

The Musa Ante

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Joking about how we had just become multi-millionaires through changing our money, we stepped out of Istanbul's Ataturk Airport into the heat. Violently the centre of the crowd opened apart while a man seemed to dance and jerk horribly. Throwing himself with all his weight onto the jagged concrete he split open his head, ripping his eye with his broken glasses. He was having an epileptic fit. He was not breathing and his teeth were jammed tight shut and impossible to open. Blood was pouring from his mouth and pooling on the ground from his eye and head. Eventually we got him breathing and he lay on his side gurgling. Taking them away from his head my hands were scarlet with blood. The others looking after him put him in the rescue position. Welcome to Istanbul. After that things got worse.

When we got to the hotel MIM we turned on the TV in one of the bigger rooms. The channel was HBB, soon renamed fascist TV. They had footage of the airport, five or six camera crews had appeared instantly; they had been waiting for something to happen. Although HBB is complete propaganda it still affected us with its barking declarations that we were all 'terrorists' and that one of us, the man who had the epileptic fit, was 'drunk': and that it was obvious what happens when you let terrorists into the country—bloodshed, see that blood well there's going to be more of it if they try to go to Diyarbakir. And we sat there while they made other thinly veiled threats.

The Musa Anter Peace Train was an initiative by Hanover Appeal, a German human rights organisation. The largest immigrant population of Kurds live in Germany, where they contend with a similar oppression to that experienced in South East Turkey.

The original idea was that a train would travel from Brussels through most of Europe and eventually end up in Diyarbakir in the heart of Kurdistan, where we would all attend a Peace Festival. The German government, seemingly on their own initiative, decided to ban it going through their territory and cancelled the railway contract, action which is possibly illegal on a number of points. They did this over the weekend—one or two days before the train was due to set off. The organisers decided to proceed, flying us from Brussels to Istanbul and then travelling by a convoy of buses to Diyarbakir, a journey taking well over 24 hours each way.

Most European countries were represented with around 150 people, including MPs, camera crews, human rights activists, journalists and just seemingly normal people of a range of ages from about 18 to 70. The British contingent was comparatively small, consisting of Joe Cooper and Paul Delahunty, from Liverpool, who planned to video the journey for a future TV film; Arti Dillon and Alan Brooke who are members of Socialist parties; Julia Guest who is a freelance photographer; Hüseyin Çakar who was our illustrious interpreter (and who bears an astonishing resemblance to Al Pachino) and Miranda Watson from the Kurdistan Information Centre in London. That was the kind of 'core group' but we were also invaluablely joined for the journey by Andy Keefe (whom I would describe as a political activist—but was here as an interpreter/co-ordinator) and Francis D' Souza of Article XIX. Bruce Kent and Christine Blower (of the NUT) joined us briefly at the Hotel, Lord Rea I never laid eyes on.

It quickly became apparent that we should carefully

follow whatever advice might be given us by HADEP the Kurdish organisation giving us assistance. They were very brave and kind people, but it was difficult to grasp their advice at all times, what with the fog of our own reactions, conflicting opinion and the general confusion of events and language. So (even at the worst of times) we only had an abstract notion of what was ahead: possibly a lot of people had not fully grasped how 'serious' the situation is in Kurdistan: I know I didn't.

Because of the change of plan we had a few extra days in Istanbul within which various visits, events and meetings were arranged, most of which I took no part in because of sudden severe illness. Julia suggested food poisoning, at the time I thought I was dying and lay for a day in a delirious soaking sweats having the most disgusting weird nightmares.

Around about midnight, after trying to get to sleep with the entire football supporting Turkish nation driving through the streets honking their horns (including the one that plays 'Dixie'), Miranda skulked up to our room. The plans had apparently been changed. The Hanover people had decided in the foyer that the main and over-riding objective was to arrive at Diyarbakir, thus, they determined, in an effort to reach that goal a small amount from each 'delegation' would fly there early tomorrow. The others would follow on by bus as planned. According to Miranda the situation in Diyarbakir would be a "heavy bitch". There seemed to be no plans for getting back—a minor point I stumbled on out of curiosity. As it stood it looked like Alan, Arti, Julia and myself were being offered the chance to go. Joe was at the meeting and according to Miranda seemed "worried about losing all their camera gear".

Photograph: JULIA GUEST



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Photograph: JULIA GUEST

The fact that Joe didn't like it struck me as somewhat backing up 'rule number one': that we should all stick together. Alan had joined us by this point, sheets over his head like a pretend messiah. We agreed to discuss it early in the morning, and we called it a night. The distinct impression that this was some late-night spontaneous meeting in the hotel foyer led by organisation junkies easily circulated round by throbbing brain amongst the other assorted hallucinations.

