

WARnews

Bulletin of Workers Against Racism • Number 6 • August 1989 • 50p



CONTENTS

5

**Britain and the
China crisis**

6

Julius Alexander

7

**Police riot in
Wolverhampton**

8-9

Kurds in detention

10-13

**Asian politics after
Rushdie**

14-15

**Interview with
CLR James**

16

**Tower Hamlets –
Bengalis under attack**

London police kill two more black men

SEE PAGE 2

How did these men die?

'We want answers'

Jamie Stewart was just 22 years old. Edwin Carr was 39. In the few short months since the last issue of *WAR news* both have been killed while in the custody of London police officers. They are the latest in a whole series of deaths in police custody.

Jamie Stewart was driving his car through north London on a Sunday evening, 2 July 1989. He was stopped by police who it is claimed suspected him of having stolen the car he was driving. Stewart had to suffer the indignity of dropping his trousers in the street before being more thoroughly searched back at Holloway police station.

According to the police they had to use violence to search Stewart for evidence as to his identity. They

then dumped him in a cell. Thirty eight minutes later, at 1.30am, he was dead.

As in the case of Clinton McCurbin in Wolverhampton two years ago, police first responded by claiming that drugs were responsible for the death and that Stewart's 'minor injuries' were nothing to do with it. Stewart's solicitor responded by accusing the police of trying to 'prevent allegations that he was beaten to death'.

Edwin Carr was a south London insurance salesman. He was arrested on 28 June at 9pm. It was alleged he was in possession of cannabis. His home had been raided by police who suspected him of being a drug dealer. Carr had been on crutches for six months following injuries to his knee. One hour after his arrest he was on a life

support machine in Kings College hospital and found to be brain dead. One week later the machine was switched off. Police claim that Carr had 'fallen ill' during a conversation with a police surgeon. After a month this is still the only official explanation for his sudden death.

Since 1971 there have been 21 deaths of black people in police custody (see box). It is clear that black people are seen as fair game by the police. Another black death is just a minor administrative problem to be rushed through the coroners courts. If we are to prevent these murders from happening we need a strong and vibrant anti-racist movement prepared to expose police brutality and defend the victims of it.

DEAD IN POLICE CUSTODY

1971 ♦ Aseta Simms: the police surgeon noted that she was bruised and her brain swollen but could not determine the cause of death. Police in Stoke Newington say she brought about her own death. Her daughter is still fighting for justice.

♦ **Andre Savvas:** Arrested and taken to Hornsey police station, and later died of a fractured skull.

1972 ♦ David Oluwale: was found dead in a river in Leeds. Two Leeds policemen were charged with his manslaughter.

1974 ♦ Steven Bernard: was taken to a local police station after relatives had phoned for an ambulance. He was held and later charged with causing damage to the station. In court he was discharged and recommended for admittance to hospital where he died the next morning.

♦ **John Lamaletie:** died days after his wife had seen him being forcibly held by police and punched on both sides of the neck.

1979 ♦ Nigerian man, still unidentified, found dead at West end police station in London.

♦ **John Eshiette:** died in police custody after being arrested for the murder of his common-law wife.

1981 ♦ Winston Rose: died handcuffed in a police van after he was taken, unconscious, to hospital.

1982 ♦ John Sague: 70 years old. Died in Brixton police station with bruises to the head.

♦ **Thomas Connor:** died in Brixton police station.

♦ **Simeon Collins:** died as a result of injuries to his liver and spleen after being arrested for drunken behaviour.

1983 ♦ Colin Roach: died from a shotgun in the foyer of Stoke Newington police station.

♦ **Matthew Paul:** died in custody at East London's Leman Street police station after two days inside.

1985 ♦ John Mikkleson: Police beat him up during an arrest. He was dead on arrival at hospital.

♦ **Cynthia Jarrett:** Collapsed and died after police broke into her home on the Broadwater Farm estate and pushed her over.

1986 ♦ Anthony Lemard: Arrested in Notting Hill and forcibly held in a police van by the arresting officers. He was dead on arrival at St Stephens hospital.

1987 ♦ Clinton McCurbin: Held down by two officers during an arrest in Wolverhampton. Died of asphyxia.

♦ **Nennah Jalloh:** held in Marylebone police station and fell from a fourth floor window.

♦ **Mark Ventour:** 21 years old. Found in the river at Northampton. He had previously been arrested and taken to Campbell Square police station. A post mortem found evidence of strangulation, slapping around the face and bruising consistent with being tied. Police claim he had fallen in the river under the influence of glue.

1988 ♦ Samuel Carew: 22 years old. Died at Carter Street police station in South London after an arrest at his home. Police claimed was suicide.

♦ **Oakley Ramsey:** Arrested in Walsall and died during the arrest.

[Information with acknowledgement to *The Voice*, 11 July, #352]

What about fighting racism?

Two recent controversies provide a graphic illustration of the demise of anti-racist politics in Britain. One is the backlash against Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, which has become the unfortunate focus for mass mobilisations by the Muslim community. The other was the backlash against the Labour Party's imposition of a stooge candidate in the Vauxhall by-election, which became the focus of a campaign by party activists for more black representation. The two campaigns illustrate how the left's refusal to put the interests of black people before its loyalty to the Labour Party has driven many young blacks to look to reactionary campaigns as the only vehicle through which they can vent their anger.

Labour's refusal to countenance a black candidate in the Vauxhall by-election, and its imposition of Kate Hoey, outraged black and radical activists, who denounced the leadership's action as dictatorial and racist. They argued that it was an insult to black members who have struggled long and hard for the party, and to black voters who have kept the party in power in Vauxhall. They argued, too, that the choice of candidate was a crucial issue for all those who wanted to fight racism.

In fact the debate about the candidacy has got nothing to do with advancing the struggle against racism. It is all about advancing the careers of black activists in the Labour Party.

The Vauxhall debate exposes how a whole generation of black activists have been corrupted by their involvement in machine politics. In the past, standing up for black rights meant fighting immigration controls, official discrimination and police harassment. Today it has come to mean supporting black careerists who are manoeuvring for position, influence and political office through the Labour Party machine.

Since the early eighties the Labour Party has provided a route through which aspiring black politicians could carve out a career for themselves. After the uprisings of 1981 scores of grassroots activists were incorporated into the Labour machine, as the GLC and other Labour councils dispensed political patronage in the form of patronage to community groups. Many former community activists joined the party and many stood for election to council office. The formation of the black sections campaign reflected the changing priorities of black activists.

In return for recruiting more black members and votes for the Labour Party, black activists demanded greater representation in the party, councils and parliament. The election of four black MPs in the 1987 general election appeared to vindicate this strategy and was hailed as an historic breakthrough by black activists.

The argument that advancing the careers of black politicians will improve the lot of black people doesn't stand up to much scrutiny. The demand for more black representation is always couched in terms of how it will benefit, not the black community, but the Labour Party. If you don't pick a black candidate, ran the argument in Vauxhall, then the Labour vote will suffer.

