

FREE THE BRADFORD 12

12 Asian youths charged with Conspiracy face life imprisonment for fighting racism

On Thursday July 30th and Friday July 31st (1981), officers of the West Yorkshire Metropolitan Police Force (England) carried out a series of raids in Bradford's black community and seized twelve Asian youths:

<i>Giovanni Singh</i>	<i>18 years</i>	<i>Sabir Hussain</i>	<i>19 years</i>
<i>Pravin Patel</i>	<i>20 years</i>	<i>Jayesh Amin</i>	<i>24 years</i>
<i>Saeed Hussain</i>	<i>18 years</i>	<i>Bahram Noor Khan</i>	<i>19 years</i>
<i>Tariq Mahmood Ali</i>	<i>24 years</i>	<i>Tariochan Gata-Aura</i>	<i>25 years</i>
<i>Ahmed Ebrahim Mansoor</i>	<i>17 years</i>	<i>Ishaq Mohammed Kazi</i>	<i>22 years</i>
<i>Masood Malik</i>	<i>18 years</i>	<i>Vasant Patel</i>	<i>20 years</i>

The 12 youths are all members or close sympathisers of the United Black Youth League, a Bradford-based independent organisation of Asian, West Indian, and African youth. Following their arrests, the youths were subjected to brutality by police officers, racial abuse, and threats in the main headquarters at Tyrils, Bradford. They were denied access to solicitors. Friends and relatives were not allowed to see them. On Saturday, August 14, they appeared in Bradford Magistrates' Court where they were charged with conspiring to destroy property and to endanger life, and secondly with conspiring to do grievous bodily harm. Both these charges carry a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

The campaign to free the Bradford 12 needs to be recognised in the wider context of the socio-economic recession which has inevitably led not only to a breakdown in the social fabric of society but to increased political repression. This has been intensified by the vicious policies of the Tory party, especially reflected in its attitude to police powers. Those hit the hardest from the culmination of the two are Blacks. This is seen not only in the economic front with jobs, housing, etc., but by political repression in the form of immigration laws, sus-type of provisions, police harassment, and indifference to racist attacks. The "uprisings" in Liverpool and other cities were inevitable, although police reaction was extreme. Southall experienced an invasion of skinheads who attacked defenceless Blacks. When Black youth retaliated, the police answered by protecting the skinheads and arresting the Blacks. Bradford itself did not escape the familiar process of racist provocation followed by further repression. Black people in Bradford had been attacked and an invasion by 300 skinheads was anticipated. These rumours of attack from sources like that of a local Labour councillor, permeated through the community and created an atmosphere of tension and fear from past knowledge of attacks. It was during this

period that 12 members of the UBYL were arrested.

Directly after the arrests, the community felt the necessity to organise for the release of the defendants. This became even greater because of a further escalation in both the number and types of racist attacks. The most blatant example is that of the fire-bombing of Textile Hall, a West Indian community centre and base of the July 11 Action Committee. Predictably, the police ruled out arson. Police harassment has been continual. Plainclothes policemen have followed relatives and friends in an attempt to make their intimidating presence felt. Again, friends and relatives visiting one of the three defendants who have been granted bail, were stoned and windows were broken by white "Mods." No police protection was granted in these situations. When Anna Singh, a sister of a defendant, was recently attacked by a white racist, the police then decided that they were not going to press charges against him. This led the community to conclude that the arrest of the Bradford 12 is not enough, and that the lesson to be learnt was that anyone else willing to defend the Bradford 12 would be continually harassed. At a more general level, in Bradford the community and members within it are still being systematically attacked. Again, the police are indifferent.

The Sinister Use of Conspiracy Laws

The most sinister aspect of the Bradford Trials is the use of conspiracy laws. Conspiracy laws are notorious for avoiding the safeguards that otherwise are afforded to defendants in every criminal case brought in this country. In relation to the question of admissible evidence, evidence that is normally never admissible (given by one defendant in relation to another, for example) is, in a conspiracy trial, directly admissible.

The prosecution can cast a wide net and trawl in people who otherwise would not be able to be charged with any substantive offence. This means that someone, for instance, who has given a "nod and a wink" at a meeting will be able to be charged with conspiracy, where that person would never have been party to the commission of any substantive offence.

Another and perhaps the most serious way in which conspiracy violates the normal expectations of defendants is that it increases the potential sentence in any given case. The notorious Shrewsbury Pickets case offences, which the defendants were alleged to have committed, would normally carry a sentence of six months. By the device of adding a conspiracy count to the indictment, the sentence was converted to two years.

The Bradford conspiracy trial stands out as the only trial amongst the riot charges brought in this year of riots, in which

the prosecution has chosen to mount a group trial. After Bristol, group trials are regarded as beneficial to defendants. In the context of Bradford, however, it is clear that the prosecution would have inadequate evidence in which to bring substantive individual charges against many of the defendants involved. Consequently, the prosecution have mounted a group trial with all the paraphernalia of a political prosecuting circus, such as we saw in the past in, for instance, the Anarchists' Trial --a trial in which the prosecution failed to obtain any convictions despite having resisted bail at considerable lengths, for many months; one defendant having spent 18 months on remand.

It is of intense importance to query the basis on which conspiracy trials are brought. It is clear that there has never been any determination on the part of the prosecuting authorities, police, or solicitors, or DPP, to bring any conspiracy charges against members of the British Movement or Column 88, who are known to have organised repeated attacks on Asian, Left Wing, and Black bookshops, community groups, youth centres, and individual houses in the course of the past five years. It would also appear that sentences meted out to right wing groups, when caught in the act of committing such offences, tend to be substantially less than those meted out to young Black defendants who are seeking to defend communities for which the police have never been able to provide adequate defence.

There also seems to be a personalised interest taken by the prosecuting solicitor who, in the case of one Bradford defendant, took it upon himself to submit a personalised affidavit objecting to bail. In the experience of most defence solicitors, this course of action, in which the prosecuting solicitor expresses it as an objection to bail that the issue is arousing local political interest and attracting demonstrations, is most unusual.

It is clear that the prosecuting process in this country is putting its forces behind a determination to achieve convictions and high sentences. This is only going to further alienate a community which has already expressed its utter lack of belief in the even-handedness of the forces of law and order.

The Attorney General, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the local Solicitors' Department, the Police, the Magistrates' Courts, would appear to be all indicted of a conspiracy to subvert the course of justice in relation to the Black community.

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