In the morning the plan turned to nothing. Only a couple of people from the German delegation had been actually pushing for it while the French and Swiss delegations had pressed heavily for the convoy sticking together: "Bang on!" I said. Joe, leaning over into my breakfast laughs with me into my ear: "Beware of Germans preaching Stalinism." We are more optimistic than we were after the paranoia of last night. We have very little on our side: solidarity—i.e. staying together and watching over each other; a message of 'peace'—i.e. non provocative action and organisation—i.e. listening to the people who know the territory. The future would rely on instinct, split second reactions in difficult irrational situations. Trying to pretend to be relaxed I have a word about the "decision making procedure" with Julia. "This is luxury, this is clockwork compared to some of the delegations I've been on. I just want to get on with my work."

Most of the delegations attended their respective Embassies to inform the consulates of what we planned to do. Press reports seemed to have mellowed slightly, as in this example from The Turkish Daily News, August 28th: "Foreign Minister, Sermet Atacanli... made it clear that the travellers who were going on to Diyarbakir would not meet with any difficulty and those who are not forbidden by law to enter Turkey would be met with tolerance." We asked Neil Frape, the Vice-Consul for Press and Public affairs, whom we would later become better acquainted with, what he thought of this and what his impression of the climate was. There was very little he could tell us. Owen Jenkins, another Embassy man, had reported the situation in Diyarbakir as being 'very tense', the 'State of Emergency' being of course very much in place. Mr. Frape provided us with a letter on Embassy note paper, which we imagined would somehow help us in a difficult situation. It did strike me as peculiar that a bunch of 'activists' like ourselves should go crawling to the State for help. Well, using the Civil Service for what it is intended—for any prospective

advantage—seemed like a good idea at the time. The photographers amongst us were also worried about getting their material out of the country and were hoping for the old diplomatic bag. Mr. Frape seemed honestly sympathetic: it must be something of an insight into the smooth running of a democracy to work as a press officer in Turkey, where journalists go missing, papers are closed down in the night and lies and corruption go rampantly unchecked.

Earlier that day Joe and Paul had caught something of possible future significance when they filmed an interview with Mr. Imam Gassan Solomon, a South African ANC Member of Parliament (Justice and Foreign Affairs), this is worth quoting at length:

"We thank the Turkish Government and the Turkish people for their sympathy towards our struggle, but we would also like to offer our assistance to the Turkish Government and the Turkish people to assist in the problem which they have with the people of Kurdistan. And I might as well tell the Turkish people and maybe the rest of the World Community that President Mandela has given an indication that he is going to step down in 1999, that we have a very short time in order to make use of his good offices. And he will be available to assist, and I think he would be the best person to assist, to solve this problem peacefully in Kurdistan."

Still ill I didn't make it to the visit of The Mothers of The Disappeared the next day. It is some indication of our times that a term such as that will be understood by most readers without further explanation. They meet every Saturday (and are also known as the Saturday Mothers) and are treated with inhuman, disgusting, violent contempt by the police—constant harassment and beatings. This is a perfect indication of how far out of control the slide is in Turkey. The eventual repercussion of 'counter-insurgency' is that young men in uniform are made to turn on old women; women who could easily be their own mothers, who themselves are forced to go begging on the streets for information on other young men and women who could easily be the young cop wiping the blood off his truncheon. Another of the South African MPs put it quite well later on that evening, this was Mr. Ahmed Gara Ebrahim who said: "Attending the Saturday Mothers demonstration in Istanbul today reminded me of the anguish of the Mothers, Sisters, Brothers and Fathers went through in our own liberation struggle. One of the fundamentals of human rights is the right to live and the right to feel secure.

As long as these Mothers, Sisters and Brothers do not know what happened to their relatives and loved ones, basic human rights in Turkey will remain violated."

At breakfast, on the morning we planned to set off, we were visited by top Istanbul secret policeman, who gave out some 'final warnings about any form of protest' to Miranda and Francis D' Souza, who had the stomach to listen to him. As we gathered to leave, the Italian barmy army¹ of Communist Party MPs and members began to noisily sing their full repertoire of anti-fascist songs, eventually they are weakly told to shut up by one of the Hotel fat boys. Just two buses took us to our first stop. With all the crush I ended up at the big window at the front as we wove out of the vastness of Istanbul and its homicidal traffic. We gradually picked up a bit of a police escort but they knew where we were going: Kadaköy. On its outskirts the police presence grew to enormous proportions, armoured vehicles and the extensive apparatus of 'crowd control': they became too many to count. Halting in the middle of all this we got out and walked in more or less single file through the police lines and machine guns into an even more astonishing sight—a massive rally of thousands of Kurds who were risking life, limb and liberty to welcome us and see us off.