While black activists are preoccupied with preserving the Labour vote, they seem to have given up taking up the issues that concern the vast majority of black people. What about the plight of hundreds of Kurdish refugees in Hackney, who are being hounded and harassed by immigration police and threatened with deportation by the home office? What about the criminalisation of black youth, who are the victims of police persecution everywhere from Wolverhampton to Tottenham? What about the predicament of countless black families who are living under siege, the victims of daily attacks by racist thugs? Labour's black politicians are virtually silent on such issues.

The transformation of the anti-racist struggle into an electoral bandwagon for black politicians has undermined attempts to organise collective resistance to racism within the black community. The emphasis on electoral solutions has diverted the struggle against oppression, and deprived angry black youth of a focus for fighting racism.

While a small clique of black activists has become ever more integrated into the political mainstream, the vast majority of black youth have become increasingly alienated and atomised. The retreat of black activists from the anti-racist struggle has allowed reactionary forces to provide an alternative focus for angry black youth. The way in which the anti-Rushdie campaign has become a vehicle for militant young Asians to vent their frustrations is a tragic illustration of the failure of the left to organise resistance to racism.

While the campaign against *The Satanic Verses* has been organised by reactionary religious leaders, it has attracted support from a new generation of Asian youth. In the early eighties these youth would have been marching behind the banners of the Bradford 12 or the Newham 8. Today they can find no vehicle through which to articulate their resentment other than a reactionary campaign led by reactionary leaders.

The left's loyalty to the Labour Party has blinded it to the possibilities of building a real fightback against racism. Even when black youth are looking to fight back, the left would rather drive them into the hands of the mullahs than break with Labour. It makes even more urgent the necessity to build a genuine anti-racist movement.

Debating anti-racism

How to Fight Deportations

SINCE THE DEPORTATION OF Viraj Mendis in January you have carried a series of attacks on the Viraj Mendis Defence Campaign. These attacks must be countered because they damage the example of the VMDC and obscure the lessons that can be learned from it. You raise three questions about the VMDC.

How did Viraj Mendis fight his case in the courts? Viraj's legal case was fought on two grounds: his 15-year residence in this country and the situation in Sri Lanka. You state that this latter point was mistakenly 'made the centre of the argument'. This emphasis was not mistaken at all. As the situation deteriorated it was quite correctly made central to Viraj's legal case, because it was the weakest aspect of the home office's case for deporting him. As the campaign spread more news about the situation in Sri Lanka, so the home office lies were exposed, and their real motive for deporting Viraj became clear: the fact that he is a black communist. In this way what you call the legali-

ties of the case can be used both in the courts and the campaign to fight the legal case, to win popular support and to show in practice the racism of the immigration laws.

What was Viraj Mendis resisting? You say this orientation led to the appearance that Viraj was resisting 'a third world regime...rather than Britain's racist immigration legislation'. Viraj is a communist who resists all forms of oppression, and campaigned against racism in Britain and Sri Lanka. As a result he became a target not only of the British government, but also of reactionary forces in Sri Lanka. His campaign against deportation exposed the collaboration between the two regimes; Britain maintaining that Sri Lanka was a 'democracy', safe for refugees, in order to protect its interests in Sri Lanka. This sort of collaboration is central to immigration laws.

How did the home office succeed in deporting Viraj? The home office did not succeed in winning the argument as you suggest. In fact, for four and a half years the home office failed to win the argument, or drive away the support for Viraj that prevented his deportation. In the end the home office could

deport Viraj only by force. It sent 100 police in a dawn raid to kidnap him, flew him handcuffed to Colombo, and arrested 30 of his supporters. Then began a major smear campaign in the media. This also failed: two weeks later 3000 people marched in protest against Viraj's deportation and all other deportations.

You suggest that the critical weapon for campaigning work is the right argument. Black people are not going to win with arguments. They will only win through political organisation that allows all those opposed to deportations and racism to participate in the fight. The VMDC demonstrated this method. Britain's immigration laws were put at the centre of the political stage. This was achieved not by starting with the right argument. We achieved this by starting with the question: how can we unite the biggest force in support of Viraj? This must be the question with which all anti-deportation campaigns begin. The VMDC stands as an example of this approach.

Sarah Ricca
Secretary VMDC
Manchester

What sort of anti-racist movement

THE SECRETARY OF THE VIRAJ Mendis Defence campaign Sarah Ricca claims the VMDC fought his deportation 'not by starting with the right arguments', but by attempting to 'unite the biggest force in support of Viraj'. In doing so she gives the game away. It is a prejudice of modern left-wing thinking that there is a contradiction between a clear uncompromising stand, and 'uniting the biggest force'. It is a prejudice that the VMDC exemplifies, and demonstrates above all else how little confidence it has in the biggest force in society, the working class.

Throughout, the VMDC seemed to place more faith in the Church of England than in any other force. This reliance on the church con-

stantly dictated the limits of the campaign's politics. It was impossible for it to make the simple point that Viraj was a victim of Britain's irretrievably racist immigration laws, and that like all deportations, his had to be fought from an anti-state perspective.

In place of such a forthright stand, the VMDC appealed to the heartstrings of assorted liberals. The claims that Viraj would face execution at home became the only motivation for supporting the campaign.

It should come as no surprise then that the VMDC's last conference was poorly attended, or that a recent national march in London attracted fewer than 100 people. The idea that church sanctuary was able to provide Viraj Mendis with security, and that the main enemy was in Sri Lanka, effectively demobilised the campaign.

Sarah's contention that the right arguments are of no consequence, and that you only win 'through political organisation' begs the question of where the strategy and tactics which form the basis of that organisation come from. As Lenin said, without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary movement.

Having the right arguments is the prerequisite for winning the fight against racism; and the VMDC's wrong ideas must take a large chunk of responsibility for its defeat. It would be a step in the right direction if the VMDC would come out of the bunker and examine the failure of its ideas in practice. Making mistakes is no great problem, but turning them into virtues is positively suicidal.

Keith Tompson
WAR national organiser

Write to

WARnews

BM WAR

London

WC1N 3XX

British racism and the China crisis

The vicious massacres in China in June exposed not only the Chinese regime's barbarity, but also the racist and hypocritical stance of our government back home in Britain.

Nigel Lewis reports on the arguments about the Hong Kong Chinese

Margaret Thatcher is in trouble over growing demands that she do something to defend the rights of British citizens in Hong Kong. In 1984, the government signed an agreement to hand over the British colony to China in 1997. After the slaughter of thousands of workers and students by the Beijing regime, there is a growing concern among the people of the colony about what will happen to them seven years hence. In the past month the government has faced calls to grant Hong Kong's 3.5m UK passport holders the right to British residence which they are presently denied.

The Tories insist that Britain cannot open its doors to British citizens in Hong Kong because the numbers are too high. 'There are in Hong Kong 3.5 million people with British passports' Margaret Thatcher told the house of commons in June. 'Since 1945, from the New Commonwealth, we have had emigration into this country of 1.6 million.' 'I give the figures' she added, 'to show the enormity of the task'.

