

***THE  
STRUGGLE  
OF ASIAN  
WORKERS  
IN BRITAIN***

**The Race Today Collective**

# The Struggle of Asian Workers in Britain

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## Introduction

This pamphlet brings together three articles and a set of interviews on the struggles of Asian workers in Britain. The articles all appeared in 'Race Today' at varying, key historical moments in the development of the Asian section of the British working class. They were all written by past and present members of the Race Today Collective.

The interviews with Asian workers were the first to appear — in the April 1974 issue of Race Today. At that time, the Asian workforce, "disciplined, united and organised by the very mechanism of capitalist production" had, for the preceding five years or so, moved to shatter the low-paid, primitive conditions of work with which they had been saddled. Manufacturing industries in the Midlands and the South became centres of bitter strikes and struggles between Asian workers on the one hand and employers on the other. In most cases, the unions had to be fought as well.

It is in this context that the interviews were recorded. Their political significance was aptly described by Karl Marx whose short document, *A Workers Inquiry*, stated as follows:

"We hope to meet in this work with the support of all workers in town and country who understand that they alone can describe with full knowledge the misfortunes from which they suffer and that they and not saviours sent by providence can energetically apply the healing remedies for the social ills to which they are a prey.

... We also rely upon socialists of all schools who, being wishful for social reform must wish for an exact and positive knowledge of the conditions in which the working class — the class to whom the future belongs — works and moves".

Then, in the summer of 1976, British society witnessed a new phenomenon. Young Asian workers and students moved en masse to challenge the constant stream of racial attacks which had plagued the Asian community for a decade before that, claiming the lives of Asians. Mass demonstrations, retaliatory violence, the emergence of vigilante groups characterised this period. Members of the Race Today Collective were active in this movement and remain so to this day.

By mid 1979, it was becoming clearer that the major participants in the mass movement of young Asians were of the view that the movement of Asian workers began when they themselves discovered it. The

consequences of that ahistorical view for political strategy were entirely negative. As a corrective, the Race Today Collective published the two part article 'New Perspectives on the Asian Struggle' which documents significant moments in the development of the Asian working class struggle from day one.

The final article, 'Reflecting on the Trial of the Decade: The Bradford Twelve' records a dramatic moment in the struggles of Asian youth against racial attacks. In a northern industrial town, Bradford, 12 young Asians were charged with conspiracy to cause explosions and were indicted before judge and jury. The majority of the defendants claimed they had manufactured petrol bombs to defend the Asian community in Bradford from an impending, mass racial attack. The jury accepted self-defence as a motive and acquitted the defendants.

Thus, this pamphlet charts the period beginning with mass immigration from the Asian continent to the factories of British capitalism, through the various strikes and struggles, to the dramatic mass confrontations on the question of racial attacks which are characteristic of the current period.

Race Today Collective.  
February 1983.





The immigrants, who came to Britain from India and Pakistan in the late fifties and early sixties, came to sell their labour. The rapidity with which particular sectors of the British economy absorbed this internationally mobile army of labour demonstrates two things. First, that in that era, whole sections of factories were being abandoned by white labour for better conditions, better wages, shorter or regularised hours and supervisory posts. Second, that those immigrants who came from India and Pakistan as individuals from various backgrounds, urban and rural, landowning and peasant, quickly found their collective, political identity as a distinct section of the working class in Britain.

They worked where the work was hard and the conditions decidedly unpleasant. At the Courtaulds Red Scar Mills in Preston, a rayon spinning mill, Asians first sought and obtained employment in 1956. By 1964, a third of all the workers at the mill were Asians. Two departments of the mill were wholly immigrant, organised in ethnic work-teams under white supervisors. In Southall, in West London, there were 350 Asians in 1951. By the mid sixties, Asians formed 12% of the area's population. From this one community, they went to work in four factories, two of which produced bread, the third called Batchelor's Peas and the fourth, which employed 40% of all the Asian workers in the area, Woolf's. By 1965, 90% of all unskilled labour at this rubber factory was Punjabi Sikh.

At Courtaulds in Preston, and at Woolf's in Southall, several skirmishes and two battles, significant in the history of immigrant labour in Britain, were fought between the Asian labour-force and the managers and mediators of British industry.

The same battle has been fought in a hundred factories on parallel issues with similar demands. The pattern of industrial struggle of the Asian workforce, which arrived with the second phase of immigration in the early seventies from Africa, was the same. At the Mansfield Hosiery Mills, in Loughborough in 1972, at Imperial Typewriters in Leicester in 1974 and at Grunwick in 1978, Asian workers, in these instances, largely from African backgrounds, rebelled and organised against the continuity of a colonial relationship which is common and central.

The conditions of work, and the conditions of the machinery on which the labour performs, are essential ingredients of this relationship. Broadly speaking, immigrant labour has always been, and continues to be employed in those sectors of industry in which Britain has not made sufficient and competitive capital investment. The factories are old or converted. The machinery is antiquated. Profits depend on long working hours, on overtime, on low wages, on constant

ployments to step up production. Profits are always gleaned from labour, but in the case of Asian workers, they are extracted with an intensity which the white labour force is unwilling to tolerate.

If we examine the background of the industrial struggles in which Asians participated in the sixties and early seventies, these conditions of work emerge. Of the Courtaulds Red Scar Mill in Preston, where in 1965 one of the first 'racial' strikes took place, Paul Foot says: "In the Tyre Cord Spinning Department the machines never stop. The workers man banks of spindles (about a hundred spindles per machine), rewinding the spools when the thread breaks. The work is dexterous rather than strenuous, but the conditions are decidedly unpleasant. The air is thick with the stench of chemicals and the noise is appalling. Particularly at a time of full employment, it is work which men and women instinctively shun." (Institute of Race Relations Newsletter July 1965).

At Woolf's, the basic pay in 1964 was £11. A worker at Perivale-Gutterman, a textile firm in West London, recalls being the first Asian employed there. He says that in 1964 there was a handful of machines and fifteen workers in the firm. He used to put in 84 hours a week for a pay of 3/6d an hour. Over the years, the same firm employed more Asian workers and expanded, 'till in 1969, there was a fire at the factory. The insurance money paid for a new plant, and the firm modernised its machinery.

In 1974, Courtaulds, a firm which has built a substantial amount of wealth on the labour of immigrants, declared that it had doubled its profits in the year 1972-1973. Courtaulds' Harwood Cash Yarn factory, in Nottingham, built itself on the labour of white women, and gradually replaced this work force with Asians in the late sixties and early seventies. In 1973, Harwood Cash Yarn was hit by the industrial action of its Asian workers. The work they did was described thus: "The work is noisy, demanding, monotonous. The operator keeps an eye on two dozen bobbins of different coloured thread. As they run out they have to be replaced by a fresh bobbin. The work is constant and tiring. But if the operator is prepared to put in a twelve hour day, seven days a week, he can end up with a pay of £35 a week, less stop-pages . . . . . While white workers signed a contract of employment that gave a standard 40-hour working week, the Asians were required to sign for a 60-hour basic week. Many in fact put in a 72-hour or even 80-hour working week." ( 'Race Today' February 1974).

The mechanisms of production in these semi-skilled sectors of industry ensured that black workers congregated together in them. Communities grew around the particular work places. An apocryphal story, purporting to explain the concentration of Punjabi labour in Southall,



says that the personnel manager of one of the firms in Southall was an ex-army type who had been in a Sikh regiment in India, and his special knowledge of Sikhs and favourable disposition towards them nurtured a settlement of Punjabis in the locality of the factory. The truth is, of course, that the Asians went where work was available, where there was a shortage of white labour willing to take on the exploitative hours.

The fractioning-off of black workers into the lower paid and hard worked jobs is the essential ingredient in the colonial relationship that British industry established with its new work force. For the workers, a visible token of this relationship was the white supervisor who was inevitably put in charge of teams of shift workers wherever Asians found employment. In the sixties, very few Asians found promotion into supervisory jobs. In very many factories, Asian labour was hired in gangs and put under the control of one white charge-hand who would allocate the work, dispense overtime, recommend the hire and fire of workers and, in many cases, take bribes for doing or not doing something for, or to, the workers under his charge.

The ghettoisation of labour also meant that the school teacher from Ludhiana, the mechanic from Hoshiarpur, the graduate of Punjab University, the illiterate middle peasant from a village in Azad Kashmir, found themselves working on the same machines on the same shop floor. Britain recognised no distinctions of class or qualification amongst the Asians whose labour it used. It was after the first wave of Asian unrest on the industrial scene, that the distinctions were born. A separation was made between the militants and the docile, between the political activists and the followers, between the rude and the polite. It was in the industrial struggle that management realised that Pakistanis and Indians had political allegiances which may keep one section at work while the other was on strike.

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## Organisation and Strikes

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What started as an effect of weakness became the cause of strength. The localisation of Asian workers in one factory, or indeed in one section of a factory, became the chief nucleus for industrial struggle. The pattern of employment set the pattern for independent organisation. One of the earliest Asian strikes, of recurring significance, was in Woolf's in Southall in 1963. As far back as 1960, an Asian worker in the Woolf's rubber plant attempted to unionise the Asians. Gurdev Singh recruited 400 people and asked for recognition of the factory branch by approaching a district officer of the Transport and General

Workers Union (TGWU). The organiser approached the management of Woolf's who refused to recognise the union. The Ministry of Labour of Harold Macmillan's Tory government was asked to intervene. The Ministry recommended recognition but had no powers to compel it. Woolf's again refused. At the time they were paying £11 a week to their workers, and one of the complaints from the Asian workforce was that charge-hands were charging them bribes to employ them in the first place, and taking money selectively from workers to give them the overtime which would boost their weekly income to £25.

The attempt at unionisation came to nothing that year. Gurdev Singh left the factory. In 1963, in secret meetings held at the homes of Asian workers, 452 workers were again enrolled in an attempt at unionisation. The circumstances which enabled this development, the first rumblings of industrial organisation in the new work force, were both peculiar and, with the help of hindsight, inevitable. Several members of the Executive Committee of the Indian Workers' Association (IWA) were employed on Woolf's shop-floor. The IWA had been set up some years before to act as a community organisation for social and cultural events. Many of the executive members, and the Punjabi workers at Woolf's, had been, or still were, members of political parties back in India. Apart from sending money home to their families, they contributed occasionally to party funds in India by having a collection, or got together to send a cheque to the government of India when it appealed to its citizens for flood or drought or famine relief.

The workers, who came to the secret meetings, were Hindu Punjabis, Sikhs and Pakistanis. They swore on oath, on hastily assembled holy books of each religion, to refrain from giving bribes to charge-hands for overtime. Some brief speeches were made, and the management was approached by elected spokesmen and by the regional organiser of the TGWU who had been contacted. The management again declined to recognise the union. An officer of the management approached Mr Gill, the President of the IWA, to ask him to keep the union out of the factory. Gill refused to intervene. It was true that the workers had come together as the Asian workforce of the factory. They were conscious of their power to paralyse production, but conscious also of the fact that, in Britain, the dialogue between workers and owners and management was mediated by the unions. The workers issued a threat to management.

Management at Woolf's were aware that there was an upheaval on the shop floor, and that several meetings had taken place outside the gates of the factory. They offered recognition to the union, and, at the same time, sacked two of the militants who had formed it.



The issue of recognition of the TGWU branch was connected with four demands that the workers made. The move to unionisation was simply the nearest weapon at hand to redress grievances. The workers put to the management that those paid below the minimum basic wage for the industry should be brought up to par. They wanted stipulated tea-breaks, because resting time had become an issue which caused constant friction on the shop floor. They wanted cleaners to be treated according to provisions laid down by a national agreement (the TGWU regional organiser gave workers details of this agreement, about which they knew nothing). Lastly, they demanded increased basic wages for mill-room workers and an introduction of a system of three grades of workers in this department. The management was willing to recognise the union, but hesitated on the granting of the demands. The workers started a ban on overtime. The management capitulated.

The workers had had a taste of success, and they had organised as an Asian workforce. Their first strike, in October 1964, was unofficial. The Asians walked out of the factory when one of their number was dismissed for being rude to a foreman. The worker said that the foreman had asked him for a bribe. The friction between the worker and the foreman was not new. Every dispute and rumour of dispute at Woolf's had started in the same way. At the end of 1964, with the blessing of the management, the National Officer of the General Workers Group of the Transport and General Workers Union stepped in and negotiated a procedure to be followed in case of disputes of this sort.

In May 1965, this clause, in the assimilation of Asian labour into the processes and practices of the British working class, was tested. It failed the test. Management at Woolf's decided to sack ten militants from the mill room. The workers went through the official procedure to have them reinstated. The management wouldn't have them back. The negotiating procedure, dictated by the National Joint Industrial Council for the Rubber Industry, came into play. Danny Evans, the District TGWU officer, went diligently through the motions of the procedure. It was not what the workers wanted. They wanted backing from the union for immediate industrial action, which they felt confident would get the dismissed workers reinstated.

When the union didn't give them official backing, the Asian work force instituted a ban on overtime and many of them stopped paying their union dues. There were harsh words and acrimony between Danny Evans, the district TGWU officer, and the shop stewards of the Asian work force. Evans, who was trying his best to restrict the dispute to the methods he had always used and had some faith in, was

castigated as a racist. The TGWU offices were picketed by the men, and the union took the decision to remove Evans and put a harder negotiator, with a left-wing reputation and a dedication to unionising the black work force, in his place. The new negotiator, Fred Howell, succeeded in getting seven of the dismissed men reinstated. Two others had already got jobs elsewhere and didn't want to return to Woolf's.

In November 1965, Woolf's again became the testing ground of the early and tenuous relationship between the British unions and the relatively young, black, industrial workforce. A worker called Mukhtiar Singh complained to his shop steward and to security officials of the factory that he had witnessed a chargehand pilfering materials from the factory. Mukhtiar Singh was called before the management and told that since he had been ten minutes late for a shift, he could collect his papers and clear off. He was dismissed.