The organisers estimated that about 10,000 people who had tried to travel on every conceivable form of transport had been turned back. As we walked in we were hugged and kissed like long lost Sons and Daughters, we shook and held hands and just looked into the eyes of everyone we passed—so many people. In utter emotional dizziness we walked into the huge body of Kurds. Joe, Paul and Julia snapped into action with their cameras while I mumbled inanities into my tape recorder. Standing on a car bonnet when we lost someone I got to see the enormity of it: furious speeches were still being pounded out of the P.A. by Union leaders to be met with deafening responses from the crowd. One uncomfortable memory is accidentally looking up at our 'special guests' as Miranda kept calling them, who had climbed on top of a van which was acting as a platform for the speakers. They went up there presumably to be cheered. Seeing Bruce Kent's fat chubby face and cringing at what buffoons they seemed, taking all that applause with silly paper 'Peace Train' hats on their heads—far better, I thought, to be down here and try to talk to some people. But we had started to be directed towards the seven buses which would take us to Diyarbakir and we moved off through the waving crowd and extremely annoyed police.

What the hell was I doing in this country, what the hell did I understand about what it was like to live here? All anyone could do was look people in the eye and show them some respect: we would soon zoom off, but these people were staying; to soon be battered senseless for turning up. At least, I thought, with all its failings, the Peace Train might, in some small way, bring some international attention and recognition of the reality of the Kurdish situation. Undoubtedly the Kurds were more than happy to applaud our efforts. I could not help feeling that we imported something of the class system within the British contingent, which is our problem; but there is something peculiar about a member of an un-elected upper House of Lords, Lord Rea, lecturing a country like Turkey on 'Democracy'.

Up in the mountains, well out of Kadaköy, we were stopped at about six in the evening on the pretext of a passport check, although we hadn't left the country. At the checkpoint people began to get off—those with video cameras and so forth gathering round any potential disturbance, but we were only delayed for about two hours. Paul later let slip that he had been told by a



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soldier that if he didn't stop filming he would be shot.

The journey was long but our spirits were kept up by Yasmien—the Mother of the Bus—who would perfume us with rose water and at one point when the darkness outside was creeping in, actually went round kissing us all. She also led the singing. Kurdish songs are quite similar to Bulgarian folk songs with that open throat, which becomes so charged with emotion. We also had a Kurdish band on board one of the buses who would start up playing practically anywhere and at any time. Their pounding slapping drums and strange reed instruments sprung into action among the flashing blue lights in several God forsaken service stations, where one could obtain the worst food in the World. Food so bad in fact that Julia and I couldn't eat it for laughing about how we had jumped the massive queue, to get at it first.

I think most people were sleeping when we came into Kurdistan. High Mountains were to the left and right of us with a low mist filling the desert ground of the valley. Higher and higher into the mountains and about eight in the morning we were stopped at a military check point at Gazi Antep², near the Syrian border. Previously we had heard of deportations from Diyarbakir including Musa Anter's widow and daughter, several HADEP party members and our 'special guests'. They had also stopped us entering Ankara and driven away the people who had gathered to meet us, so there was no telling how things would go: from here on in we were in the Emergency Zone, under Martial Law. At the checkpoint, the soldiers start to take off one of the 'Musa Anter Peace Train' banners and set fire to it in front of all our cameras and all of us, obviously in an effort to get some kind of reaction thus 'justifying' some bloodshed. Eventually after they have had their fun they let us proceed.

As the people along the way, in greater and greater numbers, wave us on with peace signs; we could also on occasion see them being harassed by the police. At about ten thirty we are escorted into a large and notorious military compound at Urfa and more or less held under arrest. The organisers and MPs and so forth start to negotiate with the Army while the rest of us wander around the compound trying to find shade from the radioactive sun. It is beginning to look like a dead end, but I arrange a bet with Francis D' Souza of 1,000,000 Turkish Lira that we get to Diyarbakir, just for the sheer hell of it. A few moments previously Francis told Joe she was going to find out if we were free to go out of the compound by slowly walking out the main entrance and seeing what happened. He agreed to film her. No sooner had she set one foot in the open space when the click of machine guns signalled that this was a bad move and she quickly turned back. Inadvertently Paul and I began talking to one of the Turkish soldiers, a huge guy obviously in Special forces or something: he is armed with about ten fragmentation grenades, a powerful machine gun with a

grenade launcher attached. I notice a little Turkish flag on the butt of his automatic hand gun—nice to see a bit of individualism flourishing, but it turns out to be quite common. He looks down at us and quietly asks us why we have come to Turkey: "Why not Bosnia or Palestine or..." "Ireland," I interject. "Yes Ireland" he murmurs, "why don't you go there?" "I've been" I reply. "All we want is peace" Paul tells him, and gradually the conversation tails off. It is a bit tricky talking to man who is equipped to annihilate all of us without breaking into a sweat.