The government's argument that Britain is a poor, overcrowded little island is racist humbug. What really concerns the Tories is not the number of people coming here, but the colour of their faces. Some politicians have tried to embarrass the government with the argument that if Britain was really committed to democracy, then it would surely welcome with open arms immigrants fleeing the clutches of totalitarian communism. But the Tories have set too much store by their use of chauvinist tirades against

immigrants to make any concessions on this argument.

Thatcher has constructed a racist consensus around the idea that immigrants are a threat to the British people, running hysterical campaigns against Tamils, Kurds and other refugees fleeing persecution. In the current debate, it is inconceivable that the government would ever do anything to undermine this anti-immigrant consensus.

Thus Thatcher has said that she could not take seriously the suggestion that the government should allow 3.5m Chinese into the country. Others have wheeled out the familiar argument that such a move would open the floodgates to immigrants everywhere. Some have said that it is just not on because nobody would stand for it. Even those who insist that the government has an obligation to its citizens in Hong Kong accept the parameters of the racist consensus. They say that of course the country cannot afford to accommodate 3.5m, but at least it should allow in anyone who has served the Crown. In fact this is happening already, with police chiefs, civil servants and top administrators being given the right of abode.

This chauvinist crusade must be confronted in an unequivocal fashion. Our attitude to this latest twist in the immigration debate has to be unambiguous. Whatever we might think of rich capitalists in Hong Kong, we nevertheless support their right to come to Britain, and that goes for every single person who wishes for whatever reason to come here. The panic that has been stirred up around the immigration issue is simply a chauvinist attempt to whip up racist sentiment by raising the spectre of Chinese take-aways on every street corner, and British culture being swamped by alien hordes. This is something that we in Workers Against Racism are not prepared to accept. We therefore support the right of anybody from Hong Kong to come to this country if they should wish.

Our arguments have to be directed against the Tories, and also their

loyal allies in Her Majesty's opposition. The Labour Party's home office minister, Gerald Kaufman, has capitulated to the anti-immigrant consensus, and has refused to challenge immigration laws. This should come as no surprise, as the Labour Party in their last term of government in 1974-79 drew up the green paper on nationality that became the Tories' Nationality Act in 1981. After ten years of Thatcherite scapegoating of immigrants, the Labour Party has once again shown that it is no ally of black people.

It is important to point out that all the problems of Hong Kong have been caused by British imperialism and not by China or anybody else. Now that the government is promoting the doctrine that Chinese immigrants themselves are the problem, it is doubly important that we pinpoint the real culprits. The real job of anti-racists is to challenge the chauvinist views that are currently being used by the Tories to divide and disorientate the working class. We should campaign on the basis that every foreigner who wishes to should have the right of abode in this country. Anything else just won't do, because opposing British racism means opposing all of Britain's racist immigration laws.

LIVING MARXISM

Living Marxism is produced monthly by the **Revolutionary Communist Party**, and includes regular features on the fight against racism.

Twelve month subscription:

£15 to Junius Publications, BCM JPLTD, London WC1N 3XX.

Call 01-375 1702.

Individual issues: £1.50

A test case for British racism

Since the last *WAR* news, when we reported the case of Julius Alexander the case has developed into an important test of the government's latest modifications to the 1971 Immigration Act.

Julius has been in Britain since 1984, although his mother, two brothers and sister came here in the 1950s. He is recently married to Maureen, a British citizen, and they have a seven-month old child, Julius. Julius is the only father that Maureen's two children, Beverley and Joanna, have ever known.

Julius is being threatened with deportation because he does not carry a British passport. Legally he is termed an overstayer. He has had two appeals against deportation and both have been thrown out. His case is now going to judicial review.

Julius Alexander's case has become a test case in that he is one of the first people to be affected by a new ruling, made in August last year, giving immigration officers at inspector level and above the right to sign and issue deportation orders. It is this ruling that has resulted in an enormous increase in

deportations over the past year. They are now at an all-time record high of about four every day.

The two appeals ruled that the home secretary acted lawfully in delegating his authority over the signing of deportation orders to immigration officers. In effect this is like giving police officers the right to issue terms of imprisonment without recourse to a jury and a trial.

Julius Alexander's deportation order had been signed by an immigration officer below inspector level, yet still the appeal was denied, on the grounds that an inspector gave permission. So not only can the home secretary delegate powers, so too can those whom he delegates his powers to. Where does this process end?

The findings only confirm that the law exists to uphold the interests of the state, and can be twisted to mean anything which serves the purposes of the establishment. The adjudicator's decision in the Julius Alexander case shows that the home office is intent on winning the right for immigration officers to impose deportation notices on

those who they consider to be illegal immigrants. In this sense the case of Julius Alexander is more important than any other deportation. Whether he wins or loses will determine the fate of tens of thousands of deportees over the coming years.

The campaign launched by *WAR* to fight the deportation has discussed its response to the latest developments. In similar situations other deportation campaigns have made the mistake of allowing the legalities of the deportation case to dominate the arguments put forward by the campaign. In the case of Julius Alexander this would be fatal. Were the campaign to focus on who signed the deportation order it would be easy, once the legal process was complete, for the home office to issue a new one signed by the home secretary. Julius would then be deported legally and would have recourse to no legal defence. Indeed, since the removal of the right to appeal against deportation on compassionate grounds in August 1988, few deportees have a legal defence any more.

The lesson is that to win a deportation case in 1989 the campaign must focus on the racism of the immigration laws and above all else develop an effective political defence of the deportee. Our support for the right of an immigrant to stay has nothing to do with the legal intricacies of who signed the deportation order. We oppose deportations because we are for the right of all those who wish to live in Britain to do so.

Julius Alexander is the victim of a repressive state which allowed his mother and two brothers to emigrate from St Vincent in the 1950s when labour was in short supply, but which rejected his attempts to join them in the 1970s when the labour market was saturated. The only hope for Julius and his wife and their children is for a campaign to mobilise large numbers in his defence. The legal process is not a reliable instrument: the weight of numbers of ordinary people counts for everything.

Keith Thompson

■ Julius, Maureen and their three children



The truth behind the Wolverhampton riot



■ Who were the 'rioters'?

'I don't agree with the rioters but the real villains last night were the police,' Eamon Irvine lives in Heath Town in Wolverhampton. On Tuesday 30 May he had been drinking in the Traveller's Rest pub when the police burst in.

According to the police the pub is the local centre for crack dealers. The raid was necessary, they say, to prevent Wolverhampton turning into Britain's Washington. The authorities claim that the officers were met by a rampaging mob from the nearby estate, primed with bricks and petrol bombs, who attacked the police, burned down buildings and looted shops.

Local and national newspapers faithfully reported the police story. 'Thugs In Riot Fury - cops petrol-bombed' screamed the *Sun*. The local paper, the *Express and Star*, devoted five pages to the riot and claimed: 'Police faced a shower of bricks and petrol bombs as 500 youths went on the rampage.... Shops were looted or damaged...and a council office set ablaze...as gangs of youths erected barricades in a pitched battle with police in riot gear.'