The Asian shop stewards met that evening. They didn't call a general meeting of the membership. They didn't even check to see who was a fully paid-up member of the TGWU and whose membership had officially lapsed. Most unions allow for a period of non-payment from forgetful or reluctant members, and reinstate them as members, with the proviso that they won't get the full support of union action of one sort or the other 'till their subscriptions have been paid for a specified time. The shop stewards didn't believe that the negotiating machinery would get Mukhtiar Singh his job back. They called an all-out strike for which the Asian workforce mobilised from door to door in the community. The next day, at the factory gates, the workers responded. The TGWU was immediately called in. The Asians mounted pickets at the factory. The strike lasted six weeks.

The management pulled a classic ploy. It issued dismissal notices to the whole striking workforce and sent a letter to most of these employees offering to re-employ them on new contracts. They excluded the militants and people whom they thought were leading the strike.

The TGWU responded in a way which destroyed its own organisation in the factory. After several representations from the workers to the head offices of the union, the TGWU said that the union would give 'industrial support' but not 'official' support to the strikers. Lorry drivers, also members of the TGWU, crossed the picket lines because, on phoning the regional union office, they were told that the strike was not being officially supported. When the strikers asked for strike pay, they were told that several constitutional complications prevented them from getting any. The officials at TGWU headquarters led the shop stewards through a maze of bureaucratic conditions



and stipulations.

When an end to the strike was finally negotiated in January, the men, who drifted back, were given jobs at lower grades than the ones they had held before the action. The two shop stewards, who had called the strike without recourse to any democratic procedure amongst the Asian work force, left the factory of their own accord and never went back.

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## Making Labour History

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In almost all the industrial struggles of the Asian workers, from the early sixties to the conflict at Grunwick in 1978, the relationship between the supervisory staff, the shop floor management and the workers has resulted in industrial action which, looked at from the point of view of unions, may be construed as hasty and out of all proportion to the incidents which sparked trouble. Underlying the flare-up between the worker and the supervisor, which has been occasioned by arguments over tea-breaks, toilet-breaks, lateness, rudeness, racist remarks, is the reluctance of the Asian workforce to a smooth assimilation into the mechanisms and procedures of capitalist production. Suspension, or dismissal of the worker concerned, has led to a show of force by the other Asians whose grievances emerge as the workforce struggles with the questions and issues of effective organisation.

Even those firms which employed the soft glove techniques that more enlightened managements have taken with black labour, have sooner or later come up against the problem of increasing productivity and profit and the resistance of black workers to schemes to achieve it. At the Red Scar Mills of Courtaulds, the first skirmish, which has become a landmark in Asian labour history in this country, was fought. Red Scar is a weaving firm which uses chemical processes. The workers in the Tyre Cord Spinning Department are required to supervise a bank of spindles on a machine. Throughout 1964, Courtaulds was seeking improved productivity from its plants and its management at Red Scar duly negotiated, behind the backs of the workers, a deal with the regional organiser of the TGWU to which the workers belonged.

When an agreement was signed by the union official, the shop stewards, only one of whom was Asian, were told to convene a meeting and get the workers to accept that they would have to supervise one and a half machines each instead of the one. They would get a ten shilling bonus a week. The workers called a meeting with the regional

organiser of their union and asked him to explain the agreement he had made. They jeered him and pointed out that the agreement meant a 50% increase in output for a 3% increase in wage.

The workers voted against the proposals and the plan was shelved for a month. Then, without warning, the workers on the afternoon shift were confronted by line management who brought in red paint and brushes and divided the machines by a boundary into halves. They told the men to start supervising one and a half machines each. The men refused spontaneously and staged a 'sit-in' immediately. The machines began to clog and chaos ensued for 17 hours. Then the black workers, most of them Indian and Pakistani, walked out.

A three week strike ensued. The TGWU chairman at the factory was one Richard Roberts. He immediately began a campaign amongst the strikers to return to work before any negotiations could begin. He declared to the newspapers that the strike was 'unofficial'. Roberts also told the press that the strike was 'racial' and said to Paul Foot, "I could have said it was 'tribal' but that might have been a bit unfair". (IRR Newsletter July 1965). The strikers stayed out 'till mid June, attempting to organise themselves without the precept of precedent, and with no recourse to a black movement equipped to mobilise the assistance they needed to win. The 120 West Indians involved in the action went back to work in early June, when representatives of the West Indian High Commissions assembled a strike meeting and gave them a pep talk about 'responsible behaviour'.

Other outsiders intervened. For the first time the left wing of the Labour Party, in the person of a Mr Ray Challinor, offered assistance to the strikers in the form of attempting to get the left wing trade union movement to respond with support and solidarity motions. In every succeeding strike, with the exception of one or two, notably Imperial Typewriters in Leicester in 1974, the strike committees of Asian workers have been solicited by politicians of the left wing of the labour movement in search of a mass base. These politicians, the last of them to enter the public eye in the glare of Asian industrial struggle being Mr Jack Dromey of Grunwick, have one thing in common. They don't believe in the independent movement of the black section of the working class. Their expertise with union conventions and constitutions, their undeniable ability to get resolutions passed in left wing dominated branches and connections with a labour movement network, inevitably give them, for a week or two, the appearance of men who know their way about class struggle. Not a single industrial strike of Asians or black workers has been won through this network of assistance. And thereby hangs a tale.

At Red Scar, again for the first time in Asian industrial struggle,



the black movement made a much publicised intervention in the persons of Mr Roy Sawh and Mr Michael De Freitas, sometimes known as Michael X. They came from the Racial Adjustment Action Society (RAAS). Their intervention took the form, at first, of a generalised demand from Mr Sawh for a separate union for blacks. De Freitas later told the press, that though he was against white people, he was not for separate unions. The workers listened to both these gentlemen, applauded their spirit and laughed at their anti-white jokes, but couldn't take them or their organisation as serious channels of industrial struggle. It was apparent to the workers, from the beginning, that Michael X would bring them publicity in the quality Sunday papers, but no more. RAAS had no experience with mobilising an independent black revolutionary force in Britain, and didn't seem to the workers as capable of analysing the issue of the strike, let alone mobilising national or international support for it.

Commentators on the early strikes and walkouts of Asian labour were quick to note that the actions took place in those capitalist outfits which had no policy apart from recruitment and hard work for Asians. The race relations industry was in its infancy. The Ministry of Labour noted, in a paper researched for Barbara Castle, the Minister at the time, that patterns of recruitment enabled an Asian workforce to achieve a majority or a sizeable minority of themselves on one shop-floor. It warned against this development. Surprisingly enough, Paul Foot, a journalist of the Trotskyist left, took a similar, only more confused position: "Hysterical references to 'industrial ghettos' can be grossly exaggerated. But the Preston strike shows, that where coloured workers cluster together in separate departments or factories, they lay themselves open to industrial struggles whose consequences can be widespread." (IRR Newsletter on Red Scar, July 1965). Lay themselves open? Lay managements open, surely! Is that just bad prose or a confused political pose?

After the experience of Red Scar, John Torode wrote in 'New Society' advocating more education by the union of their Asian workforces so as to avoid strikes. Paul Foot takes a similar position, concluding his article on the strike with the beginnings of a race relations policy: "If the Red Scar strike shocks management and unions into greater care over communication with and promotion of immigrant workers, its consequences may not be as disastrous as they once threatened to be." Disastrous for whom? Threatening to whom?

For Asian workers, going back to work after a partial defeat with an assurance of no victimisation from the management, Red Scar and Woolf's were among the first attempts at fielding an industrial power in Britain's working class, which operated in spite of the union struc-

tures, which gave a dubious legitimacy to action. To sociologise about the togetherness of the Asian workforce, and their ability to collectivise their struggle through their community network, would be to state the obvious.

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## The Indian Workers Association

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There is no doubt that the Indian Workers' Association played an instrumental part in these formative years. It began life as a cultural and social focus, but faced with the insurrection of Asians on the shop floors of Britain's industries, transformed itself into a political organisation. Support was given to the shop floor revolts, and it pronounced and demonstrated on issues affecting the immigrant population. However, its intervention, as a positive force in the newly emerging independent movement of black workers, was severely restricted. Its mass base was confined to Punjabi workers and the inherent internal splits in its political allegiances, along the lines of fracture in the Indian political scene thousands of miles away, made it an unacceptable vehicle for the struggles of Asians from the African continent, who entered the milieu of British production in the 70's. It was unacceptable too for the young Asians who were born or grew up here who, in 1976, burst onto the political stage in Britain with an unprecedented force. Their slogan was, 'Come What May We are Here To Stay'.

If young catholics had not joined the Irish Republican Army in the sixties and the seventies, the British State would have been able to smash the Republican movement. It wouldn't have taken them long to round up the old guard. A political movement runs on new blood. The Indian Workers' Association in Britain is one movement which has been unable to win such a transfusion. As a political and industrial force, it came to a peak in the mid and late sixties. In the seventies, it inevitably began to degenerate into the position of mediator, into the posture of a support force and into downright conservative, leadership-seeking reaction.

There was no predicting this inevitability. The IWA had its origins in the social and cultural cohesiveness of the Punjabi community. Way back in the late fifties and early sixties, when most of the migration to Southall, Leicester, Derby and the industrial centres of the Midlands was from the Jullunder and Hoshiarpur districts of Punjab, there was hardly any need to come to any organisational conclusions about what Gujaratis, African Asians, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis would



find in organisation. There was hardly any need to apply foresight to fielding an independent Asian struggle in Britain. The early industrial immigrant workers in the Midlands and the mill belt of Yorkshire and Lancashire established themselves in the factories and the communities where they worked, before 'immigration' became a political issue requiring the force and organisation of black workers as a whole.

Starting as a cultural and social meeting place for immigrant workers, as a focus of nostalgia and national pride, the Indian Workers' Association rapidly became politicised as a consequence of the industrial struggles the members faced and, in the late sixties, in response to the immigration laws passed by the Labour government.

In the mid-sixties in Southall and in Birmingham, the Indian Workers' Association was the only resort that Asian workers had when faced with the necessities of publicising an injustice, pushing a demand or trying to win public support and political leverage for an industrial action. The leadership of the Indian Workers' Association came from the workers who had been members of a political party in India. Some were members of the Akali Dal, some were members of the Congress, the most significant had been members of the Communist Party of India. It was these members who gave the organisation some constitutional shape and the vision of continuous contact with political developments in India. They brought to the organisation the discipline of having a constitution, elections, official posts and responsibilities and a fee-paying membership.

Contact with Indian politics was continuous. The IWA followed the fortunes of Indian political parties through discussions, resolutions, invitations to visiting politicians and protests at India House. The Communist Party of India gathered funds from the expatriate workers who may not have been members of the CPI, but who contributed sums for their campaigns at the behest of leaders of the IWA. When the communist movement in India split, the Indian Workers' Association was also visited by schism. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) emerged in 1964 as a mass faction of the CPI, joined coalition governments in two states and defeated CPI candidates in several others. Again in '67, when the Naxalbari movement in India carried forward the further split in the CPI(M), giving rise to the CPI (Marxist Leninists), the Indian Workers' Association gave birth to the 'ML' branch.

The CPI branch, fairly influential in Southall, kept in touch with the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) through some leaders who were members of both organisations. As a consequence it endorsed the Labour parliamentary candidacy of Sidney Bidwell, because the CP in Britain threw its support behind Labour.

The CPI(M) branch emerged as the one which lent most support to the independent struggles of Asian workers on the industrial front. Its stronghold was Birmingham, and the foundry workers of the Midlands were proving to be a more recalcitrant labour force than their employers had imagined. Several strikes broke out in Birmingham amongst Asian workers, and the IWA (ML) was called upon in several cases to provide the know-how to carry on the industrial fight.

The IWA (ML) was led by the late Jagmohan Joshi. This branch of the IWA had to balance three factors influencing its directions and its membership. The leaders of this faction, joined by young Indian intellectuals of the CPI(ML) persuasion, studying at the LSE or some other British college, set themselves the task of propagandising the China-leaning policies, 'the violent revolution' policies of the early ML groups in India. In Britain, they had to take into account the facts of the material struggle of the members on the shop-floor of foundries, mills and factories. The outstanding fact was that Asian workers were disciplined, in their response to shop-floor issues, by the precise conditions of the work itself and not by a 'Maoist' ideology. The IWA (ML) also incorporated, out of courage, vision and necessity, the emerging 'black power' ideology that was generating militant revolutionary organisation amongst young West Indians.

For some of the activists of the IWA, this last ingredient was a bit difficult to swallow. Their leadership seemed to champion it. There were connections, tenuous and wary, between the IWA and the Black Panther Movement, the Black Unity and Freedom Party and other groups that identified themselves as part of a black dawn in Britain. When the Black Panther Movement took the initiative, in 1971, of calling a National Conference on The Rights of Black People, and booked the Alexandra Palace in which to do it, the IWA sent a grudging delegation. The twenty or so people who turned up in a coach from Birmingham had obviously discussed the potential of the conference before they came. They didn't want to be participants; they wanted to be observers. The conference was to last two days. After the first half of the first day, the IWA walked out. "What is the ideology, what is the line? We don't understand. Anybody seems to be getting up to say anything."

They went back to Birmingham feeling that the black power movement could talk endlessly about the rights of black people. They were an Asian organisation willing to make common cause with West Indians under the political label 'black', but there was no far-reaching analysis of imperialism, no ideological denunciation of Russia. They couldn't join. They had behind them the confidence of having organised a conference of militants from the factories of the Midlands which



had been on strike in the previous two years.

They never made common cause with the West Indian organisations again, except when the delegations of both populations met on the anti-immigration statute demonstrations called in London in '68 and '70, when coaches came down from Birmingham and contingents set out from Brixton and Notting Hill to denounce Callaghan, then Home Secretary in the Wilson Government, as a racist. The demonstration against the Kenyan Asian Bill, passed by the Labour government in record time (between conception as a Bill and execution as an act, it went through the shortest gestation in British history) was the most massive.