Mr Solomon informed us that what they were doing here was the oldest trick in the book, he had seen it many times in South Africa. The purpose of this stop was to enable them to set up men and machinery down the way. Eventually after two and a half hours we are let back on the buses and move slowly towards Diyarbakir. An announcement on the bus tannoy tells us that "the Governor of Diyarbakir said the buses could not come in due to a public safety law. He advised the organising committee to turn back but will allow us to proceed into Diyarbakir Province." Joe and Paul are running out of film and batteries. Standing up and looking at the numbers of the Army, Paul turns to Joe: "Looks like we're going to need another two Scousers."

I don't know what time it was—I was asleep; possibly about four—but we abruptly stopped and an urgent call came out for all press to get up the front. The road to Diyarbakir is a mere two lonely lanes, and as far as the eye can see everything is wilderness and the odd animal skull. No cover, no nothing. Our bus was number five so we couldn't see very much till we got to the head of the convoy on foot. Two huge tanks blocked our path, a huge semi-circle of soldiers at a three metre spread surrounded us, fondling their machine guns. We can see what looks like Diyarbakir about a mile away in the distance but all that long way was lined by hundreds of soldiers and more tanks.³

Everyone is off the buses now sitting down in front of them and in front of the tanks. Chanting and singing began with "Peace" in Kurdish accompanied by a furious hand clap. Two Kurdish women from within the circle of protesters made a passionate speech to the soldiers, until fraught with emotion one of them threw the bouquet of roses she was carrying up into the air and crashed to her knees weeping. I later found out she was the widow of an MP who was murdered—kicked to death—in Diyarbakir, the flowers were perhaps intended for his grave. People started singing the Kurdish National anthem (a frail but relentlessly determined song and no doubt illegal), and 'Ciao Bella' an old Italian anti-fascist Partisan song, together with chants of "Internationale Solidarité!" The soldiers were beginning to look pretty edgy as people put some of the scattered flowers on the tanks.

There was some confusion as the organisers debat-

Photograph: JULIA GUEST

ed with the military what would be the next move. A huddle of press people developed around them, whatever was been decided was in Turkish and then in German, off to the side I eventually found a translator who was making an announcement in English, looking understandably dazed and confused he said: "you see we are stopped here, they don't let us to finish our peace ...eh...trip. So we decided to turn back here. Now we sit down here for a while and we sing some songs but now it's time to turn back. We are going to Sali Urfa and we'll have a rest here, then we'll speak about what we'll do and how we'll do it. Now please everybody get on the buses, thankyou." I knew there had been a bit more to it than that, from what I could pick up from everyone else but we all slowly drifted back towards the buses. The sun was on its way down as a military helicopter landed in the field and then took off again after instructions.

I wandered past the Kurdish band who were out playing alongside their bus and tried to talk into my tape recorder while I gathered a handful of pebbles. I was still curious as to what was happening and bumped into Miranda, I still had the tape running as she tried to speak over the noise of the helicopter:

"There's been about 1,000 arrests [in Diyarbakir] because of us going in. HADEP, IHD—and the organisers of the Peace Train, just now in a coach meeting said that, well, it was suggested that the Europeans take some kind of action—because the worst that could happen was a detention or deportation or maybe a ban. That might cripple solidarity work in the future—with no return to the country; that's something to be considered. On the other hand for our Turkish and Kurdish friends: they said they're willing to die for they're political beliefs, so therefore any action we take, they take the consequences. Now the most serious thing which was suggested—and of course is not a possibility—is that everybody walks en masse to these barricades. There would be overhead firing, they'd fire into the crowd and then there would be mass arrests. *That's not an option for anyone*, also it would be damage to the whole process." The italics here express a tone which I think came into her voice due to the look of abject horror on my face. Miranda carried on: "Other suggestions are to go to Urfa and protest the arrests, then possibly just the Europeans go back here to the barricades. The problem is this area belongs to a Tribal Warlord. You know that car accident we talked about—the Beauty Queen was killed, an MP and a Police Chief and a Mafia guy wanted by Interpol? Well the one who survived has a Contra-guerrilla army and this is his territory, his jurisdiction. So the Germans think it enough to go back and have a 'something', the Italians want something more." I did not like the sound of what Miranda was saying, and started to imagine what this place would be like if we came back here in the middle of the night. The buses moved off.