Locals tell a different story. The police organised a brutal, military-style attack on the pub. And when they had finished with the drinkers they spent the rest of the night terrorising the local community. 'The police came through the door like

madmen', said Eamon Irvine. 'They spread us, legs apart, and took away the ones they wanted.' Around 50 police threw people over tables and through doors. Every drinker was forced to put up with degrading searches. How much crack did police find in the 'drug baron's paradise'? All of £140 worth.

The police attacked the Traveller's Rest not because of its attraction to drug dealers, but because of its popularity with the local black community. After smashing it up over 250 riot police stormed the Heath Town estate opposite. A helicopter with searchlights was used.

'There was no question of any petrol bombs being thrown at police' said David Beattie, a white resident who lives near the estate. 'I looked out of the window and saw officers in riot gear swarming in. A gang of youths were shouting and throwing bricks. They had broken up flowerpots to throw. But mainly there was an awful lot of shouting. It appeared to me that the so-called rioters were heavily outnumbered by police.' In all the photographs of the event there were plenty of riot police wielding batons but none of black youth throwing petrol bombs.

Young blacks returning to the estate from the pub were forced to walk a gauntlet of riot police who systematically assaulted them. Raymond Davies was set upon as

he went for some chips. 'I was standing near the chip shop when suddenly about five policemen grabbed me and threw me to the floor. I could feel blows to my back and somebody said "if you don't get out you're going to be arrested".' His back is now a mass of lumps and blue weals.

The police riot in Heath Town is part of a long campaign of scapegoating of the black community in the area. The authorities have quite literally got away with murder, when two years ago they killed Clinton McCurbin, a resident of the estate. In the past few months the police have used the hunt for the mysterious 'Black Liberation Front' to target black activists. Dozens of students from Wolverhampton Polytechnic have been hauled in for questioning. The closure of black pubs is also part of a pattern. Four have been closed in Heath Town alone.

This harassment has united the local community against the police. Even the *Wolverhampton Express and Star's* reporter, Peter Rhodes, had to admit that the raid on the Travellers Rest pub had 'united one of Britain's most racially mixed districts. I spoke to more than a dozen people; not one of them had a good word to say for the police'.

Rupert Gilroy

Kurds



■ Hurd's 'footloose' refugees exploiting the British way of life

Nigel Lewis argues that we can defend refugee rights only by fighting for an open door immigration policy

Since the start of May, some 3 000 Kurdish refugees have arrived in Britain from persecution in Turkey. The British government has used their plight to impose even stricter controls on immigration.

In June, the Tories introduced visa restrictions on Turkish visitors to Britain. Even before the new controls became law, planes carrying Kurds were turned round at Heathrow and flown back to Istanbul without the passengers so much as stepping on the tarmac. In one case all Turkish passengers were told to remain in their seats; 16 then had their passports stamped 'entry refused' and were flown back. Dozens of Kurds have been detained and beaten up when their planes have arrived back in Istanbul. Immigration officers have even had the audacity to travel to Turkey to prevent Kurds from boarding planes.

Kurds who have managed to enter the country have been treated like common criminals. Hundreds have been thrown into prison or detention centres. Hundreds more have been dumped on the Turkish community in Hackney where many are still sleeping in community centres. The scenes are reminiscent of third world refugee centres. Hundreds of men, women and children mill around the bare halls. Camp beds and blankets are piled up in the corner. Women pick through old clothes emptied out of plastic bags. Volunteers dole out soup to lines of waiting refugees.

Local councils have passed the refugees from borough to borough to avoid taking responsibility for them. Haringey has accused Islington and Hackney of a conspiracy to dump Kurds on its streets. The council sent a circular to all its staff asking whether any had a spare room to billet a refugee. Hackney's housing department is telling Kurds that they cannot be housed by the borough and to return to church halls. Until their cases are assessed – which could take over a year – the refugees are barred from working or even changing address.

The treatment of the refugees shows how every British institution treats foreigners as second class citizens. It shows too how immigration laws are the cutting edge of racism in this country.

Before 1985 the arrival of refugees was not a subject of contention. Britain had willingly accepted large numbers of refugees: 20 000 Hungarians in 1956, 2 000 Czechs in 1968, 20 000 Vietnamese since 1979. But the arrival in 1985 of 1300 Sri Lankan Tamils fleeing the civil war in their homeland changed the tone of the debate. The Tories, aided by their friends in the press, used the occasion to whip up a chauvinist hysteria about immigration.

'Keep those Tamils out of here' screamed the head-

in detention

line in the *Sun*. The respectable press echoed this sentiment. 'Britain is an overcrowded little island down on its luck', claimed the *Financial Times*. 'It can't even find jobs for its own people. The last thing the country needs, as it tries to cope with record unemployment, is a flood of new immigrants.'

Why did the arrival of a handful of refugees create such a furore? Because, as the *Independent* pointed out, 'the Tamils are largely young Asian men' – exactly the kind of people that the government wanted to bar from Britain under immigration policy. Refugees have been treated as unwelcome aliens and Britain has slammed the door on them.

The authorities coined a new term – 'economic refugee' – to describe arrivals from the third world. According to the Tories, the new refugees were coming to Britain not as a result of political persecution, but to make a better life for themselves. Home secretary Douglas Hurd claimed that allowing Tamils into Britain would open the floodgates to 'very large numbers of people who are footloose'. It 'would leave us open to a great deal of exploitation and abuse by people who are simply trying to get round the immigration controls'. Home office minister Timothy Renton recently told parliament that many Kurds were 'bogus' refugees who 'didn't qualify to remain here'.

For Workers Against Racism, it is immaterial for what reason refugees come to Britain. Kurds, Tamils, and anyone else have as much right to come here to make a better life for themselves as they have if they were fleeing torture. Immigrants are not responsible for unemployment and poor housing. The lack of jobs and services that working class people have to endure is the result of a system that caters for profit and not need.

The effect of immigration controls is to divert attention from the responsibility of the current system for the degradation of our lives by scapegoating foreigners instead. Immigration laws are divisive because they blame one section of the working class for the problems that the working class as a whole faces.

We cannot defend the rights of refugees by arguing that they are a special case who deserve to come to Britain because they might otherwise face torture or death. The Tories have made it clear that they regard all people from the third world as unwelcome. We can only defend refugee rights by challenging the system of immigration controls which underpins the racist consensus in Britain. That means arguing against all immigration controls. This is something which many anti-racists are not prepared to contemplate.

In the campaign that has been set up to fight for the rights of refugees, Workers Against Racism supporters and others have argued that on all our leaflets and posters we should make opposition to all immigration controls a key demand. We have argued, too, that the campaign must win working class support by pointing out that it is in the interests of workers to side with immigrants and refugees in opposing all restrictions on immigration.

Many in the campaign have, however, opposed such

a campaign on the grounds that it is 'divisive'.