In Leicester, four thousand people marched against Callaghan's Bill. The IWA, predominantly the CP(M) wing, had mobilised the Asian working community and the student and organised left-wing sections of white society. In London, the demonstration was fifteen thousand strong. There were West Indians and Asians and whites. The whites were organised behind the banners of the Communist Party, the International Socialists and the handful of trade union officials who were influenced by their membership of political parties. The West Indians, in a minority, followed the banners of black power groups. The Asians, in the largest community groupings, from Birmingham, Southall, Leamington Spa, Derby, Coventry and Leicester, followed the banners of the IWA.

In all its history, the Indian Workers' Association never emerged as the prime moving force in any industrial struggle. In the sixties, workers in factories turned to it for organisation. In the seventies, with the settlement of the African Asians, on whose behalf the IWA had demonstrated and agitated, a new force emerged. The IWA gave it meagre, verbal and financial support and, in one or two significant cases, blundered into opposing the impatience and independence of this new battalion on the Asian industrial front.

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## The Struggle of African Asians

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The new Asians came from Africa. A lot of sociological claptrap had been written about them, and their forced migration from Kenya in '68, and the later migration of thousands from Amin's Uganda.

A minority of these migrants came to Britain and attempted to enter a profession or use some accumulated or borrowed capital to set up a shop or a small business. The majority of them went into the labouring that Asians before them had done. The single, significant fact about the Asians from Africa, that this article is concerned with,

is that it was a majority of African Asians who brought about and carried through the industrial struggles of Mansfield Hosiery Mills in Loughborough in '73, the Imperial Typewriters strike in Leicester in '74 and the Grunwick struggle in Willesden in '77.

For African Asians, the discipline of factory shift work was new. Large numbers of women, who had never done a day's paid labour outside the home, were forced by the exigencies of family economy or sheer individual survival, to seek employment in factories. The supervisory structures of the factories, into which they went, were unacceptable to them. The women at Imperial Typewriters repeatedly told reporters during the strike that what they objected to was the white male supervisors regulating the time they spent in the toilets. "We won't be treated like slaves."

In all the industrial disputes of the sixties and seventies, this clash between the management and supervisors, and the basic expectation of decency from the work-force, played a part. The African Asians continued to be employed in those areas of industry which white workers had abandoned. In a report on the West Midlands, written by Denis Brooks for the Runnymede Trust, he generalises about his research findings:

"Primarily black workers are found in numbers in those establishments where sufficient white workers could not be recruited and retained. Whether managers in these establishments were 'liberal' or 'prejudiced' towards black workers was almost completely irrelevant; they needed to recruit, black workers were available".

While this may be so, the pattern of disputes suggest that the treatment of the Asian labour force by the supervisory staff is not an irrelevant factor. In Mansfield Hosiery Mills in Loughborough, where the dispute was about promotions to grades reserved for white workers, the management's desire to keep Asian labour in semi-skilled work played a part. The Grunwick strike was triggered by the walkout of a few young Asians after an argument with a supervisor.

The Asian industrial struggles of the seventies were a mass rejection of unskilled and semi-skilled work, the hours of employment, the structural racism which prevented promotion out of the badly-paid sectors of the economy. The foundry workers of the Midlands were working in the sixties for as little as £14 a week. In 1968, at the Midlands Motor Cylinder Company, Asian workers protested against the promotion of a white worker above their heads in their work section. The workers struck until the promotion was withdrawn.

At Mansfield Hosiery Mills, the promotion issue was central. The Asian workforce operated in the semi-mechanised part of the factory and white workers were recruited to the mechanised side, given 'skilled'



status and better pay and hours. The Mansfield Strike became a national issue because the workforce was divided on racial lines by the grading inherent in the management's production plan. The strikers had to fight the combined force of the management and the National Union of Hosiery Workers whose officials declared themselves against the strike and made several racist remarks which the newspapers picked up.

Imperial Typewriters followed in 1974. The divide between the organised white labour movement and the organised independent struggle of an Asian work force became a historical fact, one from which there was no return. The strike lasted three months. What was the strike about? It was an organised assault on the colonial relations that characterised the employment of Asians in Britain. The workers, who walked out of the factory on Mayday 1974, complained about the low pay, the fiddling of bonuses, the constant harassment of the workforce for more productivity, the imbalance in the production targets given to blacks and whites, the non-existence of Asian shop stewards, the restrictions that made up their daily working lives as compared to those of the white workers – washing time, tea breaks, lunch breaks, toilet breaks, dignity.

The Transport and General Workers Union, to which the strikers belonged, professed not to understand the strike. George Bromley, negotiator of the TGWU for thirty years, a Justice of the Peace and a stalwart of the Labour Party said: "The workers have not followed the proper disputes procedure. They have no legitimate grievances and it's difficult to know what they want. I think there are racial tensions, but they are not between the whites and the coloureds. The tensions are between those Asians from the sub-continent and those from Africa."

Bromley's remarks throughout the strike were unfortunate. The above-quoted remark was not prompted by his observation of the strike-force itself, which contained Asians from the sub-continent as well as those from Africa. It was prompted by the attitude of the Indian Workers' Association (ML) to the Imperial Typewriter's strike. At the first sign of unrest, the Transport and General Workers Union officials went running to the IWA. By 1974, the IWA in Leicester had permanent officials who put themselves up for elections each year, and continued in office year after year building their contacts with union officials, Labour party worthies and the network of mediators and negotiators, which ensured that capitalist production is not brought to its knees by workers acting in the interests of their class.

The Imperial strikers sought the assistance of Benny Bunsu, a South African by nationality and a political activist, who had played an advisory part in the Mansfield Hosiery strike in Loughborough, not so

many miles away. At first, the Indian Worker's Association was wary of the strike. "They are mostly Gujaratis," was a remark often heard amongst the veterans of the Punjabi leadership. "They have a shop-keeper mentality, what's the point of helping them? They'll take the money and set up shops to sell us expensive goods". When the strike hit the national newspapers, a gang from the Indian Worker's Association turned up at the strike headquarters. They were told what they could do to assist the strike. There were several factories in Leicester and throughout the Midlands over whose workforce the IWA had some influence. The IWA didn't want to know. They wanted to know how they could achieve prominence by running the strike, not what they could do to assist it. A crowd of IWA activists threatened to beat up Benny Bunsu. It was a sort of desperation. An organisation that had achieved mediating status had pitted itself against the emergent, independent force of Asian workers.

The mediators lost. Without the help of the IWA, the strike came to an end with a negotiated return to work. After the event, IWA activists said that one faction was giving the other a bad name, but the truth remains that the Indian Worker's Association, enmeshed as it is now with the Community Relations Councils and their sporadic programmes on education, equality and the like, caught up as it is with delivering support for the Labour Party, compromised as it is through personal contact with labour-movement-wallahs, can never reinstate itself as a force for the independent, material struggle of Asian workers.

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## Youth Revolt

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No wonder then that the young have deserted the ranks. A parallel development shaped itself in the Bangladeshi community of Britain. Its distinction in the late sixties and seventies was that it never had an industrial base. The Bangladeshis of London, concentrated in the East End and in Camden, work largely in the tiny establishments of the rag-trade, or in restaurants run by Asians. Their position in production has not given rise to industrial struggle for wages and reduced working hours, in the same way that it has in the communities of Southall, the Midlands or the North Western industrial belt of London.

Yet the Bangladeshis have, since the mid-seventies, moved politically as a community. The East End of London has seen the unique battle in black communities over housing. It has generated political organisations fighting racist attacks in which the community relations buffs and the stultifying leadership of the older generation, full of caution and reliance on powerful contacts, is wholly absent or wholly defeated.



In no other black community in Britain has there been a mass movement to combat the fact of homelessness. Between 1972 and 1976, the Bangladeshi community of the East End began a mass squatting movement, a determination to appropriate vacant homes and fight the effects of the unsettling migration to one of the worst areas of Britain. The squatting movement was a pre-condition for the organised demands made on the state's housing authorities by the Bengali Housing Action Group (BHAG) which surfaced in 1975, with demonstrations and political agitation.

In 1976, one phase of Asian political activity in Britain was supplanted by another. The young Asians, who were born or brought up in Britain, made a decisive intervention. They were a generation which had displayed scant interest in Indian politics. They were not the people to summon rallies against the Indira Gandhi's emergency, or turn up in their thousands to picket India House. Their sense of loyalty to the Asian community was only partly a product of cultural upbringing. It owed much to the political isolation of Asians in Britain who hadn't known Asia.

In 1976, the isolation turned into identity. In Southall and in the East End of London, in the north in Manchester and in Blackburn, Asian youth organisations stepped forward to declare themselves defenders of their communities. The step was taken in direct response to a spate of assaults on and killings of Asians.

The central task of the various youth organisations that arose in Southall and in the East End was self-defence. From the beginning, these organisations adopted an antagonistic stance to the direction and guidance of the Indian Workers' Association, the Bangladesh Welfare Association and those formations which belonged to another generation and clearly did not want to shoulder the burden of community self defence. The youth organisations were and are subject to the uncertainties and pressures that accompany a political dawn.

First and foremost, there is the need to transform sporadic enthusiasm into regular cadre work. Several of the youth organisations haven't the experience that will provide cadres with regular political work and political education. The inexperience opens them to the influence of example from tradition, to the influence of the white left groups with their regular band of activists and anti-racist formulae and slogans and strategy, to the lure of community relations negotiating activity. All these factors and influences tend to diffuse the clarity and strength of the Asian youth movement and add to its inevitable growing pains.

Take the East End as an example: the four or five youth groups that have existed since the hectic summer of 1976 have all been approached by older Bangladeshi politicians to espouse the political line of the

various Bangladeshi parties. The youth movements have been invited to swell the ranks of meetings in favour of the Bangladeshi ruling party, and the leaders have been promised some kind of prominence in Bangladesh as important politicians in the Bangladeshi community of Britain.

Apart from the interest of the national parties, the Community Relations Officers of the East End police stations have cultivated the acquaintance and friendship of youth who appear to be leaders, and have cajoled and coerced them into negotiating meetings about 'community relations'. Besides keeping the police informed of developments in the organisation of the East End community, it compromises the 'leaders' in the eyes of the rest of the community.

The talent scouts of all the leftish parties of Britain have also moved in, from the Labour Party which organises dances to introduce young Asian voters to Ian Mikardo and Peter Shore, to the Anti-Nazi campaigners who want to carry a radical element of Asian youth into the labour movement's organisations and into the unions.

Having started as movements to defend their own communities, the Asian youth groups had a perspective chalked out for them by history. Here was a community under direct physical attack. There was a generation of young people who were determined to say that this was not on, that they would throw their time and energy to seeing that it didn't happen. The task of self-defence of the community is a daunting one. It means generating a disciplined para-military movement, or it means activating the entire community into a militant, insurrectionary community, willing to move on every issue that touches them materially. The youth movement had neither the experience nor the historical hindsight to generate that sort of organisation instantly.

The euphoria of the self-defence movement has produced neither the disciplined para-military organisations that can in fact systematically undertake self-defence, nor has it produced the organisation which can agitationally undertake campaigns on material rights. And yet the history of the black movement in Britain points simply to that.

What the Asian youth have established are hundreds of organisations, from musical groups to cultural and sports clubs. They have fought for the social space they occupy. The existence of these cultural irreversibles gives a geographical location and particularity to the life that the young Asians are making in this country.

The youth movement of Asians is only three years old. Today, it faces the most serious challenge in its history. The British state's reaction to the Southall demonstration of April 25 this year, and the trials which arise out of the arrests at that demonstration, are severe tests of the political stamina of the movement.

In the run up to the general election this year, the National Front



was given permission by Ealing councillors to hold an 'election meeting' in the old town hall at Southall. There were protests from the Indian Workers' Association. Several MPs voiced their misgivings about the wisdom of the move. The councillors of Southall were in touch with Merlyn Rees' Home Office and with the government's legal department. The mood of the Asian community was explosive. The Home Office knew that the meeting would meet with the combined resistance of the old and young Asians of Southall. The National Front was not called off. The state evidently decided that it was willing to face the challenge, and demonstrate to the Asian movement that there could be no question of its getting its way on the streets of their own community.

Several thousand policemen were deployed in and around Southall. The Southall Youth Movement took to the streets earlier than the main force of the counter-demonstrators, composed of the Indian Workers' Association and a few hundred members of the Anti-Nazi League. The National Front coach, carrying its fifty-nine decoys, was driven in. Over a thousand Southall residents, present on the streets that day, were clobbered by police batons. The Special Patrol Group was unleashed and managed to kill Blair Peach, a teacher, who was in Southall as a supporter of the Anti-Nazi League. Seven hundred people, very many of them Asians, were arrested. Three hundred and forty-two were charged. The police cleared the streets in military charges. When demonstrators took refuge from the assaults in the offices of Southall Rights, they were pursued by snatch squads of policemen.

The charges against those arrested range from using abusive language to malicious wounding and causing actual bodily harm to policemen. At the end of the day, the police held the streets, but at tremendous cost and with an unprecedented riot-control effort that brought to mind the assault on the Notting Hill Carnival of 1976.

The cases of the 342 have been assigned to Barnet Magistrates Court, infamous for its role in disposing of the Grunwick defendants. The special court was put in the hands of five stipendiary magistrates, Messrs Cook, Badge, Canham, Burge and McDermott. At least two of these stipendiaries are seasoned police prosecuting lawyers. The decision to engage them to officiate at the trials is, to us, obviously not arbitrary. The trials began in June 1979 and will probably stretch to February.

At the time of writing, 186 of the cases have been heard so far. About half of these have been remanded and therefore the trials will be pursued at a later date. Of the other 91 cases that have actually been disposed of, 77 defendants have been found guilty and fourteen people have been acquitted. Four defendants have been sent to jail. The most extraordinary occurrence was the sentencing of two witnesses, Mr B Rampal and Mr J. Samara, by magistrate Canham. After they had testi-

fied from the witness box, he pronounced that they were, as far as he was concerned, part of a crowd 'hostile' to the police and would have to be bound over, as convicted defendants are, to keep the peace with convictions and fines hanging over them. Canham went so far as to wonder why these witnesses had not been arrested and charged.