Photograph: JOE COOPER/PAUL DELAHUNTY



Photographs: JOE COOPER/PAUL DELAHUNTY

It is becoming obvious, once we can judge the size of the police/military escort we are picking up, that we will not be allowed to stop. The convoy is travelling very fast and through red lights. As we pass various small towns the police and army in large numbers seem to be lining the route. When the buses stop at a junction or a roadblock, riot police immediately run alongside the bus. This is by no means over. We are told to keep our seats by Yasmien. We can barely travel one hundred yards without seeing massive groups of soldiers.

It is about seven thirty, and there is an announcement over the bus tannoy: "everyone who tries to enter Diyarbakir the way we went will probably be killed." To be honest I was quite happy to be run out of country, and I mention this to Andy who is sitting next to me. He tells me that the police escort will probably diminish once we have been put out of the Emergency Zone. Miranda is on the phone to the British Embassy trying to find out what happened to Bruce Kent and the others who flew into Diyarbakir; where—the latest news tells us—about 2,000 people have been arrested and they are using the schools as temporary prisons. At about 11 o'clock another announcement suggests that we try a sit down protest at the next stop: "The purpose of this association is to provide support for the mass of refugees—the mass that wants peace the most—they are the victims of the war and they want peace the most. In Turkey it's one of the most danger-

ous things to strive for: peace. Thankyou." Most of the police escort must have left us at some time in the night as there are only two or three police cars, but we have also lost the rest of the convoy. We join up again at about ten o'clock. The headlines in the Turkish press are calling us "Peace Terrorists" which causes a bit of laughter on our part. As the day proceeds it looks like the authorities are trying to force us on to the road to Istanbul rather than Ankara, where we plan to hold a press conference and meet up with Embassy officials from each country. The buses are forcibly stopped at the Motorway turn-off for Ankara and we all get out and up front again.

A sit down protest in front of the buses in the middle of the Motorway is already in progress as we arrived with the press gathering. To one side of the buses it is a quiet little wood with birds chirping, on the other side the police are bringing up heavy reinforcements and redirecting the chaos of the traffic. Two water cannon tanks come rolling through all the police cars and a helicopter circles in the sky. A Military General and the First Secretary of the Police Section and the leader of the Jandarma are putting their heads together and barking out the orders, off at the back of the convoy I notice the riot squad vans pulling up and the men getting out with their shields, helmets and batons glistening in the sun. All the delegations get on their mobile phones to their Ambassadors in Ankara. The German Embassy "declined" to attend and told them to "piss off" in

see the exasperation on Benjamin's face as he tried to be 'diplomatic', but through his and the negotiations of the others the situation turned in our favour. I noticed the riot police get back in their vans and we return to our buses. Despite the precarious nature of the situation there is a little man out there who has turned up to sell Turkish doughnuts, and people are buying them.

Although the organisers agreed to abandon our plans to go to Ankara, and we are now proceeding (with our police escort) to Istanbul, this felt like a slight victory in that we had averted a beating and who knows what else. Yasmien makes an announcement to the bus: "We are always ready to welcome you here, even if Turkey isn't. One day we'll welcome you in Kurdistan." She then asks us if we will come back.

At another, uneventful stop later in the afternoon we are able to buy some of the Turkish press. The Interior Minister is stating that we never met with any disruption and that anybody could go anywhere in Turkey. According to him the Turkish Authorities "didn't tell us we could not go, it was [us] who didn't want to go." According to the Justice Minister: "nothing happened." And this little nugget: "Anybody who is for peace is able to drive over anybody who is against it." We will never know how many arrests were made in Diyarbakir, nor the horror each individual went through. To my knowledge, no 'International' press were in attendance, but we were very close and our information was good. And the many reprisals will go un-noticed: it took a potential 'international incident' to draw out Reuters and AP, who turned out for the Ankara turn-off. The Kurds would have held the festival in Diyarbakir anyway, it is difficult at this stage to assess what, if anything, we have achieved.

With Andy interpreting I spoke to a Kurdish man who is involved in an organisation which aids refugees, I asked him if he had anything to say to Kurds living in exile in the UK and Scotland in particular:

"We understood oppression would go on during International Peace Day—important for us—it could make a more important demonstration. I want you to come back. The importance of the delegations is that they put pressure on the state. Kurdistan is under fire, we're suffering under oppression. Wherever there are Kurds in the World—our solidarity and salvation depends on them. We're expecting help and support from them. Without help from the rest of the world the problem will not be solved. Wherever in the World there are Kurds they can be involved in the struggle—it's international." Looking around, his voice tailed off as we ran into a roadblock at a motorway toll.