Supporters of the Socialist Workers Party, for instance, argued that such an uncompromising stance would alienate people who were shocked at the treatment of the Kurds but who would balk at supporting an open-door policy on immigration.

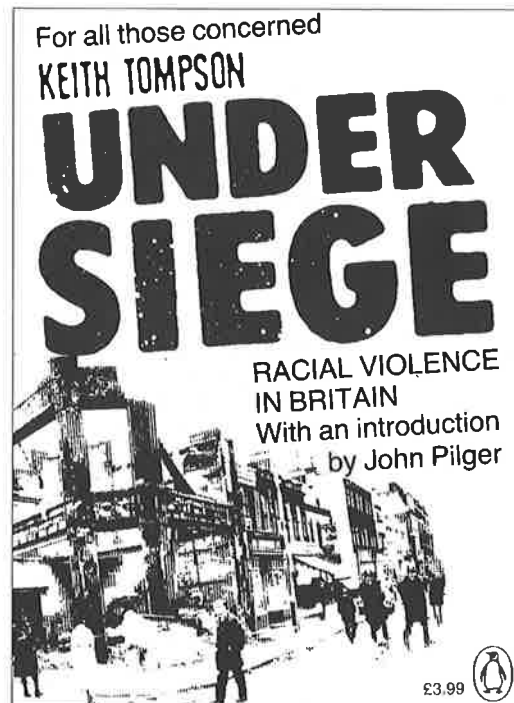
To win support from such people and build the broadest possible movement, argued the SWP, we must appeal on compassionate grounds that Kurds face inhuman treatment in Turkey. In pursuit of building a broad movement, SWP supporters even backed a church representative who complained about a campaign leaflet which described the British government's treatment of refugees as 'barbaric'!

Such a spineless approach is doomed to failure. The government has pulled the rug from under the 'compassionate' argument by declaring that the refugees are not 'genuine' but are simply seeking a better life in Britain. How many vicars will defend the right of an 'economic refugee' to come to Britain? And what use to the Kurdish people is someone who refuses to call government harassment of refugees 'barbaric'?

It is those who refuse to challenge all immigration laws who are pursuing a divisive policy.

They accept the division between 'genuine' refugees who 'deserve' to come to Britain and other immigrants. And they do nothing to challenge the divisive and racist consequences of immigration controls within the working class.

We cannot build a campaign to defend the rights of refugees if we accept the argument that the government has a right to interfere in the life of even a single immigrant. Only a movement that maintains a resolute opposition to all immigration controls will be able to stand up to the harassment the Tories are now meting out to the Kurds.



'The sleeping demons

Kenan Malik reports from Bradford on the impact of the Rushdie controversy

It's closing time and the drinkers, all white, largely male and mostly in their twenties, spill out of the Queen in the city centre. Spotting a group of Asians across the street, one shouts 'Let's get the Pakis'. Half a dozen stream across the road chanting 'There's only one Salman Rushdie'. It's another Friday night in Bradford.

In a city that for thirty years has been polarised between black and white, Salman Rushdie has become the new symbol of the divide. Even more than Ray Honeyford, the local headmaster sacked for his comments about black schoolchildren, Rushdie has caught the racist imagination. The letters page in the local *Telegraph and Argus* has become a soapbox for those who want to defend Rushdie and 'the British way of life'. On the streets, white shoppers express vehement support for an author they have never read and whose views they would most likely find as abhorrent as do Muslims. In Manningham Ward Labour Club, the drinkers speak of Rushdie as if he were one of the lads. At Elland Road, home to Leeds United's notoriously racist fans, not even the arrival of new signing Gordon Strachan can replace Rushdie as the hero of the kop. 'Rushdie is a Leeds fan' sing the Paki-bashers on the terraces.

In the Muslim community Rushdie is reviled in equal measure. Young and old alike agree that *The Satanic Verses* should be banned; many believe that Rushdie should be killed. All are aghast at the white response. 'All we want is our rights, the same as anyone else', says Shahid Ali, a taxi driver. 'But they don't want us to be equal. They'll tolerate us only so long as we don't demand our rights.'

'This country has a history of prejudice against Islam', claims Liaquat Ali, the general secretary of the Bradford Council of Mosques. 'Historically Christians have been at odds with Muslims. The religious leaders used to terrify Christians that Muslims were barbarians, killers. Now with this Rushdie thing all those sleeping demons about Muslims have come awake.'

To the outsider this polarisation of the city is most striking. The dozens of pressmen who have descended on Bradford in the past few weeks have painted the picture of a town caught between two unyielding cultures. Local politicians have encouraged this view. 'Entrenched cultural values are involved', claimed Bradford council leader Eric Pickles. 'On the one hand, the concept of literary freedom runs through all classes of British society. On the other, Muslims ask how a society can exist where a perceived blasphemy against Islam is accepted.'

But dig a little deeper and the picture becomes cloudier. Many of the young protesters are not religious, let alone fundamentalist. Many don't attend

mosque, only a handful can recite the Koran, and few observe traditional Muslim taboos such as those on drink or sex. On Saturday afternoons they can be found at Valley Parade cheering on Bradford City, on Saturday nights at the Palace nightclub, jiving to Peter Singh, 'Punjab's only rock and roll king'. Whatever culture they belong to, the young Asians have more in common with their white peers than with their parents.

Equally, many sections of 'British society' have shown a reluctance to uphold literary freedom. Pickles himself ordered Bradford libraries to take *The Satanic Verses* off the shelves. Gary Waller, Tory MP for Keithley, called for the book to be withdrawn. The Labour Party is split over the issue.

Clearly Bradford is not simply divided by two opposing cultures. The Rushdie affair has brought to the surface a variety of tensions both between Muslims and whites, and within the two communities themselves. To understand the impact of Rushdie on Bradford we have to look at the way that racism, the black community's response to their oppression and the state's attempt to contain black anger have each shaped local politics.

Sher Azam is president of the Bradford Council of Mosques. He will go down in history books as the man who burnt the copy of *The Satanic Verses* on that first demonstration in January. Thirty years ago he was one of the first immigrants in Bradford. 'Everything was alien to us', he recalls, 'the people, the language, the culture, even the weather'.

Asians were recruited specifically to work night shifts in the mills. 'We all worked in the textile industry. The industry needed workers for manual jobs which the indigenous population wasn't prepared to do. At that time if you went on a night shift it was almost entirely Asian, apart from a few overlookers and supervisors.'

Racism wasn't confined to the workplace. In every aspect of life Asians faced discrimination. 'It was extremely difficult to find accommodation', says Azam, 'because nobody was prepared to let us into their homes. We had to live in such cramped situations - in many cases 20 to 30 people in a three-bedroomed house.'

The private landlords reflected official attitudes towards the black community. 'We expected some sort of guidance from the council', says Azam, 'but that guidance was not available to Asian people'. It wasn't just 'guidance' that was unavailable; council housing too was the exclusive property of white tenants. To this day there are virtually no Asian council tenants. Council figures are exceptionally hard to come by but a walk around the major council estates tells its own story. Buttershaw, Holmewood, Howarth Road, Allerton, Ravenscliffe - all are exclusively white. 'I'd be astonished', says Labour councillor Charles James, 'if more than five per cent of council housing was Asian'.