Several defence committees have been set up in Southall to provide the legal and political support that the cases demand. The committees don't appear to be able to agree amongst themselves on the line to take in a losing fight. Through these committees, the maximum that the vibrant youth movement, which faced the police on the streets in April, has been able to surface is a stunned mechanical efficiency, not a sufficient political and agitational answer to the state's assault on the movement.

The assault of police and courts, with permission and co-ordination from first the Labour and now the Tory government, is reminiscent of the attack on the movement of West Indian youth in the late sixties and early seventies. The predominantly West Indian groups, which are loosely referred to as the 'black power movement', were, throughout the early seventies, besieged by court cases and the necessity to form defence committees to fight them. There wasn't, for instance, a week in which a member of the Black Panther Movement didn't face some charge in court. From the Mangrove Case to the trial of Cliff McDaniel of the Black Youth Movement, runs a thread of blunder and experience which the West Indian movement has had to weave into the fabric of its existence. The Asian movement is today being similarly tried.

The West Indian movement gives the Asian term of trial some pointers. The Southall/Barnet organisation cannot simply concentrate on fixing transport for defendants to travel the twenty miles from home to court. The court defences must follow principles controlled by the political committee of defendants which must pronounce and internationally propagandise the defence that the black movement is capable of fielding around the cases.

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## Conclusion

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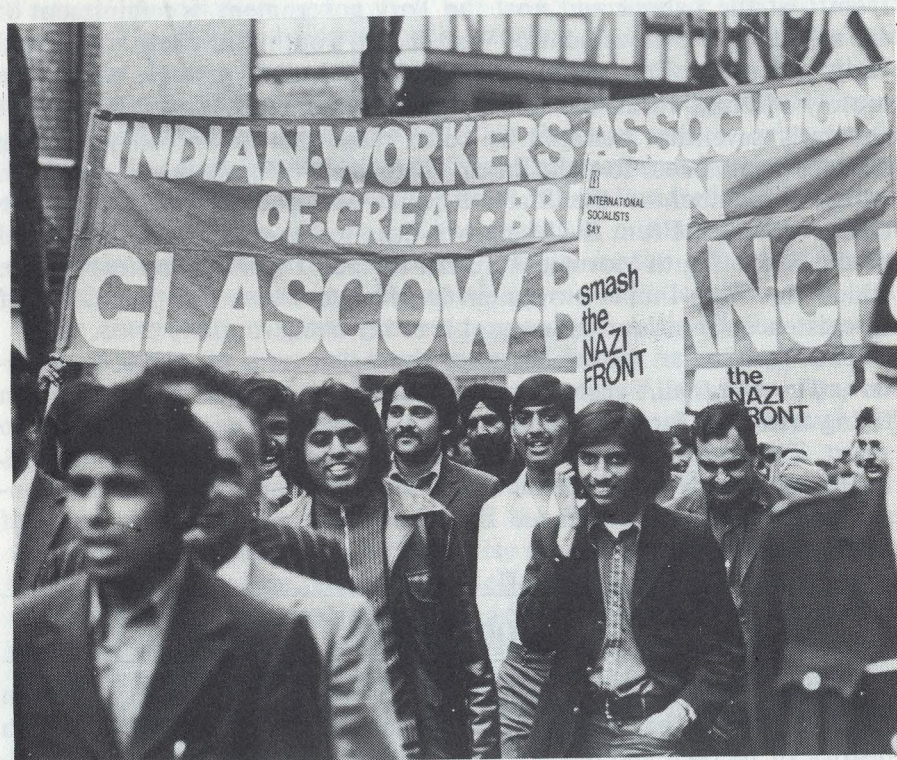
We have tried to show, particularly to young Asian activists, that an Asian movement has existed since the late fifties. The movement has a history of its own and did not come alive when discovered by the Anti-Nazi League or young Asian activists.

We have identified the emergence of the IWAs as an organisational expression of that movement and traced how they have turned into their opposites — a hindrance to the further radical and revolutionary



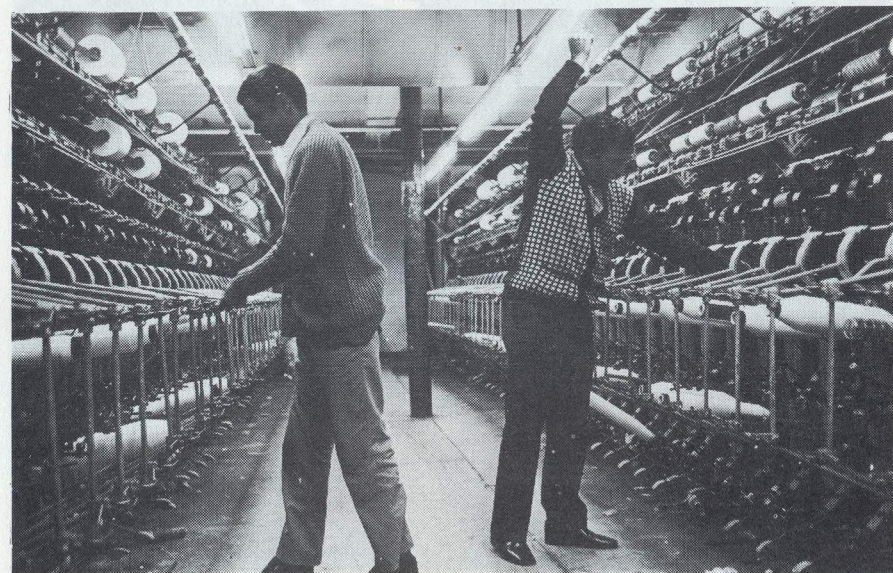
development of the independent struggle of Asian workers.

The present stage of the movement could be described as a radical and insurrectionary movement of Asian youth, now faced with the merciless counter-attack by the British state, its police and courts. In this period, the Asian youth movement faces the task of consolidating itself and winning older workers from the stranglehold of the different Indian Workers' Associations and Bangladeshi Associations. It is an enormous task, but one which West Indian workers, who have shed the burden of the West Indian Standing Conference, will instinctively understand and assist in resolving.



1978. Ford Strike against 5% pay offer

Camera Press



Nightshift in a Courtauld's textile mill

John Sturrock/Network





Inside the PTA Plant, Ford Motor Company, Dagenham: photo. Ian McIntosh

## Chapter 2

# Interviews With Asian Workers



## Sarwan Singh

Sarwan Singh came from the Punjab in 1958 at the age of 14. He lives in Bradford and is now a publican.

“ I came to England with my mother to join my father who was already here in Bradford. I went to school for a year but didn't learn anything; I wasted my time there. I didn't learn even a single word of English. Then I got my first job as a jobber, for £2.16s a week. My English wasn't good, but it was enough for the employers. They didn't want to know about your problem, they just wanted to show you how to work, and the machine does that for itself. But I only stayed a year. The pay wasn't enough and there was nothing to achieve. I'd taken the job because I thought when I'd been there for five years I'd be an overlooker. But then I saw they gave preference to the English lads. I went to another firm, in textiles, as a machine operator for £5 a week. I stayed there three years, but again there was nothing to achieve, not enough pay, and again they passed me over for a job as an overlooker. I had thought when I joined industry that I must learn something and not just operate a machine all my life.

I went to another textile firm, Regina Cotton. In that job I had a lot of trouble with an overlooker when I wasn't paid extra time. It was sorted out, but I left as I knew he'd be prejudiced with me — try to sack me or something. Anyway I was getting married and did not like to work nights then, so I changed and got a job at Croft Engineering in steel. They promised me a skilled moulding job, but instead they put me in a crane. It was all right but so smokey that I had to leave and have an operation on my nose. I went back to work in textiles for eighteen months until I opened a shop with my four brothers. When it was settled, my sister-in-law ran the counter and I went back into textiles for a bit and then I got this pub. I'm a tenant here.

During my time in industry, I felt what was right and what was wrong. I found out how management behaves differently to coloured workers than to whites. Sometimes you can say it's a minor thing, but it shows differences, like the way they order us about, and you can tell they're thinking we're inferior. And they use this to divide workers.

Like one firm I was working at in Dewsbury. They told us — they didn't ask us first — that they had made separate toilets for coloured workers. Now there are differences; different language, different culture, different everything. If we go very deep, we come from a situation entirely opposite to that in England. Here everything is organised — England is a developed country, an industrial country, everybody is economically independent, even the unemployed. But in India we are economically dependent so we always depend on others. And our people here, because they're in a developed country, their ways may have disgusted some people. But instead of consulting with us, they make a separate toilet and create separation between the workers, and then say it's for our benefit. Some white workers start saying: 'Hey your toilet is separate, everything is going to be separate, your bus, your canteen'.

We soon found out that's wrong, and there were two or three white workers with us, that makes it better for us. We were glad we'd got some white workers with us, and we told management that we'd stop work until anyone could go in any toilet. So they abolished separate toilets. But from then on there was still separation between us and the white workers.

The trouble is that the white workers think it is the coloured workers who try and make division. But it is created from the top of the monster or whatever you call it. Like the present crisis. Some white people think it's caused by the coloured people that come into the country. We have to convince them that it is not true. I always start thinking about things from a class angle or an economic angle so I know that the current situation is because capitalism is in economic crisis internationally. And it is affecting the workers. Before, when they joined a union, they just joined, they were never active or taking initiative and so it was always the puppets of firms or other shop stewards who took the leadership. But now workers are changing because when wages go up, prices go up and there is no value in the wages. With people on a three-day week it is hard to live.

In my pub there is always talk about the miners, and support for them. They say they should be paid more money, which is something new because some of my customers are agriculturists, not workers. Once, when I was working in a firm, there were some Indian workers working in the furnace for over ten years, and when I tried to convince them to join the union, they said: 'No, only workers join unions. We are peasants, agriculturalists.' But I know this is changing because they have had to get involved with the problems here at work and with their children growing up here. Before, they used to talk about what was happening in India and sending their money there and building a house. Now they are talking more about the problems here, of Indian workers, of what happens to them in the pubs and factories and problems like the miners and the election. They are interested now, but what happens depends on how the situation keeps going. Some Indian workers talk about forming separate unions. I am against creating separatism; we must struggle and we must unite.”



## Musstaq Hussain

Musstaq Hussain was a 13 year old when he arrived in Britain from Azad Kashmir in Pakistan. Now he is 24 and working in the textile industry in Nottingham.

“My family were small farmers and my father left to work in England in 1952. The family joined him in 1963, and although I couldn't speak a word of English, I picked it up by meeting people. I had a little education in Pakistan, but when I left school in Nottingham at 15, I couldn't understand English properly. My father was not educated at all — even now he can hardly speak English. He wanted me to stay on at school and learn, but I couldn't see what good an education would do me. I wanted to earn some money.

I couldn't get a job through the youth employment service because I couldn't speak English. So I found a job for myself, with a small firm 12 miles away, as a machine operator. I earned £40.00 a week, but by the time I had paid my bus fares, I had only a little money left. After six months, I went to the same firm as my father as a messenger boy, but I wasn't learning anything. I then worked in a couple of textile mills.

It wasn't until I was 18 that I realised that we are discriminated against and not being treated the same as a white person. They were using us as cheap labour: for example, there is a certain firm where I worked where they were paying our people less than the white workers. We used to work twelve hours and they paid us the flat rate with no overtime. They supplied the white workers with an electric kettle and wouldn't allow us to use it, and their wage rates were kept secret from us. Later on, when we had a dispute, the white workers started running our machines. There were things like that.

When I was 18, I went to work for Jaffe's and then I went to Harwood Cash for a year and a half. There, they made us work 60 hours and we got the same basic as the whites got for 40 hours. At that time, I didn't have the courage to stand up against the employer because they used to say: 'If you don't like it, you can take your cards and go.' So most of us drifted away. I went back to Jaffe's for a year, and then I went back to Pakistan for six months.

My family arranged for my marriage while I was there. I came back in 1972, but my wife had to wait six months for the British authorities to grant her an entry certificate. I started back with Jaffe, and he told me that I could work as an operator, but he would make me an overlooker or foreman soon.

All the workers were Pakistani, and, at first, they thought of him not as an employer but as someone big who could do a lot of things to people. Everyone was divided in that factory. One would be getting 30p and another 35p per hour. He said he was doing us a favour letting us work there, and later on we realised he wasn't doing us any favours, he should have been paying us the same as the English workers.

In 1972, there were Asians in another small factory, Crepes Sizes in Nottingham,

where they were being discriminated against. They formed a union to protest about being treated as cheap labour because they had to work 60 hours and the white workers 40 hours. They held a strike, and it was a shock to us because we never knew anything like that in our community. The strike lasted only two weeks, and we asked friends who worked there what had happened. They told us to join the union. So one by one we all quietly joined. All the labourers and unskilled grades in our factory were Asians, and they elected me shop steward. So we asked the T&GWU to go and see Mr Jaffe. Then he said that if I stopped being shop steward he would make me the foreman, but I told him I had wanted promotion earlier and he hadn't done anything about it. Now it was too late, and I would stick with the men because I didn't want to be on his side. We all stuck together, and we started negotiating: he would pay us all different rates and different hours and we were confused. So we complained about that, and about a white lady working for management who called us names, and about never replacing the light bulb in our toilet and providing us with gas to make tea with. After ten months of negotiating, we never got anywhere, and during that time we had four different union officials negotiating with Mr Jaffe, so none of them knew our case.

When the fourth one came, we didn't know if he was working for us or the management — he even left us standing in the rain while he sat in the manager's office discussing the victimisation of Mr Sarwhu. That incident was the final straw and we came out on a four-week strike.

But the union didn't do anything to help us: whenever we rung them, they would always say they were doing everything in their power, but they never came round to see us. Lorries went through the picket lines delivering and picking up goods, and we couldn't do anything about it because we didn't want to get arrested for violence. We had no support or guidance from the union, so we said to Jaffe after four weeks, either you take back Mr Sarwhu or we all leave. He wouldn't take him back, so we all left and got jobs in other places.