Here they split the buses up with a mobile roadblock. Mostly it was plain clothes policemen running around and alongside the buses with the Jandarma hanging back in the wings. Standing up at the back it is difficult to find out what is happening without eyeballing the cops outside the window, but we watch one guy getting dragged off and beaten up. It looks like people on one of the buses (probably the Italians) are getting off and fighting back, here I think two Swiss MPs were arrested. Some idiot suggested that we all get off the bus. Francis D'Souza makes a speech to try to quieten everybody down, people are understandably becoming increasingly panicky as it becomes evident the police are coming on the buses with a view to arresting people, mostly the Kurds and anyone who reacts. Yasmien was arrested and dragged off at the front of the bus on the pretext of having phone numbers on a napkin. People are ripping up cards and pieces of paper they do not want to be caught with as the police move up the aisle of the bus. We had sat our Kurdish friends up the back of the bus with us on the



ous things to strive for: peace. Thankyou."

The confusion and paranoia reached a crescendo when they let us stop at a service station for petrol. As far as we knew we would be ran all the way to Istanbul and people were tired, hungry and thirsty, so there was something of a mad scramble. This was complicated by the organisers telling us not to buy anything because this was a fascist place. Somewhere in all this I heard that a Kurdish guy got his arm broke by the police for attempting to get on the bus, I think he was trying to join the convoy, we could also see some kind of disturbance at the Italian bus. Things almost get completely out of hand, but we manage somehow to get back on the road.

German, the Belgian said that "it was all their own fault and they shouldn't have come." One of the South African Ambassadors talked to one of the top Secret Policeman, protesting about being blocked access to his Embassy, the policeman replied that "he didn't care who he was". Things are beginning to look bleak, when our own Ambassador, John Benjamin arrives. He is not what we expected: long curly hair, about five foot two and obviously only wearing a black suit and tie for his job. He immediately asked us if we want to be evacuated out of the situation, an offer we decline. Once appraised of the situation he begins to talk with the Secret Policeman—who refused to give his name to anyone—apparently directing operations. I could



Photographs: JOE COOPER/PAUL DELAHUNTY

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outside seat. When they got to us foolishly I caught the eye of the secret policeman and kept staring. He was nervous and asked to see my passport. As I handed it over he mumbled something about Turkey being a democratic country and that he was just doing his job and all that. Meanwhile I could see out the window behind him that his colleagues were kicking the shit out of someone. They started to collect all Peace Train material, plucking paper rosettes off people's lapels. After what seemed like hours the buses carried on (with a heavy escort) and we ended up back in the Hotel MIM.

We decided to contact the Embassy to inform them of what had happened to us. This is a transcription of some of the conversation we all had in one of the hotel rooms with Shane Cambell, the Vice Consul involved with British people in distress. He told us he "was not involved with the political situation."

Miranda Watson: "We've got to explode the myth of what exactly is going on here—where is the rule of law?"

Shane Cambell: "I live here I have an intuitive feel of what the Turk thinks I'm not surprised...This is Turkey."

Francis D'Souza: "Well we've got to inform the group with the European Parliament..."

Cambell: "It seems paradoxical—they want in the EU but..."

D'Souza: "The government are not in control, we need to uncover this—the Turkish Ambassador in London said 'we're not in control.'"

Cambell: "I'm meeting the Prison Governor and the Chief Prosecutor—they're in control."

D'Souza: "But not when disappearances occur, not with forces working by proxy."

Joe Cooper: "Journalists are still in jeopardy..."

Cambell: "If they want to be difficult they can be, if they want to stop stuff they can."

There was not much point in carrying on with our conversation with Mr. Cambell. Rumours were flying around the hotel as indeed were members of the Turkish Secret Service (who all seem to drive Renaults for some peculiar reason). We heard that the police had arrested most of the bus staff, which was a private company. There was no news of Yasmien and the

Swiss MPs are being held "in isolation" at some political prison. Exhausted we drift off to bed.

In the morning we discuss plans for leaving early, but the organisers seem to want us to stay. Francis D'Souza and Andy Keefe flew out because their tickets were booked, while the rest of us will stay for the next few days. We are somewhat trapped in the hotel and seem to have been informed that all press conferences have been banned. We are under complete surveillance with countless weird individuals creeping around the hotel. We learn of the publicity in the European press which is all front page news: the Luxembourg Government have already protested about Turkey's possible inclusion in the EU. It is not making much impact in the UK because of the overwhelming press coverage of "The Death of the Century."

The delegations felt that it was necessary to make an announcement clarifying that the Peace Train was not organised by the Kurds in HADEP who were arrested; as was the assertion of the authorities in their charges against all those arrested, which could easily mean long prison sentences or worse. An announcement of this was planned for three o'clock and we contacted Neil Frape, the press officer at the Embassy. Julia, Joe and Paul also planned to give him their film and tapes.