If a black family attempts to move into these estates they are simply intimidated off. Eighteen months ago Farekh, his wife and two children managed to secure a

have come awake'

council house on the Howarth Road estate. 'The day after we moved in it started. They broke the windows, put fireworks and excrement through the letterbox, emptied the bin on the doorstep. When the pubs closed there'd be a gang outside, shouting abuse, throwing stones or milk bottles at the windows, writing obscene things on the door. Eventually we had to move out for the sake of the little ones.'

For Azam and his fellow workers life in Britain was a virtual state of siege. Faced with racist hostility on all sides, Islam became the source of strength and identity for the new community. The mosques did not simply provide spiritual guidance; they dispensed welfare, organised social activities and became the political voice of the community. The strength of Islam in Bradford lay in the depth of racism Muslims faced.

The original immigrants were single men who reckoned on eventually returning home. By the mid-sixties it was clear that they were here for good, and they brought their families over to join them. The second generation of Asians refused to accept the conditions their parents had put up with. They considered themselves British, wanted equal rights with their white peers and were willing to fight for it.

Conflict in the workplace and on the streets was particularly acute. By the seventies the uncompetitiveness of the British textile industry forced major cutbacks and closures. The number of textile workers in Bradford fell from 28 790 in 1965 to 9087 15 years later. The cutbacks hit Asian workers particularly hard. Black workers had always faced lower wages and worse conditions than their white counterparts. Rationalisation made their situation intolerable. And those made redundant had simply nowhere else to go. Racism shut the door on any other job prospects for black workers. The result was a series of bitter strikes in the textile industry led by young Asians.

Workplace militancy was mirrored by conflict on the streets. Racist attacks had increased alarmingly. While the first wave of immigrants might have been willing to put up with 'Paki-bashing', the new generation was not. They organised and fought back. And when they came into conflict with the police they fought them too. In April 1976 24 people were arrested in pitched battles between youth and police in Manningham, in the heart of the city's Asian community, as black youth confronted a National Front march. It was seen as the blooding of a new movement. The following year the Asian Youth Movement was born as the militant voice of young Asians. Throughout the next few years there was increasing conflict between black youth and the police, culminating in the trial of the Bradford 12 in 1981. 'The Trial of the Decade', as the radical black journal *Race Today* called it, rocked the town. Twelve young Asians faced conspiracy charges for making petrol bombs to use against racists. They argued that they were acting in self-defence – and won.

This growing militancy produced problems for both the traditional Muslim leadership and for the British state. In refusing to accept racism, the new layer of activists also rejected many of the dominant Muslim values. 'Our children were growing up hating our culture', says Azam. 'They were angry, withdrawn, we could not reach them.' Asian youth effectively created a new leadership within the community and began challenging the traditionalists on issues such as the role of women and the dominance of the mosque.



PHOTO: SIMON NORFOLK

For the state, the militancy of Bradford youth exemplified the growing alienation of young blacks from British society, an alienation which finally exploded on to the streets in the riots of 1981. The effect of the riots, wrote one political commentator, was to 'transform pleas for more political opportunities for black people into the received wisdom that the black electorate should be more involved in politics' (Fitzgerald, *Black People and Party Politics in Britain*). The authorities recognised that unless the black activists were given a political stake in the system, their frustration could threaten the whole social fabric in Britain.

'They were shit scared', remembers Ali Hussein, a black activist involved in most of the campaigns over the past decade. 'They were staring at the possibility of wide scale riots and they were looking for people to talk to. Anyone, anywhere. They simply pulled people off the streets and said "Come and talk to us".'

In London the GLC pioneered the strategy of drawing the new layer of black activists into the mainstream of politics. It organised 'consultation' with the black community, drew up equal opportunity policies, threw millions of pounds into black community organisations and set up race relations units largely staffed by black activists. As the activists grew dependant on council grants and facilities, so they were drawn into the local state machinery; militancy was transformed into political manoeuvring (see K Thompson, *Under Siege*).

In Bradford the process of providing the black community with a political stake in the system was more complex. The council had to deal not just with the youth but with the mosques, too, which still played an important role. And because black politics had been largely conducted either through the mosques or on the streets, there was no tradition of secular leadership within the community upon which the council could draw.

The council began by 'consulting' virtually every existing black organisation to forge links with the community and create a mechanism that could draw black activists into local politics. It ditched policies such as busing which antagonised Muslims. As in the London boroughs, Bradford drew up equal opportunity statements, established race relations units and began funding black organisations. Through this new machinery, the council established a relationship with religious leaders, created a new layer of secular leaders and incorporated the black militants into the local state.

The council set up the Bradford Council of Mosques in 1981 to unify the religious leadership. The BCM was almost entirely funded by the council. The local authority also poured money into mosques and other religious organisations. The Labour Party groomed a new crop of Asian councillors – such as Amin Quereshi, Bradford's first black councillor, Mohammed Ajeeb, who went on to become Britain's first Asian Lord Mayor, Mohammed Riaz, tipped to replace Pat Wall as MP. 'Labour went headhunting', says Hussein. 'They were desperate to create a new non-religious Asian

leadership.' The quangos tamed the militants, winning their political allegiance by funding their pet projects. Financial dependence was turned into political support as activists were increasingly drawn into the Labour Party to protect their jobs and their organisations.

The establishment of a new race relations industry effectively opened up a new era of local politics. 'There developed a mutual relationship between the religious leaders, the secular leaders and the council', says Hussein. 'The religious leaders delivered the votes, the secular leaders delivered the money. And for the council it's meant a few years of relative peace on the streets.'

Because the mosques had the whip hand within the Muslim community, religious issues acquired a new salience in local politics. In the late seventies the issues that created debate in Bradford were largely political – the National Front, racist attacks, police harassment, immigration laws, busing, workplace conditions. In the past five years, however, the main conflicts have been largely religious – halal meat, separate education, *The Satanic Verses*. Even the controversy over Honeyford's racist views took a religious form as sections of the community used it as a lever to push for separate Muslim schools. The council was quite happy for religious issues to take prominence. Its relationship with the mosques meant that these controversies rarely got out of hand. When the Muslim Parents Association used the Honeyford affair to campaign for separate schools, the council wheeled out the BCM to calm things down. Azam and Liaquat campaigned against Muslim schools, accusing the MPA of being 'fundamentalist'. At the same time the high profile of religious issues helped sideline potentially more explosive political conflicts. By underpinning the dominance of the mosques within the community, the council ensured that there was less chance for more militant voices to get organised.

The different aspirations of the council, the mosques and the Labour Party machine men could all be managed within the race relations framework so long as each gained from the relationship. But the austerity policies introduced by the new Tory administration has upset the carefully created balance and made explicit the tensions inherent in the council policies. The controversy over *The Satanic Verses* is both the product of these tensions and the means by which they have surfaced.