I went to Boots first, and then British Celanese, but I think they knew me from being a shop steward at Jaffe's. I wasn't a trouble maker: all I was saying is that we are to be treated the same as white people. After that I worked for Raleigh, which was alright, but the job was a bit greasy and they tried to transfer me. Then I got a job with a textile firm, and they started me on £25, saying I would get a rise when the factory got into full production. There are three of us Pakistani operators on the small machines and we get £27 now, but the white workers all work on the big machines and they get £30. I asked to go on those machines, but they said I can't because I don't know the job. I told them it only took me two days to learn the small machines and how can I learn the big ones if they won't start me on them? But



I can't keep going to the manager, because if I go into his office more than twice, he's going to give me my cards, saying: 'He keeps barging in my bloody office everyday.' So I think if I start a dispute, people might think 'this coloured boy is always in trouble'. What they don't realise is if you don't make trouble they won't pay you. I think I might start a union or join the same union as the other department where they are making £42 for 40 hours.

My father doesn't struggle. He thinks you just go to the factory and work for them no matter what they pay you. Just ask them once and if they say no, you just stick with the job. I think the younger generation of Asians are prepared to do anything if they're not treated right. But the three-day week has really affected me. My wife is having a baby. I want to buy a house, I want to buy a lot of things which I need. All I do is go to work thinking how I can make some money.

In the Midlands, in Nottingham, wherever we go, we're treated as coloured workers. Big firms aren't too bad, but the small ones treat you like cheap labour. To prevent this, we have to organise together. Wherever there are fifty or more people working, you would have one representative from them so that if there is any discrimination or dispute going on, you could help them straight away from all sides, because everyone will know what is happening down there. It would be more than a union, it would be supported from the community, for instance, and anyway the unions might not make a strike official. I am going to make an organisation like this — inside the Pakistani League — so that we won't be dividing our people. Our experience has shown us, in past strikes, that if our community supports us we can go through any situation."

## Mike Rodda

Mike Rodda is the Works Convenor at the United Glass factory in New Cross, South London. He came to Britain from Calcutta in 1961.

"The day after I turned up in England, I went to the Ministry of Labour and they offered me a job as a packer in a zip wholesaling company in Aldgate. It wasn't until I worked there that I realised £9 is nothing for a week. They said "We've got to look out for ourselves, so you go and look for another job and we'll look for another worker." I ended up working at Key Glass Works in New Cross where, if people were prepared to do shifts, they could earn a bit of money. That was in September '61 and I've been there ever since.

It's now United Glass, subsidiary of Distillers, and it employs 500 workers in bottle manufacture. Blacks work all over on shift work and some are day workers. They work in the shed; the rough jobs that produce the most overtime because their prime interest is money to buy a house or send back home to maintain their parents. A £20 a week job won't do. They don't mind accepting abnormal conditions so long as they get the money.

Foreign workers now want the kind of money that whites get for working the same hours. Some of them work 80 hours for £40. Unfortunately, our pay is determined at national level with representatives on a Joint Council. Management comes from the Head Office level of the major companies and union officers at district level and above. My union is the T&G, but it makes no difference whether the union is USDAW or the GMWU, there's no shop floor representative there. If a meeting takes place at the Charing Cross Hotel between management and the union, with plenty of Scotch and all lying about, I wouldn't expect any decision to be made in favour of the workers.

Over the years, I have had to accept the job of shop steward and we've had a few strikes and all. The first one we had was over speed ups: it was a productivity deal, the outcome of George Brown's freeze. The agreement was that we'd get another half hour break and we'd get a bit more bonus, but on a reduced manning. They said: "You've sold out your recreation allowance." They wanted us to stop smoking, eating and drinking where we were working. After the first strike, we got the smoking and recently we've got back the tea drinking. We've had two more strikes after that, basically on manning. Four of us may work around a table. If they take one man away, they say three of you can do the same amount of work that four people used to do. So the employers are trying to get us to work more, and we're beginning to fight to work less.

Before the George Brown freeze, they said; "We've got no money, we're running in the red". During the George Brown freeze, they said; "We'd like to give you the money, but unfortunately there's a freeze on. You take it up to George and see what he says." After things cooled down, they said: "We've got no money to give you." At the moment, they're saying, "There is a freeze on, Phase Three, and we're sorry there's nothing we can do for you. If you want the money, you must take it up with the Government." So when they've got money, they say there's a freeze on. And when there's a freeze on, they say they are broke. Either way their intention is not to give us more money.

My experience in the factory is that if there's a strike, it's more supported by the immigrant workers than the white workers, which to me means that they are not prepared to accept a raw deal. They come from the islands, India or Africa or wherever it is, places where conditions are bad. They expect to find better conditions over here. Which is why they are the first at the picket line, the first at the demonstrations, the first to fight for a better deal. Perhaps, we have come away from home, but we are not going to go back to those conditions. Whether we are back home or here, we are not going to have it. We want a better deal and we are prepared to fight for it. Which is why, with many factories, the pickets outside the gate are the coloured workers. Most of them have got a few bob spare, doesn't matter what people say, because they don't spend it on beer. They save their money so they are more able to stand a longer strike than an English person.

Recently, the shop steward at Feltham Way was sacked because he was a militant. So the warehouse stopped, the loading and unloading of trucks stopped and they rang up the workers at the New Cross warehouse and they stopped work loading and unloading. The fork lift drivers and the trucks stopped. They rung



up Fletwick. That warehouse also stopped working and it was spreading to the next place at Harlow. That was when management and everyone started running around. By five o'clock it was all settled, the shop steward was to report for work next day and there was no problem.

It so happens that about a week later, the long awaited meetings, which had been delayed and not produced anything, produced good fruits. The lorry drivers got £4 per week rise. You work that out under Phase Three. How does it work out? Plus 75p as an overnight allowance when they go out. I don't believe they would have got that rise if they weren't militant enough together. By fighting together, it was possible. There is a constant struggle between the management and the workers over bonus, and that is how the struggle turns in the factory.

In the present national crisis, we, in my firm, are still working 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as it's a continuous process in the glass container industry. They need the glass because there's a shortage of milk bottles. There is a furnace being built now which means at least another 30 people being employed. I expect that four out of every five employed will be immigrant workers. We'll be lucky if we get the fifth as an Englishman because they come, they have a look and they go away.

When the trouble started with the short-time, I thought it would end up like Germany where the Turkish workers were sent back to their country. I was afraid that the immigrant workers would be eased out with the help of Enoch Powell. But I think it will be a tough time for any government to get rid of the immigrant workers, it doesn't matter what people say. For one thing, my factory would close. I am sure that there are many industries up and down the country that would close because of a shortage of workers. There are the hospital services, the buses, British Rail. They need the men and they don't have them. The only people that are keeping it going are the immigrant workers. So the practical aspect is that it's not possible. The economy needs people who know what they're doing and are prepared to do it.

If there were a situation with millions of unemployed, there would be a problem, but I cannot foresee that at the moment. That's a bit too much. The government would be destroyed in the process. Anarchism would increase, every political organisation apart from the three main parties would want to protect the people. And the left wing groups would rise in arms. Whether it's arms figuratively or literally I cannot say, but I can foresee a fight taking place.

It's like the social security benefits, the benefits we receive. I feel it's just a means of keeping people away from fighting the state. If people did not receive that money, the few pounds they get when they are unemployed, they'd start robbing, they'd start plundering vans and shops so they've got to have something to keep them off the streets really. It's not much, but it's something. So if there is very high unemployment and the people are stone broke, there'll be a lot of robbery going on, there'll be more thefts and there'll be more bank raids. There'd be utter chaos in this country. It cannot afford it, which is why I cannot foresee the possibility of

ten million unemployed.

As far as the election is concerned, I say "a plague on both their houses" because it doesn't matter which party is in power, it will still be the shop steward's problem to get more money for the workers."

## Akbar Khan

**Akbar Khan came to Britain in 1966 from Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Now aged 26, he had been involved for three months in the industrial dispute at the West London factory of Perivale Gutterman.**

"I came to England for a better life and for a new experience. I arrived in London, where I stayed with a friend of mine and then I went to Manchester where I worked for six months in a plastics factory. I didn't have any experience of industrial life in Pakistan, and to be honest, it was pretty hard for me to start with. After Manchester, I moved to Luton and worked on the line at Vauxhalls, and then I went and worked as a press operator at John Dickenson's stationery firm in Watford. Four years ago, I came to London and started as a machine operator with Perivale Gutterman.

It's a factory making silk thread, and the main work force is Asian from India and Pakistan. Some of the Asians went to work in the parent company in Germany for two years, and when they finished, the management said that they would exchange one Indian or Pakistani for ten Italians, so much was their appreciation of their work.

Before 1969, there wasn't any trade union organisation at Perivale Gutterman, and people say that life then wasn't very good. They used to work 12 hours a day, 7 days a week for, say, £30 a week. It was reasonable work, but for a real living wage you had to work Saturday and Sunday mornings, afternoons and evenings. It does affect the social life of the Asian blokes who were working there — they couldn't go and see their girlfriends or whatever it is — but to earn a reasonable amount, a living wage, they had to do that.

Since then, we have been able to establish a branch of the T&GWU and decent, basic rates of pay for our fellow workers. The majority of production employees are Asians and the rest, who are in the warehouse or the office, they don't join the union because they think that it's an Asian trade union: but we are part of the biggest trade union in Britain. They're mainly white people and their basic rate is higher than ours. If we earn more than them, it's only because we work six or seven days a week. I think it's the tactics of the employers who say, 'OK, if you don't join a union, it's better for us and we will give you better money. There are



some white ladies, Irish, who joined the company, and we made contact with them and asked if they would like to join us. They were approached by the management who said: 'Don't join them, it's more or less an Asian union.' Two or three of them joined us and stayed with us until they left. One of them said it made her more militant when management said don't join the union; it made her ask why not.

There was a time when there were wars between India and Pakistan, and management tried to split the workers by issuing some sort of leaflet on the shop floor that said: 'We know there's violence going on between India and Pakistan, but we don't want any trouble. We know your loyalties lie with one or the other.' But there's never been any trouble of that sort. I mean we have our sympathies for India or Pakistan or Bangladesh or any other country, but as a union, as the working class we have all to be together. There has never been an incident where it would affect our unity or strength.

In 1973, there was a group bonus imposed on us, but it was never understood by us. I'll give you an instance: one week we produced 53,000 kingspools which is the unit there for the calculation of bonus, and we had 46p bonus per man. But the next week, we had 53,500, or something like that, and we had 36p bonus. We would argue, 'look my production's the same, the people in the workforce are the same, nothing has increased, why has the bonus gone down?' This was the main stumbling block, and I think management never wanted to resolve it because it went in their favour. But the management presented a list of 30 active members and said, 'accept the group bonus or we will make them redundant'. So the shop stewards had no alternative.

We banned the overtime in October 1973, and, as a result, all of us trade union members were locked out on 4 December 1973. The T&GWU has been reasonably good, but I would have liked more pressure at higher level. They have branches in the docks and whatever. And we have not received support from nearby factories, except one factory which had a collection for us. The main support has come from our own community, the Asian community. We held a concert in Southall and collected about £200, and the people who have been involved in the struggle for the last thirteen weeks have been living with the help of friends and relations. Our own business people have been pretty generous.

I think the main problem with employers is that they don't want us to join trades unions. They know that we have our own liabilities back home, we support our families, we do all sorts of things, as they encourage people not to join the union. I dare say it creates problems for the employers. Basically, we are a working class people. We know that we are part of British society, so we can't live aloof.

Another thing is the national press. Our struggle has been going on for thirteen weeks, and we have been going to the editors of national papers, we have written to them, we have phoned them. We have sent them all a brief story of our dispute, but I don't know why they have never bothered to give it in their papers. Some left-wing papers have been round here and they have published it. A few days ago a book was published, and in that book, it said that the press only gives a bad name to the immigrant community. They would never say that Asian workers are very hard

working, or that they are this or that, or they have done something good, or they are a well integrated part of the trade union movement. But if there is some Asian caught on the ferry, it will be a front page headline in the newspapers.

We are a law abiding people and we want to do it democratically, constitutionally, legally. And now, of course, our case is being heard by the National Industrial Relations Court. But there's this crisis, the three-day-week and that. I should think that if after the elections an unstable government comes in, I don't think the future is very bright. Because, if under the three-day week it's difficult to get jobs, and if there are more crises, then I think Asian workers will be the first to be affected. But we are all working class people and we will struggle against it as the working class."

## Kewal Lehal

**Kewal Lehal, 42-years old, has lived in England for 20 years. He lives in Leicester and is employed as a skilled worker in the engineering industry. His family in India are peasants, owning their own small farm in the Punjab.**

"I was a labourer in a foundry. It was a 44-hour week, but I used to work about 60 to 70 hours for £8.7s. I stayed there for two months, but it was out of Leicester and I found another job nearer home to save my travelling time.

I had never seen a foundry in my life in India. I didn't know what sort of work I should have to do when I came here. Most of the people I knew were working in that sort of job, so I accepted that way of life to earn money. Furnacemen cast the moulds in metal in the foundry. It's hot, about 1400 degrees centigrade, and dangerous. Sometimes there would be splashes of metal which would burn our clothes and bodies.

I stayed in the second job for ten years. I started as a charger on the furnace, and then became a furnace-man. We worked 60 to 70 hours a week for £14. Only ten or twelve of us workers then were black, but over the years, all except the skilled white workers left and were replaced by black workers. The Asian workers then were not given apprenticeships, and there was a clear division between skilled white workers and unskilled black workers. But young white workers weren't coming into the foundries. It was too hard and too hot, so they did other jobs that weren't available to us. There were always trades unions in the factory, and if there was any pushing around by people, they'd stand by us. But they were usually against the blacks when we got better jobs like crane drivers or slingers; they'd tell the foreman that they don't want blackie in the cabin. The Indian Workers' Association supported the unions and told their members to join, but sometimes we



had to struggle with them. We did in Walkers Crisps a few years ago, and told them what was wrong with the unions. Some people agreed with us — they're not all racist, but some are.