The announcement, which of course would be viewed as a press conference by the Turkish authorities, took place in the hotel bar, which curiously enough, considering what was about to happen, was decked out in a Mexican style with Wild West type wooden swinging saloon doors. Neil Frape turned up about 3 o'clock and he had heard all about the journey. The representatives from the delegations had assembled themselves on the platform of the bar and began introducing themselves, the biggest applause going to Mr. Soloman from the ANC. Julia was upstairs sorting out her camera equipment when I went up to tell her things had started, I left her to it and walked back into the bar. When she arrived she told me that she thought the place was about to be busted and asked whether she should inform Neil Frape, who by this time had all their film. The police were gathering round the saloon doors, as various delegates intro-

duced themselves. Frape went to leave then turned back nervously laughing because when he had told them who he was and asked to leave, they had said "no." So much for diplomatic status in Turkey. I tried to concentrate on what was being said on the platform and as I went to tell Joe what had happened there was a scream from the foyer and sounds of outrage and a scuffle. Most people moved to see what was happening, Paul and Alan were up ahead and when I ran out into the foyer, leaping over the couches, neither Frape, Julia, Paul or Alan were there. The scream we heard was Julia. My momentum took me right out to the front of the hotel and as I skidded to a halt at the plate glass windows I realised I was inches away from who knows how many riot police, whose buses were blocking the entrance outside. At the revolving doors somebody shouted out "English journalist!", meaning Julia and the rest had been arrested. I quickly turned and about half way to the bar saw the riot police assembling for a charge. I shouted for everyone to get back to the bar. As I walked backwards the snatch squads were grabbing their targets and the riot police were coming in through the glass revolving door, which they proceeded to smash to pieces.

I witnessed the bravery of the men of the Turkish police: it takes three of them in full riot gear, with guns as back up, to arrest an 18 year old, five foot nothing female, Maria from Spain.

They were arresting anyone and those who defended them and dragging them out through the wrecked door and mountain of glass. Most of us got into the bar, myself and Arti just making it. A girl standing next to me was grabbed by her long hair and pulled out screaming through the swing doors. I did nothing.

We sat in fear and loathing. I told Joe and Miranda that there was no sign of Paul, Julia, Alan and Neil. It seemed only seconds away from them coming in and finishing off the job. But they had halted outside. I walked the Deputy Police Chief of Istanbul, Mehmet Caglar, who told us in Turkish that we were all under arrest and that press conferences were illegal in Turkey. He reminded us that he could do more or less whatever he wanted with us, stating clearly that if we tried anything even remotely resembling this kind of thing again; that would be that.

Probably round about that time, outside the hotel one of the ANC ambassadors arrived late. This was I think Mr Ebrahim : a very large man who has obviously seen a thing or two in his time. When the police grabbed him he turned around to them and said: "If you arrest me, when you let me out I will fly back to Praetoria and personally beat the shit out of the Turkish Ambassador." They let him go.

Mr Caglar left, seemingly satisfied, and we tried to put the pieces together. Paul and Alan walked back into the bar with big grins on their faces. They had seen Julia and Neil arrested and quickly dived up the stairs to Paul's room. By an amazing co-incidence Alan was phoned by BBC Radio Leeds and did a live interview when everything happened, holding up the phone to let them hear all the glass smashing and the mayhem. Neil had phoned the Embassy himself, while in the back of the bus with Julia and all the others some of whom were very badly injured. Two British Ambassadors arrived and we quickly filled them in.

We huddled up into one of the rooms. Lists were being passed round of all the missing and the total came to about 25 not counting the day before. It was HBB time and sure enough they had footage of everyone being violently flung into the riot police buses. This footage was brutally montaged with old library scenes of 'terrorists' i.e. piles of machine guns and what looked like packets of Semtex, with blindfolded culprits all handcuffed together. They just ran the two

Photograph: JULIA GUEST





Photograph: JOE COOPER/PAUL DELAHUNTY

things together time after time: Peace train/guns, bombs, terrorists, Peace Train/guns, bombs, terrorists as our stomachs churned. We heard that all manner of things were possibly being planted in our luggage by the police who were wandering about the hotel, but there was no evidence of this. We were told that the authorities had cancelled our reservations at the hotel and that we had about half an hour before we would be removed. I should say that humour kept us going here—at one point I laughed so much I thought I was going insane: but it was black, black humour.