The Tory cuts do not simply mean less money for the mosques; they threaten their domination of the community. The mosques have seized on the Rushdie affair as a political lever against the council, the Labour Party and the secular leaders in order to restore the balance of power. There are precious few religious principles involved in this struggle. In 1984 the Council of Mosques campaigned against the 'fundamentalism' of the Muslim Parents Association as a tactical move to increase its bargaining power with the council. Today it has adopted fundamentalism as a very effective weapon to maintain that power.

By presenting *The Satanic Verses* as an attack on the whole community and the government's failure to ban it as the supreme example of the lack of rights for Muslims, the mosques have recreated the siege atmosphere of the sixties. The Rushdie affair may have awakened the old demons about Muslims, but the Muslim leaders are holding on to them for all they're worth.

In the absence of a genuine movement in defence of black rights, the anti-Rushdie campaign has been able to tap the deep-rooted anger and frustration within the Asian community about racism. The Labour party and the council helped destroy organised militancy inside the Asian community. The mosques are now reaping the rewards. 'A striking thing about the demos', said Hussein, 'is the number of young people on it. Many of them are people I recognise from the campaigns of a few years ago – the Bradford 12 and other campaigns. They're the people I go drinking with. They're not religious but in the face of racist violence and brutality, they're looking for a way of expressing their identity, their anger'.

The Muslim leaders' threat to organise a voters' boycott of those politicians who do not back them has divided the Labour party. Over the past decade Labour has created a political machine within the black community to gain electoral advantage. Now Labour politicians are finding the same machine turned against them. The Muslim threat could have devastating electoral consequences. But Labour equally faces the possibility of a white backlash. The equal opportunity policies have created a well of resentment within the white working class. The token policies did nothing to alleviate discrimination against the black population. But they gave the impression that the council was favouring Asians above whites, and that whites were having to make sacrifices in order to provide resources for the Muslim community. This inevitably intensified racial divisions. The Rushdie affair has brought white frustration to a head. 'The Pakis have been playing silly buggers for years', said one Labour supporter, 'and the council has allowed them to get away with it. But this time it's got to stop.'

The backlash has unleashed a new wave of racist vio-

lence. Racists vandalised the Council of Mosques' office and left a note: 'Leave Rushdie alone – or else.' Racist attacks on the streets have escalated. Taxi drivers now carry clutch-cables to protect themselves. 'Any time we're on night shift we can expect to get attacked', said one.

Many Labour councillors now admit that their race relations strategy has heightened racial tension. They also accept their own policies have now forced them into a corner over Rushdie. 'The Labour group faces a delicate problem over the Rushdie affair', says Charles James. 'When we came to power we tried to put more resources into the hands of the most disadvantaged groups. But white voters saw this as providing extra resources for Asians, while Asians didn't perceive any appreciable difference. The issue cost us votes and has led to a difference of emphasis within the Labour group. A councillor for a solid working class area will have to emphasise their needs.'

The different responses of the three Bradford Labour MPs show how Labour has capitulated to the most reactionary forces in the community – on one side the racists, on the other the fundamentalists. Max Madden, whose Bradford West constituency is more than a third Asian, has fought to get the book withdrawn and the blasphemy laws extended to cover Islam. In Bradford North, Pat Wall's constituency, about 15 per cent of the voters are Asian. Wall has tried to appeal to both sides, describing *The Satanic Verses* as 'offensive' but opposing censorship. Bob Cryer, whose constituency is 95 per cent white, has vociferously campaigned for 'freedom of expression' and condemned the Muslims' electoral threat as 'blackmail'. Labour's craven approach can only further exacerbate divisions in the community.

The polarisation of Bradford is not the clash of two cultures. It is the product of racism – and the divisiveness of official 'anti-racism'. In the absence of a genuine anti-racist movement the reactionary elements on both sides of the divide have gained prominence. Book-burners appear as defenders of black rights, racist bigots as champions of free speech. Only a movement willing to challenge both could cross the chasm that now divides Bradford.

JOIN WAR TODAY

To join us, and find out more about our activities, send £5.00 (£25.00 for organisations or trade union branches) to: Workers Against Racism, BM WAR, London, WC1N 3XX. Phone 01-375 1702

Name

Address

Postcode

Phone

Make all cheques/postal orders payable to Workers Against Racism

'You never know when

On 31 May CLR James died at the age of 89. James was a man of immense talents and enthusiasms. He was a leading literary figures in his native Trinidad well before he came to Britain. He was a working associate of such political figures as Leon Trotsky and Kwame Nkrumah. In his study of Toussaint L'Ouverture's slave revolt, *The Black Jacobins*, James wrote one of the first and finest modern materialist studies of history. His semi-autobiographical *Beyond a Boundary* is arguably the best book written on cricket.

With Trotsky in the thirties, he set about challenging the failure of the US Trotskyist movement to put the struggle against racism where it belonged, at the centre of its political programme. In Nkrumah

and the Ghanaian Revolution James chronicled the failure of the Pan-Africanist movement to which he turned in disgust at the betrayals of Stalinism and the equivocation of the Trotskyist movement. In the last decade James has acted as political guru to a new generation of black activists in Britain.

In tribute to one of the twentieth century's most remarkable individuals, we reprint the interview James gave to *John Fitzpatrick*, just a month before he died. It was first published in the April issue of *Living Marxism*

CLR James is ensconced in a second-floor garret in Brixton. Perched above the offices of *Race Today*, with a view down Railton Road, he sits in an armchair flanked by shelves of books (a cricket ball is wedged among them). He gets the first question in: 'Are you Irish? I thought you might have some whiskey in your pocket. No whiskey? Irish in name only.'

He is frail, but he talked for over an hour before tiring. Lucid and serious, but with a spry wit, he often checked after a long answer, 'Is that clear? Good'. He was quick to rebuke any hint of a lazy or patronising question, and careful in all his replies. When towards the end I asked if he had ever seen anyone bowl as fast and straight as Michael Holding, he weighed the question up: 'I couldn't compare the pace of bowlers. I have known bowlers who were as fast as anything when they were playing. I will say this much. Holding ranks with the greatest fast bowlers there have ever been. I'm not going to compare him with George John or Statham, but he's in that rank. There is no perhaps or maybe about it. He is one of the great fast bowlers. You want to know more, ask the great batsmen of the day.'

How did James compare political work in Britain now, with the days when he rubbed shoulders with Leon Trotsky and baulked at the latter's advice to enter the Labour Party in the thirties? 'In those days inde-



PHOTO: SIMON NORFOLK

it's going to explode'

pendent revolutionary work was quite an adventure. Today things are more organised. It's harder in a way, but you know what you're doing. In the thirties the whole thing was wide open. You were in an open sea and you worked hard or you sank. Today, it isn't so. The organisations are pretty much set and now you join this or you join that.'