There was a feeling amongst Asian workers, as they got older, to go for jobs with smaller hours for the same money. I left in 1964 because I found a job in another foundry as a furnace-man. I was earning as much for 40 hours as I had been in 60.

But I was looking for a better job, and in 1966 I went to Jones and Shipman as a trainee machine operator. For seven years, I was semi-skilled and now I am skilled universal grinder. I am treated on my merits, not on colour, but there are now several skilled men there and a chargehand. Employers always try and get cheap labour by using semi-skilled men as skilled — there is a difference of about £6.00 in their wages — and although I am a member of the union, it's not very progressive. Last year the workers put in for a rise. The shop stewards agreed with the firm for a lesser amount, and the men sent them back until they got another pound. But

Leicester is very conservative; I've never seen any struggles here. There's only one union, the AEUW: in Bentleys, they're more militant and that firm is the highest paid in Leicester.

Prices have gone up fantastically in the last few months. I mean when we got a 7 per cent rise last December, we only got £2.50 for skilled men and £2.00 for unskilled. I support the miners and I blame the government for the present crisis. The general election won't solve anything.

I've just returned from seven weeks in India. The inflation there is worse than here, and the gap between rich and poor is widening. If you go shopping in the market, and you have a hundred rupee note, it doesn't last long. A meal will cost 20 rupees, which is just over a pound. That's a lot more money over there than here. My family work their own land, they don't have to work for anybody, and most of the things they use at home they produce for themselves, especially food.

Unless proper care is taken, the crisis is going to get worse. Management, though, is getting nearly as much labour power from me in a three-day-week as in five. I'm working 11½ hours for three days and I would rather work 8. If the crisis gets worse, the foreigners may suffer because the British always say, 'Put Britain first' and things like that. Many black people are working in the foundries, which is a continuous process.

The black people, if they work in foundries where there are non-whites and the foundry is to keep running, they've got to keep the black labour. Even then the whites don't go into the jobs blacks are doing. Some whites, they prefer to go on unemployment benefit instead of having a job, because they don't like hard, dirty work. The Asians got united over the Immigration Bill, and if anything else comes up, we shall do so again.

If black workers do lose their jobs, others will support them for their cause by going on strike and things like that. In Leicester, it's only the IWA, working with the trades union movement and some good shop stewards who are sympathetic to our cause. I think they will fight with us. ”

## Jhalman Singh Athwal

Jhalman Singh Athwal came to Britain in 1954 when he was 19. He settled in Bradford with friends who had also come from the Punjab. Now he is married and works at English Electric.

“ In 1954, everyone seemed pleased to see us, but since 1960 and especially Powell's speeches, it has changed. Youths spit on us in the streets. In Woolworth's, the other week, three youths pushed into me and threatened me.

At work it's not bad because everyone knows me now. My first job was in a brick works, but I left after two months for the mills. But the hours were too long for the money and I left for English Electric where I worked as a machine operator. I worked a 40-hour week, and preferred the night shift, so that I could look after the kid in the day when my wife worked. In 1966, I left for a visit to India, and when I returned, I tried other jobs. In 1969, when I was working at a mill, the gaffers troubled me many times. For example, they said I couldn't go to the toilet when I wanted, but only at dinner time. We all objected, and they tried to move us to other departments, so a lot of us stopped the machines. After a row with the management, they called the police and the story got into the papers. I got fed up so I went back to English Electric. I am more independent there, and if anything is wrong, I tell the shop steward and he tells the charge-hand. We make the fuse base and terminal base for electric meters, and parts of car panels and washing machines.

My average wage used to be about £25 per week, including £12 bonus, but now with the three-day-week, I can only work 33 hours. And prices keep rising — my curry materials used to be 5p a pound. It's 25p now, an increase of 200 per cent. And the wages have not changed; in fact, last year, there were two operators on the machine and now there is one. The time of production has been cut, so that they are saving a lot on each production.

I am a member of the Engineering Union, always have been, but I've never had a case where the Union has had to fight for me, so I don't know if they would fight for us. Once when we went on strike for two weeks, and I went for my money, the secretary said I was too late to get it, but I had signed and paid and all. He said it was because I had been to India, but I had always paid the Union, so I'm not that keen on them now.

I think there is a great crisis now and I blame Heath. He was talking about North Sea Gas and Oil, saying it was going cheap and saying the government had got to be strong. He does not mean cheap, he means to keep it at the same price but after all, the oil is free, they only pay for moving it, it comes free. That's the government. I shall vote Labour, but I do think socialism and communism is a good thing when it does not oppress the public. I do know that there is too much tax on us. If you work for £40 a week, it's twenty which is taken by the government and £20 left in your pocket. If you go into town with 60p, six is taken off for VAT and so it goes on.

I do support the miners. They want £40 or £45, in my opinion he should get



more than £50. If somebody gave me £70 to work underground, I wouldn't go, I like life. ”



1980. Picket line outside the Clix Factory, Slough photo: John Sturrock/Network



Supreme Quilting Company strike picket line photo: Newsline

## A Female Worker at Imperial Typewriters, Leicester

“ I assemble motors in the store department. When I first started work here, I had to make 14 motors per hour. But then they raised the target to 16 and then to 18 and so on. Now it's 22. To work at that speed, we can't even drink a cup of tea. We have no official tea break, but sometimes one of us goes out and gets tea for the others. But then if the foreman sees us, he starts complaining about us in front of all the other workers, and even the supervisor, saying we always waste time and talk too much. Anyway, we didn't complain about that. We complained to them about the target — we all said 22 is too high. However hard we work we can never make more than that — and unless we make more we don't get any bonus.

But on top of that if we make less than 22 — say 20 or 21 — they cut some money from our basic pay. We are mostly all Asians in our section but our shop steward is a white woman. She doesn't care and the Union doesn't care. I pay 11p a week to be a member of the Union but I really think it's a waste of hard-earned money. Don't get me wrong, I'm not against Unions — but our Union is no different from Management. And our shop steward, she hardly ever talks to us. One day she told me she was going to a meeting with some other stewards but I know she went to the hairdressers. I'm sure the Supervisor also knew, but he never said anything to her. She comes and goes as she likes. We can't see any difference between her and the supervisor. Yet she is with the Union and he is with Management. She didn't come out on strike with us — she didn't even want to hear about it. There's another one just like her in my friend's department.

I'll give you another example. I went to our shop steward one day and explained that the 22 target was too high. I also told her that the supervisor had asked us to oil our own machines that morning. Normally, the machines are oiled before we come in. I told her that oiling was not our job and that management was always trying to make us do more work for the same pay. She told me not to make a fuss over such a small thing. That's the kind of shop steward she is. That is why we must have one Asian shop steward. It doesn't make sense, does it? I'm not saying that all Asians will make good shop stewards — some of our people are also like the white people — they take their side — Management's side against us. But this way we are not represented at all. . . .

The other day I went to the toilet. Someone was already inside so I had to wait. I must have been there not more than ten minutes when the foreman started banging on the door. He had come to find me in the toilet to tell me to go back to work. I was very angry and shouted some rude things at him. Wouldn't you? There's a limit to everything. When I came out he asked me what I had been doing there. I told him to go home and ask his wife what she did in the toilet. He complained about me to the supervisor. . . I have so many grievances like this. Small things but they all add up. The other thing is that every morning when we come to work at 8 o'clock, we have to stand in a long queue to clock in. I try and come at 5 to 8



because we are paid according to time. Many of us have noticed that the white women push past us and clock in first. The Foreman at the gate never tells them to stand in the queue. None of us would dare to do that. Why should they be allowed to do it — not once or twice but everyday. . .

I've been in Imperials for three years now. I know what I'm talking about. I have three children and I'm alone. My pay is £18 but the men get £25. There's a lot of difference between £18 and £25, isn't there? It shouldn't be like that — we do the same work after all. Why shouldn't we get the same money? And as I was telling you, in our section sometimes we get even less than the basic rate if we don't reach the target. I feel very strongly about this — how can I bring up three children on that salary? I had never worked before when I joined Imperials, and at that time I was very relieved to get the job. I didn't really know what to expect. But now everyone says Imperials pays lower wages than other factories. If we don't get more money, and if we don't get equal pay, I'm not going back into that factory. I'll look for another job. I know it won't be easy but I'll look. . .

In February 1968 I came to this country with my daughter and my husband. We used to live in Mombasa. We stayed three days in London and my husband found a job there in a bank. But we couldn't find a room to live in because the rents were too high for us. So we came to Leicester where my sister used to live. My husband started looking for a job and the first job he found was at Imperials. It was assembly line work — making some kind of screws to fit on tripods. Now he's working as a repairman, but they don't give him a repairman's wage. For this reason he came out on strike.

I had never worked before. I was a housewife in Mombasa. I have four children now, but when I first came I had two. I brought one with me and left my son in India with my mother. Later my husband went to India and brought him here.

I started working in February 1970. Imperials used to put up a notice on the notice board saying that if any of the workers had wives who wanted to work there, they could work from 6 to 10 — after the day shift. My husband heard about it and came and told me. Since he was at home in the evenings, I took the job. It was piecework and I earned £6.50 a week. Four hours a day for five days — that made 20 hours. That's how I started. I still do part time work. I worked full time for one year but the work was too hard. So now I work only part-time- 9 to 3. But the work, even part-time, is very hard. I get very tired. I have to do rivetting. We have to use a machine to join two parts together with a screw. We also have welding in our section but I don't do that. It's piece work and our section is the machine shop. About thirty women work in our shop — mostly Asian, but also some whites and West Indians. None of us have ever got a promotion, but the white women get the better jobs. I heard from someone that in our section they pay different rates. They don't have a fixed rate for everybody — but I don't know what other people get. I only know what I get. No one tells us anything and I never bothered to ask anyone before. But now we know that this is happening.

Ever since I've been there, I've seen that the whites give their women just one machine to work on while they give us 10 or 11 different machines in a day. You see their job is better. They have just one machine but we have to move around like gypsies. The West Indian women are treated just like us. Another thing is that the setters (we have all white setters) set the white women's machines first and take more trouble over them. Ours they do last and they don't even do them properly. So we have to work slower and then, with piece work, we earn less money. Before our machines are set, we have to wait. So we asked for waiting time but they wouldn't give that to us. White women also get jobs of their choice — they can choose their jobs. But we have to do what the setter gives us to do. The West Indian women work like us but they go with the white women. Not a single West Indian in our section came out with us on strike. I don't know how they are in other sections. Even some of our own women — Asian women — who didn't support our strike have this same attitude. They don't want to take our side.

I have to be at work at 9 and before that, at 10 to 9 I take my son to school. I have to wake up at 6 o'clock every morning. I get all my children dressed and give them breakfast. Then I make my husband some tea. By then it's nearly 8 o'clock. Then my husband goes to work. He has to be there at 8. After that, sometimes I have to help my children with their homework — reading, spelling, things like that. Then at about 8.30am, my 8-year old son and 9-year-old daughter leave together for school. They go on their own. Then I have to put my two other children — one is 5½ and the other is 4 — in the nursery. After that I rush straight to work.

I work till 3 and my husband works till 5. At 3 I go straight from the factory to get my two children from the nursery. And soon after I get home my other two children also come back from school. That's about 4 o'clock. I give them some milk and a wash and then start cooking because my husband eats everyday at 6. So by 6 I must have the food ready. I like to put my children to bed early. So after cooking I give them something to eat. I like them to go to bed by 6.30, but sometimes it gets a little later. After that there are always clothes to wash and also the dishes. I like to finish all the work just before I sit down. We usually listen to the news at 9 o'clock on the radio before going to sleep.

After the strike, I don't know. Perhaps I *will* have to look for another job. If they try and change my job there — give me a worse job — I'm going to leave. ”





Southall 1976, Protest after the murder of Gurdip Singh Chaggar photo: Chris Davies/Report



East End 1976. Anti fascist demonstration photo: Chris Davies/Report

### Chapter 3

## Reflecting on the Trial of the Decade: The Bradford 12



On July 17 1981, the attention of the West Yorkshire police was drawn to two milk crates of petrol bombs which were hidden in high bushes at the back of the nurses' home in Bradford. The police, removed the petrol from the bottles, replaced it with tea and set up a vigil for the manufacturers. No one turned up. Thirteen days later, 12 young Asians from the Asian community in Bradford were arrested and subsequently charged with the following:

**Count 1: Making an explosive substance with intent to endanger life and property contrary to Section 3(1)(b) of the Explosive Substance Act 1881. That on the 11th day of July 1981 (the 12) unlawfully and maliciously made an explosive substance, namely 38 petrol bombs, with intent by means thereof to endanger life or cause serious injury to property or to enable other persons to do so.**

**Count 2: Conspiracy to make explosive substances, contrary to Section 1 of the Criminal Law Act 1977. On the 11th day of July 1981 (the 12) conspired together to make explosive substances, namely petrol bombs, for unlawful purposes.**

These charges were returned by the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions upon examination of evidence provided by the West Yorkshire police. They carry a penalty of up to life imprisonment, and legal pundits forecasted prison terms of seven to ten years should the defendants be found guilty.

The 12 appeared before the local magistrates on Saturday, August 1st and were refused bail. The defendants spent the next three to four months in prison before they were granted bail on conditions which included large sureties, daily reporting to the local police, an evening curfew and a complete ban on attendance at all political meetings, later relaxed to a ban on those meetings which related directly to their cases.

Giovanni Singh, Praveen Patel, Saeed Hussain, Sabir Hussain, Tariq Ali, Ahmed Mansoor, Bahram Noor Khan, Tarlochan Gata Aura, Ishaq Mohammed Kazi, Vasant Patel, Jayesh Amin and Masood Malik appeared at the Leeds Crown Court on April 26 1982. They were all represented by counsel with the exception of Tariq Ali who chose to defend himself.

The trial lasted 31 days before Judge Beaumont and a jury of seven whites and five blacks. All the jurors were local Leeds residents.