After a thorough inspection we gathered our things and met in the bar with another man from the Embassy who offered us another hotel. On hearing from the organisers that we were all being moved together on a couple of buses we decided to stay with the group. We walked out of the shattered MIM hotel through the gauntlet of two lines of armed police, we had been given instructions not to make any symbols or gestures. Under police escort we were driven to the tourist area and a walled holiday camp in whose driveway we stopped. But they didn't want us and we stood around outside the buses as the police blocked the entrance. It was about midnight. It was here we met a journalist from one of Turkey's better but no doubt soon to be short-lived papers⁴. Arti knew her from a previous visit and told me she was a "mad bastard", and she was right. One minute she was standing outside the gates with the police, then she slinked inside like a cat, then she moved closer and closer, then the quick sprint and she was on the bus with us, completely un-noticed. She stayed a couple of nights with us when we eventually found a hotel, although we got split up from Joe and Miranda in the confusion.

The next day we got information on Julia. The prison was as bad as we imagined it to be. One woman nearly bled to death. The first night must have been appalling: the men and women were split up with the women being constantly tormented and sexually harassed during the night, particularly Maria. They were also left without food and water for most of the time. All those arrested were deported or given "assisted passage" as it is called. Julia was last to leave and spent a day there on her own. At one point they planned to put her into one cell with about 100 prostitutes, but due to the huge Moslem demonstration every Friday, and the huge amounts of arrests, the jail was getting to bursting point and she was moved to an office upstairs. One Spanish Film crew were taken to

the airport with guns pointed to their heads.

We could do very little for Julia but we were helped by Sanar Yurdatapan, a Turkish composer and activist, who was also arrested in the hotel. I was interviewing him just after Caglar had made his creepy announcement. As I tried to hide my tape recorder, he just casually stood up with the policeman hovering over him and said: "excuse me but I have to leave, they probably want me as an interpreter or something." He has been arrested many times before.

For the remaining few days we were instructed by the organisers to do nothing, "just act like tourists." The Turkish press had come over to us and our work was finished, anything else could easily become counter productive. We were reunited with Julia at the airport and got the hell out of the country. This has obviously been a personal account. This is the last entry in my notebook:

As tears well up in your eyes there is a fleeting moment when, if you are as short sighted as I am, the tears make a lens and you can see with perfect clarity, but it is difficult to speak. Looking through tears and emotion—compassion—one sees clearly: but only perhaps if the eyes you meet can feel; feel what you feel and see. The Turkish authorities, the National Security Council, the small group of men who run the country have lost all humanity, and I mean all. With the Mothers of the Disappeared they profess willingness to look them in the eye and still brutalise them. The sacrifice the Mothers of the Disappeared make and will make this Saturday is for peace.

Is the struggle for peace in Kurdistan about land? The possession of land? The Kurds are not a possessive people. Astonishingly they bear no enmity towards their Brothers the Turks—this is not a sectarian struggle. They are not separatists either: how could they become separate from Turkey which has only existed in its present 'unchangable' form since the 1920s.

I have in my pocket some little stones, stolen from the road to Diyarbakir, which mean something to me, but I have given most of them away. Will the Turkish NSC prevail? As Ramos Horta⁵ said: "The Kurdistan region is one of the most important in the world with possibly the largest oil reserves in the world...but empires built on armies and oppression will not prevail."

One point on the Peace Train. The accusation was made in the Turkish press that the Peace Train was a

front for the PKK, and a tactic to cause redeployment of large numbers of armed forces, while the PKK regrouped. This does not stand up to any analysis. If the NSC knew this, why did they then so enthusiastically and overwhelmingly fall for it. Am I smarter than the head of Turkish Intelligence? Seven buses of minor political activists, teachers, students, MPs and (it must be said) a few idiots somehow needed, what—20,000, 30,000 police, Jandarma, army, secret police, special forces, tank crews, riot police etc.—to follow, obstruct, intimidate, arrest, brutalise and attack them? And they do this to avoid bad publicity; they arrest MPs and Ambassadors of a European delegation as a sign of good faith towards their prospective joining of the European Union? This is one simple lunacy amongst many and one cannot help feeling that Turkey needs new leadership. The Kurds seem to me to be asking for little more than I brought back in my pocket—a handful of stony arid land, they probably don't even want the oil.

Peace in Kurdistan is far off. It may require a solution for the whole Middle-East. Ramos Horta described Kurdistan as "possibly the most strategic region in the world."

Notes

- 1 God bless them: and all Italian Communists. But at times we cursed them mightily, they are obviously used to fighting with armed police.
- 2 I would really have to question my accuracy as to place names. The following is as near as I can get.
- 3 It transpires that this was not Diyarbakir but a place called Severik, about 40 or 50 km away.
- 4 I won't mention her name.
- 5 Winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace, Horta had spoken at a rally in Brussels Station the day before we left: he is from East Timor.