Governments of information obtained from ‘out-sourced’ torture, sending their prisoners to brutal regimes for detention. The official use of torture in criminal