The main line of defence was self-defence. Gata Aura, Singh, Patel, Hussain, Mansoor, Malik, Sabir Hussain, Khan and Vasant Patel admitted to being involved somewhere along the line. Ali, Amin and Kazi denied any involvement at all. Ali claimed that he was told by Gata Aura about the existence of the petrol bombs and he advised Gata Aura

to destroy them. Amin's counsel cross examined on the basis that his client knew nothing about the operation and was playing cricket at the time. Kazi denied any involvement at all.

Those who accepted that they were involved advanced the line that they were legally and morally right to manufacture the petrol bombs. They had heard that racialsists were on their way to attack the Bradford Asian community, and after a meeting at Amin's house, they took the decision to make and use the petrol bombs to create a wall of flame along Lumb Lane which would deter the attackers from violently setting upon the Asian community. They had not intended endangering life or property; they merely set out to deter.

The English Common Law upholds the right of self-defence, qualified by the fact that the force used in self-defence must not be in excess of that which is reasonable to repel the attack. The defendants claimed, therefore, that the manufacture and possible use of the petrol bombs was a perfectly legal act and necessary for the defence of the community against a racist onslaught.

The second line of defence turned on the definition of explosives. The defendants argued, through counsel, that petrol bombs were not explosives, that on impact they did not explode.

On June 16, the jurors, after deliberating for a day and a half, returned verdicts of not guilty. The breakdown was eleven to one.

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## The Mass Youth Movement and its Origins

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Firstly, who are these young men and what are the forces which shaped them and their actions? The 12 defendants are all young Asians, that is to say the offspring of immigrants who arrived in Britain from India and Pakistan. They are products of the British educational system and are aged between 17 and 25 years. With the exception of Jayesh Amin, a university graduate, and Ishaq Kazi, a bank clerk, they were, at the time of their arrest, either unemployed workers or employed in working-class jobs in the city of Bradford.

Politically they were members of the United Black Youth League, (UBYL), a small organisation which, at the time of their arrest, was three to four months old. By then no statement of policy and position had been stated by the organisation, but an interpretation of their activities in campaigns indicated a radical approach to the issues of racial attacks on the Asian community and deportations of Asian workers.

What is certain is that these young men did not fall from the sky, nor are they odd balls prone to irrational behaviour. They are products of an historical movement which first made itself felt at the heart of British



society in the summer of 1976.

Every new historical movement invariably emerges around a single issue and has as its objective the transcending, perhaps, the shattering of the old. In this case the issue has been and continues to be the constant and murderous stream of racial attacks against the Asian community. The old at this juncture was and is being represented by the moderate approach of the traditional Asian organisations backed by the British state. The moment? The murder of 18 year old Gurdip Singh Chaggar by a gang of racials on the streets of Southall on June 4 1976.

Up to that moment, the Asian community throughout the United Kingdom had been complaining about racial attacks to anyone who would listen. Their experiences in this regard stretched way back to the late 1960s. Right-wing fascist organisations in some cases actually carried out the attacks and where they did not, they were able to stimulate disaffected young whites into what was popularly referred to as Paki-bashing. The Asian community made it clear, through their organisations, that the British police showed a marked reluctance in tracking down and bringing their assailants to justice. They were perfectly right. The official position, repeated in parrot-like fashion by police forces up and down the country, was that the term, 'racial attack', was a figment of the Asian imagination. These acts, claimed officialdom, were merely the expressions of vandals.

The Asian community responded to this phenomenon with an uncharacteristic moderation. Apart from scattered groups of vigilantes in East London they seemed to reply on complaints to the authorities as a way of dealing with this issue. Another factor needs to be considered. During the late sixties and throughout the seventies, the Asian community had developed a remarkable militancy on the shop floor. There is a history of militant strikes in opposition both to the employers and the trade union bureaucracy. These militant activities won, for those activists in the traditional Asian organisations, recognition from the authorities. Some of them were rewarded with jobs inside the trade union bureaucracy, others became local councillors; the mosque and the temple attracted visiting Members of Parliament and other dignitaries. Add to this the vast race relations bureaucracy and the Manpower Services Commission with its equally vast and paralysing sources of state funding, and the corruption of traditional Asian organisations was complete by the time Gurdip Singh Chaggar lay dying on the pavement of a Southall street. The effect of this corruption was and continues to be the stifling of the traditions of militancy in the Asian community.

A whole generation of Asian youth had grown up by then. They, like everyone of the defendants, had been to school here. They were socially confident. They rose en masse to challenge the old ways and methods

of dealing with racial attacks and to break through the solid wall of Asian organisations which maintained the status quo.

The first major expression of this new force came in the aftermath of Chaggar's murder. The terrain was Southall. It is a West London suburb in which some 30,000 Asians reside. They hail mainly from the Punjab. They work in local factories in the main and in various jobs at the Heathrow Airport. There is a solid proletarian base. The children are socialised in local schools and pursue lives increasingly dominated by British circumstances. The Indian Workers Association, the Sikh Temple and the local race relations industry dominate. That particular organisational formation exists in every Asian community in Britain.

In the days following Chaggar's murder, the youth took to the streets. They organised patrols and in a sharp outburst attacked white motorists and opposed the police. When two of their number were arrested, they surrounded the local police station and secured the release of their comrades. Meanwhile, the identical process was in motion among Bengalis in the East End of London. Young Asians in other parts of the country stirred in response.

This was a massive social upheaval involving thousands of young Asians throughout Britain who were prepared to throw the caution of their parents to the wind. They distinguished themselves from all that had gone before by employing militant and violent methods to defend themselves against racial attacks. Such was the impact that the rest of British society had to take notice. No longer could the issue be clouded by the smoke screen of official jargon and police semantics. Thousands of whites responded in support. They were mainly political radicals and well-meaning liberals. The mass of the British people were not against; they were merely bewildered, waiting for a positive lead. And the first generation Asians, who got nowhere with their moderate approach, were willing to go along with the youth.

All the defendants in the trial of the Bradford 12 cut their teeth in this mass movement. It is on this general terrain that they were blooded. But there is more to it than just the general. All new historical movements must constantly contest the old if they are to ground themselves and meet the historical tasks required of them. And this movement was no exception. The old is represented by a panoply of formal Asian organisations formed during the early stages of Asian immigration. They were progressive once, but had turned into their opposites. Behind this solid wall stood the British state ready and willing to hold the line against the invading hordes of young Asians.

The British state was cautious at first, leaving matters up to the entrenched Asian formation. The traditional Asian organisations did not manage too well. They barely contained a mass revolt against the dem-



onstration which followed Chaggar's murder. Up to the morning of the march, no one knew whether the youth would demonstrate or not. Here are a couple of comments made by a young protester: "These people [the elders] have done nothing. Some of them have got rich. The party wallahs are asking us to join them when what they should do is join us, otherwise they are finished".

Posit these comments against those expressed by traditional moderates: "These people [the youth] are not political, they have no politics. It is we who have the political experience".

Those were the political lines to emerge in the cut and thrust of events surrounding the Southall murder, but they replicated themselves among the Asian community throughout the country. As it is with these contests, the manipulation began. The young Asians set up youth organisations in Southall and elsewhere. The old struck back and their ways were many. Take this as an example: In Blackburn, a northern town, a youth organisation had surfaced. The membership challenged the old on a range of issues. At the end of the day, the major figure in the youth movement was savagely brutalised by thugs organised by the old leadership. In other areas the soft option prevailed. The youth leadership was guided with much encouragement into state funded projects. The new was constantly courted with persuasive offers to sink differences and join up with the old. All manner of pressure was bought to bear.

These manoeuvrings penetrated large sections of the organised youth leadership, but the mass movement remained largely unaffected. When the front line fails it is the turn of the backline to prevail. In this case the backline was the coercive forces of the British state.

During the general election of 1979, the fascist and racist National Front put up candidates in constituencies where there were large black communities. They had no chance of winning but it would give them the right to hold public meetings in black areas. And a public meeting was carded for Southall. Young Asians gathered in their thousands to prevent the meeting taking place. The police mobilised in enormous numbers. They proceeded to attack the protesters with a savagery which no section of the society, except the Irish in Northern Ireland, had experienced in years. One person, an anti racist school teacher, Blair Peach, was bludgeoned to death by police batons. Over 300 people were arrested and the cases were heard by carefully selected magistrates throughout London who returned a disproportionate number of guilty verdicts. Only by the most vulgar, empirical violence could the British state hope to contain the Asian mass movement and its white support under the hegemony of traditional Asian organisations.

There is the time honoured conclusion, born out of centuries of

social and political experience, that repression of this order only serves to strengthen the resolve of the mass movement. In a period of five years, the young Asians had transformed the balance of power in this crucial struggle. Thousands of them participated in this movement. One moment of violent excess on the part of the police would not crush it.

All 12 defendants had at one time or another been activists in that general movement. Their membership in the UBYL placed them in a special category though. By being members of that organisation, they were openly repudiating the traditional Asian formations which dominated the Bradford community. They were, therefore, consciously laying down the challenge to the state and its Asian phalanx for the hearts and minds of the Asian community.

Gata Aura and Tariq Ali were involved in the initial breakaway from the old. They, along with others, founded the Bradford Asian Youth Movement in 1977. There they mobilised for anti-fascist demonstrations and campaigned against the deportation of Asian workers. The Bradford AYM had planned the Freedom March which would begin in Bradford and take in all major immigrant conurbations in Britain. They had hoped that this tactic would lay the foundation for Asian and West Indian unity. The march did not win effective support and was cancelled.

In the cut and thrust of attempting to transcend the old, a faction within the Bradford AYM succumbed to the practice of state funding and welfare activities. Gata Aura and Ali walked out and set up the United Black Youth League through which they aimed to draw membership from the West Indian community and to travel along a radical and revolutionary path. Above all, they persisted in their efforts to take the mass youth movement, with the support of older Asian workers, beyond the reactionary confines delineated by the old guard. For the membership of the UBYL, the manufacture of petrol bombs for use in the event of a racial attack was a normal activity. For this generation of young Asians there was nothing at all extraordinary in this approach. Also, Gata Aura had emerged as a national political figure as chairman of the Anwar Ditta campaign. He pursued this activity while being a member of the UBYL. Anwar Ditta, an Asian woman, was prevented by the immigration laws from having her children join her here. The campaign was national in scope and ultimately successful. Constant reports in the press and a documentary on television brought the issue to the nation's attention. The point to be made here is that by organising campaigns of this scope, Gata Aura and his organisation were in fact making clear what the traditional Asian organisations were not doing.



## The Campaign to Free the 12

As in Southall in the general election of 1979, the British state drew the line. On this occasion the Director of Public Prosecutions was the cutting edge. Once that office received the evidence collated by the police, two options were open to the judicial arm of the British state. The Director could take the normal course of charging the defendants simply with manufacturing petrol bombs. It would have been a low key, straight forward matter. During the summer riots, which were going on at the same time, many were so charged. He chose the abnormal and consequently highly political course. Out came the political bludgeon disguised in judicial garb aimed at smashing that tendency in the Asian Youth Movement which sought to transcend the moderate approach.

By opting for the conspiracy charges, the DPP lay down a major challenge to the youth movement and its organisational activists. How did they fare? Here was a political opportunity, par excellence, to galvanise the thousands of young Asians into motion. They were there, alive and vibrant. They had shown their mettle over five dramatic years and all the evidence indicated they were on the move. Only weeks previous to the arrests, skinhead fascists were bussed into Southall for a pop concert at a local pub. Four members of the party abused an Asian shopkeeper and attacked Asian shop windows on the main street. The young Asians of Southall organised themselves, marched on the pub and despite police protection burnt the building down. Not only did a campaign to free the 12 have the opportunity to mobilise young Asians, the way was open to take the issue to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Thousands on the Asian continent would have responded. And finally, such a campaign would establish an organisational bridgehead which would have had the effect of eclipsing the traditional Asian organisations once and for all.

A group of activists from the Bradford AYM, in alliance with other forces in the community, formed the July 11th Committee to free the 12. The issue, which at once preoccupied the committee was the political line they would adopt for mobilisation. This, of course, would turn on the defence which those arrested would employ. Courtenay Hay, a former member of the defunct Bradford Black Collective and now Chairman of the Committee, visited Gata Aura in prison. Gata Aura tells us that he informed Hay that the line was self-defence. Hay moves in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform. He returned to the Committee with the line that the defendants were framed. His campaign message was that: "The UBYL, because of its political activities of

fighting racism, its resistance to fascism and carrying forward the anti imperialist struggle has been made a victim of political persecution by the state police".

It was obvious that he had elevated the UBYL to a position which did not accord with reality. The organisation was all of four months old, just about cutting its teeth and had made to date little impact locally or nationally. Had political activists been operating in a situation in which the British state would deliberately frame an entire organisation on conspiracy to make petrol bombs, then we were living in dire straits indeed. Nowhere in the country was such evidence available. There was ample evidence in the trial that the Special Branch tailed the UBYL waiting to pounce once a mistake was made, but the frame up line was indigestible to all but the most gullible.

The July 11th Committee went to the public for the first time on August 12 1981 at the Arcadian Cinema in Bradford. The leaflet inviting the public to the meeting screamed, 'Framed by the Police'. Some 900 Asian youth attended that meeting but the explanation for the arrests was difficult, almost impossible to swallow. The 12 defendants were their peers whom they knew politically and socially. The audience would know that the 12 were quite capable of making petrol bombs. No big thing. Some of them might even have known of the details. This is not pure speculation. Large numbers of Asian youth in Bradford were aware that all the defendants made statements to the police on arrest, that they were party to making the bombs. The frame up line fell on deaf ears.

There was more to come. The platform boasted Councillor Ajeeb, Councillor Hameed and J.S. Sahota of the IWA. The political practice of the speakers has been in mortal opposition to the mass radical and revolutionary movement of Asian youth. From that meeting onwards, the mass of Asian youth voted with their feet. They went away and stayed away.

Meanwhile the Yorkshire police had been visiting the elders of the Asian community warning them away from supporting the 12. They were terrorists, admonished the police. The elders accommodated the police and subsequently spewed out the line to their followers that the 12 were evil terrorists who had let down their villages back home.

The Committee persisted with the frame up line. In November, a full three months later, the Committee held a meeting at the London School of Economics and again the leaflet harangued, 'Framed by the Police'. The degeneration was complete. Southall, Brick Lane, Newham are traditional strongholds of Asian youth revolt. Yet the meeting was held at the LSE. It was clear that the campaign was firmly in the grips of the Asian middle classes (student types) with every left ten-



dency, every miniscule radical outfit on board. Whatever else the campaign would do, it certainly could not take the mass movement one step further.

And the only line which would generate support in the Asian community was the self-defence line. Sections on the committee in Bradford argued for it, debated the issue week after week. In the end they were defeated, overruled by the solicitors. The solicitors? Yes. The legal team advised that it would be the correct course to keep the defence secret and surprise the prosecution with the self-defence argument. They carried the day. Unimaginable!

We defy a single lawyer to explain what could the prosecution have done to strengthen their case if the self-defence issue was made public. Nothing at all. Here we need to explain the legal procedure involved. The police collate their evidence and send it to the Director of Public Prosecutions who returns the charges. All the police evidence is handed over to the defence. All. What on earth could the prosecution do to hinder the defence if the self-defence position was made public? Sweet F/A.

A word about lawyers in general. They, most of them, have the tendency to dominate the client. Not for them words of advice which the defendants may or may not accept. Their word is law. It needs a powerful, political campaign and equally strong defendants to hold the fort. Otherwise, lawyers do as they please, requiring of campaigns mere orchestration and stage decoration.

In time the campaign switched line to the obscure and liberal position that conspiracy charges were legally oppressive. Listen to this. "Conspiracy charges relate more to defendants' political views and activity than to anything else. They have been used before as a political weapon by the British state to repress opposition." The question to be posed here is 'so what?' That argument is appropriate to the National Council of Civil Liberties who convince intellectuals about complex legal matters. It could not mobilise a single Asian youth. Young Asians would have responded to the line which said, 'Yes, we made the bombs, we made them in defence of the Asian community. Self-defence is No offence'. They would have flocked to that position from every Asian community in this country.

Instead, the campaign persisted in the conspiracy argument with the consequence that support came exclusively from Asian university students, law centre workers, other state-funded projects workers and various denominations of the white left. Here the campaign organisers had a fine political opportunity and squandered it. What is most ironic is that the campaign eventually adopted the self-defence position, but only after the trial was half-way through.

However all was not negative. The 12 entered Leeds Crown Court with much behind them. The mass movement's dramatic actions over a period of five years ensured that no jury in this nation could be unaware of the general issue of racial attacks. That was a major plus. The campaign, although not historically in tune with the needs of the movement, was able to let thousands know of the trial. And the defence secured a major weapon when a Home Office study revealed the existence of 2,581 instances of racial attacks in two months. William Whitelaw, Home Secretary, was forced to change the official position. In his introduction to the Home Office report he said, "The study has shown quite clearly that the anxieties expressed about racial attacks was justified". That admission was dragged out of him by the ceaseless militancy of young Asians on the question. And finally a team of radical lawyers, blooded in and shaped by the black revolt in Britain would take the fight to the judicial authorities.

There was one major hurdle to transcend nevertheless. Tarlochan Gata Aura, on arrest, made two statements to the police. They had offered the inducement that he would be granted bail if he came clean. They also prompted him with the information that his fingerprints were found on one of the bottles. In his statement he mentioned Ishaq Kazi, Praveen Patel, Jayesh Amin, Bahram Noor Khan, Sabir Hussain, Tariq Ali and Vasant Patel as part of the general organisation. He admitted to making the bombs for use "in case the National Front were there causing trouble". Following Gata Aura's admission, all the other defendants crumbled and made varying admissions. Without these statements the prosecution would have had no case.

Gata Aura's admission created a great deal of acrimony among the defendants. The rank and file membership expressed a serious hostility to the leadership trio of Gata Aura, Amin and Ali. The three, they claimed, got them into the mess and created extra difficulties by being the first to sign statements of admission.

More needs to be said on this issue. On the face of it a serious question mark is raised when the leadership of a radical and revolutionary political organisation crumbles so easily before normal police interrogation. In this instance, the issue is much more complex. Gata Aura admits that he signed because he thought "it was the end of the world". Obviously he could see no way out. His attitude is quite understandable. The UBYL was perhaps the sole Asian youth organisation which sought to take the struggle forward against the state and a solid and entrenched wall of Asian reaction. An immense task, one which they were attempting in virtual isolation. Once the entire membership was locked up, with apparently incontrovertible evidence at hand, it was likely that



a youth of 25 years with little experience of police stations, would crumble.

## The Trial at Leeds Crown Court

And so to the Leeds Crown Court, April 26 1982. The first major issue at the trial turned on jury selection. Defence counsel challenged the fact that out of a panel of 75 none of the jurors were from the Asian community in Bradford and only two prospective jurors were Asian. Old legal statutes were invoked, complex arguments were offered, specialist and technical jargon was employed. Eventually, Judge Beaumont, by an administrative sleight of hand, met the defence half way having expressed his sympathy with the view that there should be some black representation on the jury. Eventually 12 jurors were sworn in, seven of whom were white and five black.

Paul Kennedy opened for the prosecution. Not a man of great sparkle, wit and incisive intellect which are the characteristics of an exceptional barrister. He was quite ordinary, mediocre even. He referred the court to events of July 11 1981 when he recalled "there was considerable disturbance in Bradford City Centre in which windows were broken, property was damaged and crowds behaved in a menacing way and had to be dispersed." Tariq Ali, he offered, was identified by police officers as moving between groups of Asians. Tarlochan Gata Aura, he added, was organising members of the UBYL to attend a meeting in which "Tarlochan made it clear that trouble was expected that evening and that petrol bombs should be made."

And here was the major point around which the central contention between defence and prosecution turned. "There was no threat from skinheads and the National Front. . . they [the bombs] were to be used against the police. . . against large shops when they would have a larger effect. . . they were to be used in a riot". Then he outlined the specific allegations against the 12:

**Tarlochan Gata Aura** Co-leader of the United Black Youth League (UBYL). Organised the meeting and the manufacture of petrol bombs. Obtained the petrol, stuffed the bottles with wicks. Wiped the bottles clean of fingerprints. Went to the town centre to participate in a 'riot' and was arrested and charged with threatening behaviour.

**Tariq Ali** Co-leader of the UBYL. Took decision with Tarlochan Gata Aura to make petrol bombs on July 11. Went to town centre to agitate and incite a riot in which petrol bombs would be used. Arrested for disturbing the peace.

**Jayesh Amin** Leading member of the UBYL 'reluctantly' allowed his home to be used for the manufacture of petrol devices.

**Giovanni Singh** Bought rubber tubing for syphoning petrol. Arrested in town centre intervening in Ali's arrest.

**Praveen Patel** Present at UBYL meeting. Obtained milk bottles, filled with petrol, syphoned from car.

**Ishaq Mohammed Kazi** Present at meeting. Allowed his car to be used to obtain necessary materials.

**Bahram Noor Khan** Present at UBYL meeting. Obtained petrol, Kept watch while others made devices.

**Masood Malik** Present at UBYL meeting. Obtained materials necessary for petrol bombs. Kept watch while others made devices.

**Vasant Patel** Present at UBYL meeting. Obtained milk bottles and material for wicks.

**Saeed Hussain** Present at UBYL meeting.

**Sabir Hussain** Present at UBYL meeting. Arrested in town centre intervening in Ali's arrest.

**Ahmed Mansor** Present at UBYL meeting. Obtained bottles, kept watch, wiped bottles clean to remove finger prints.

The basis of all this information lay in the statements of admission signed by all the defendants.

Then there followed some 37 officers most of whom testified to the fact that they accurately recorded, in the language and wording of the defendants, hundreds of questions and answers. The line of cross examination by defence counsel aimed to show that sizeable areas of the police documentation were fabricated and that they intimidated, harassed and used violence against the defendants to sign certain admissions.

The major issue turned on the use for which the bombs were manufactured. The police claimed that some defendants admitted that the bombs were to be used against the police and property. The defence denied this allegation and claimed that those words were fabricated by the police.

The high point of the fabrication issue was reached in Helena Kennedy's cross examination of Officer Maloney. He claimed that he questioned Sabir Hussain extensively without taking any notes. Some 200 questions were asked and replied to. Maloney claimed to have gone away and recorded verbatim 196 questions and answers.

"Did you do that from memory?" teased Ms Kennedy.

"Yes, I did", replied Maloney triumphantly.

"What was the first question I asked you today?" demanded Kennedy, a sharp edge to her Scottish brogue.

"I can't remember", surrendered Maloney.



And then there was the crafty 'hatchet job' on Detective Inspector Sidebottom executed by Paddy O'Connor, counsel for Masood Malik. Paddy enquired of Sidebottom whether, "Further to my previous statement I would like to clarify the points which I did not mention before", were really the words of "an 18 year old Yorkshire lad?" "Yes", replied Sidebottom.

O'Connor then read from Sidebottom's own statement, "Further to my previous statement I would like to clarify the point I did not mention before" Out came O'Connor's sledge hammer. "Did the 18 year old lad draft your second statement for you?" Sidebottom was demolished.

Highlights those were, but there were many like moments in the detailed and rigorous cross examination by defence counsel.

At the end of the day the jurors were aware that the police were prolific at putting words in mouths of defendants.

Then there was the other key issue. Were racial attacks prevalent in Bradford? Officer after officer described Bradford as a haven of multi-racial peace. They would not budge even in the face of clear evidence to the contrary. They made themselves sound and look ridiculous.

At the end of the prosecution's case, the defence is invited to make submissions. They are invariably to the effect that the prosecution had not made a case against this or that defendant. Following like submissions, Sabir Hussain and Saeed Hussain had count 1 dropped against them. There was no evidence to show that they had participated in manufacturing the actual devices. Both charges were dropped against Jayesh Amin, there being no prima facie case made against him. He was set free.

It was now the turn of the defence. Mansfield opened for Tarlochan Gata Aura who then went onto the witness stand.

Soft features belied a formidable political experience. Tarlochan had just turned 25. He was blooded in the anti fascist, anti racist movement of Asian youth and sought relentlessly for some organisational and ideological clarity through which to advance the Asian struggle. He had joined the International Socialists, a Trotskyist offshoot. There he was part of a black caucus which probed and prodded the leadership on its grasp of the black question and its practice in relation to this vibrant and lively terrain. 'Black and White Unite and Fight' was all the leadership could muster. Tarlochan and the majority of the caucus left and formed 'Samaj inna Babylon,' a combination of Asian and West Indian activists who produced a newspaper. That organisation fell apart and he moved on to the Indian Progressive Youth Movement in Bradford, then to the Bradford AYM, the Black Socialist Alliance and finally the UBYL.

Tarlochan gave his evidence quietly and moderately, if somewhat

nervously. His delivery under examination in chief and cross examination could be described as 'suaviter in modo, fortiter in re'. Moderate in manner, strong in content.

Yes, he had made the bombs; yes, he had organised others to manufacture them. He would take full responsibility. He had pursued the course because he was told that the fascists were coming to attack and a wall of flame would deter them. No, he was not a man of violence. He had not left the Bradford AYM because he wished to pursue violent methods. He left because the organisation had degenerated into living off state funding. Coolly and calmly he informed the court of the different campaigns in which he had been involved. At the end of his three day ordeal, he impressed the jury and the public as a young man of moderation and sensitivity, searching for ways and means of alleviating the Asian condition. It was a splendid performance and the high point of the trial.

Evidence was called to show that the Asian community throughout Britain had been living under a reign of racist terror, and that on July 11 1981, the whole community was under virtual siege once news of an impending racist onslaught spread like wild fire. Evidence was also put forward, and not questioned by the prosecution, that a Chief Inspector was actually informed of the impending attack and the police did nothing to protect the community.

Then came the dramatic moment. Not a single defendant, apart from Tarlochan, would go into the witness box. They would make statements from the dock on which they could not be cross examined. Even Tariq Ali, a formidable political activist, stayed away. It was a curious decision. Thousands throughout Britain would have been moved by their responses to the prosecutor's questions. Silence!

The lawyers advised on this course because they speculated that the defendants were too naive to withstand lengthy and hostile cross examination. We beg to differ. These speculations are based on interviews between the lawyers and defendants. A more precise analysis of those interviews must be presented if we are to be convinced.

It is understandable that the defendants were thrown on the defensive when they discovered that the campaign failed to muster the potential support from young Asians, but that they could not withstand hostile cross examination because of their naivete is so much liberal speculation based on the poor, docile Asian victim theory.

Five years of mass revolt do not docile Asian make. All of these young men have experiences in organising demonstrations, campaigns and other militant activity. They have lived through the jungle of the school playground, the cut and thrust of working class urban social life, three to four months in prison and the rigorous discipline of the



bail conditions for close to a year. At the end of that process you become many things and certainly not among them are docile and naive victims. The mass of Asian youth up and down the country would have warmed to the spirited defences which they surely could have mounted.

The closing speeches and the judges summing up were of the usual order, apart from odd flourishes of rhetoric from defence counsel.

The jurors deliberated for a day and a half before returning verdicts of not guilty. The verdict carried clear implications. The five black and seven white jurors were asked by the defence to scale two formidable hurdles.

Firstly, they were asked to say that the manufacture of petrol bombs was a legal act required to meet the threat that racialists posed against the Asian community. And that the petrol bombs were necessary because the police failed to protect Asians from racial attacks.

Secondly, they were required to accept, that 'the best police force in the world' contained men and women who would fabricate evidence against defendants.

In a provincial area, far away from London, a mixed jury, by accepting the defence's version of events, defied the fundamental propositions that the police placed before them. There, the mass movement of recent years was expressing itself.