He had been in many organisations, and often in none: did he still believe in the importance of a revolutionary party? 'I believe you must have an organisation, but I don't believe that means you have to join something that's there. Maybe you have to fight against an organisation to get a clear policy. In the old days an organisation meant a certain political and philosophical orientation. Today it is that in theory, but in reality it is a structure. In the old days the political line and philosophical basis of it was dominant, not today.' So he hadn't moved away from Leninism? 'No, I have always felt I was a Leninist. I believe Lenin was the greatest political leader, theoretician and organiser that we have known.'

How would Lenin have dealt with Margaret Thatcher? 'Lenin would have said, "She has won three times. Something happens once that is an accident. The second time, maybe it is a coincidence. But the third time that is an orientation. She has won three times, let me see why". He wouldn't rush into agitation to put up somebody against her. He would have said, "Bring me all her books and everything she has said". He would have analysed them all and he would have said, "She represents this and this is stronger today than it was, and she sticks to that and that is why she wins. And now to defeat her we have to get down to these fundamentals".'

What of the racism in Britain today? 'I don't see the race question in Britain as the race question in the vast colonial areas. The dominant question in Britain today is: are you for the Labour Party or are you for the revolution? And the race question has to fit itself into that. That is the question in Britain.

'When black people raise the race question it means to them a lot more than when the Labour Party votes in favour of their struggle. For them, that's something in the paper. It means little. Only coloured people in Britain really feel race. An Englishman in Manchester or Salisbury or Dorset voting in favour of the black struggle, to him that is something abstract.'

What, then, of the colonial world, and the problems which beset African states like Nkrumah's Ghana after independence? 'I believe that in many an African country there was ultimately no distinction between the party and the state. At first the development of a party that had Marxism as its policy was undoubtedly valuable. I want to make it clear, in many a formerly underdeveloped country, the organisation of a party is a tremendous step forward. They leave the tribe, they leave the religious structure and they make a political structure. But if that political structure becomes a representation of the politics of the advanced country, there is a hell of a mess. That happened in Trinidad

and it happened in many colonial territories because the Communist Party, the Stalinists, picked up these things and went to the colonial territories and said the party is what makes politics, and the party is our party...and once the struggle began as to which party, the organisation became dominant'.

The battle which James had with Stalinism was clearly the ongoing political fight of his life. He feels that it was a job well done. 'Today it is becoming more clear that Stalinism is mainly the projection of the need of certain sections of the movement for political power. I wouldn't say the back of Stalinism is broken, but there is a movement against them, not just a few intellectuals and writers. People don't rush to them as the hope of the future as they used to do.

'And if you will allow me to say so, and this is particularly true in the former colonial territories, they understand Stalinism owing to the fact that James and other colonial writers not only spoke of independence but pointed out the evils of Stalinism. It was a tremendous struggle, you know, to make people understand that the Soviet Union, and the Communist Party it influenced, was the enemy of the revolutionary movement. But it was done and the theoretical foundations have been laid. We made clear that the things that happened were not the mistakes of leaders or the weaknesses of individuals, but were the result of the structure and system which grew up to produce them. I think that is the most important thing we left behind.'

I asked about his fiction: does he have any favourite pieces now? 'No. For this reason. I began by expecting to write fiction and to write literature and about society in a traditional way. But I came to Britain, joined the movement and became a political analyst and writer.' 'And activist?', I suggested. 'Yes, activist. Good. I left fiction behind. I don't think anything should be made of my fiction. I hadn't become soaked in the Marxist movement. I was still on the surface.'

On the surface today, I put it to him finally, there is much pessimism about the prospects for revolution. 'Well, my friend, I want to say something about this. When I look at the revolutionary movement over the ages, over the decades, for me emerges one thing. You never know when it is going to explode. The revolutionary movement is a series of explosions when the regular routine of things reaches a pitch where it cannot go on. To me that's a philosophical question based on history and I am never in any doubt. I am in doubt for tomorrow maybe – but I am never in doubt for the day after tomorrow. It has been a fundamental part of my outlook, a statement of Marx early on, that the revolution comes like a thief in the night.

'I believe, you know, that the Marxist theory is a scientific, intellectual theory such as the world has never seen before, and properly used, properly thought of, always with the feeling that history brings things new, that you didn't see before – with the basic Marxist guide you can manage. On the whole we can view the future with a certain confidence; we have a method that is aware of the past, but open to the future'.

Get the police out of Brick Lane!

In the heart of London's East End, a stone's throw from the City, a new generation of Asian youth is fighting back against sustained attacks from local racists and their police allies. Simon Norfolk reports

Saturday 15 July saw the burning resentment of Bangladeshi youth break out into the streets during a demonstration to protest at police indifference to the murder of a local Bangladeshi man. Three thousand Bangladeshis marched through Brick Lane and Bethnal Green behind Ishmot Ali's funeral cortege, and then held an impromptu sit down demonstration outside the local police station. The police responded by arresting 34 of the young Bangladeshi protesters, and gave them vicious beatings on the way to and inside the police cells, much to the delight of a local racist mob that had assembled to taunt them.

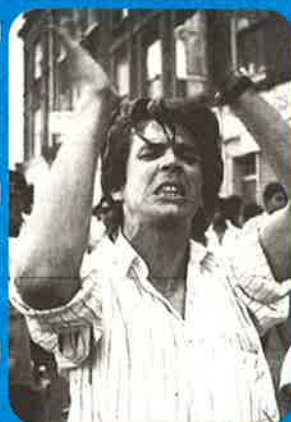
The latest racist murder of 51-year old Ishmot and the serious injuries inflicted on his nephew Waris Ali have occurred at a time when reported racist attacks in the area have doubled in the past year. And in the last month alone, gangs preying on Bangladeshi families have been responsible for an attack on a Shoreditch Bangladeshi woman who was thrown through her second floor window, and for the brutal murder of Sao Miah whose burnt remains were found after he had been kidnapped from his home on the local Chicksand housing estate.

Media reports of the disturbances have depicted the angry Bangladeshis as being intent on starting a full scale riot. But as some of the youths arrested by the thugs in blue testified to Workers Against Racism, what occurred was simply self defence against the officially tolerated levels of racism that plague the area. 'We get beaten up every day by the local racists' said 16 year old Rashid 'they come looking for trouble when the schools close or later when the pubs turn out. They never pick on groups of Bangladeshis, but go for isolated ones and twos. It happens to us all the time, but the police seem to treat it as a joke.'

Rashid was arrested and beaten by the police on the demonstration. He protested at the way a policeman on the march had thumped a young Bangladeshi who had stepped out of the march to shout at local racists along the route. 'Three big policemen wrestled me to the ground and started kicking me. They dragged me along the floor to a waiting police van and threw me in headfirst. They beat me in the van and later in the cells. When I protested, they told me that if I didn't like the laws of this country, then I should go back to where I came from. They're no better than the people that have been murdering us for the last month. If they think that we're going to take this lying down, they've got another think coming.'

Many of the youth also express anger and contempt at the way that the community leaders seem to be in the pockets of the authorities. 'The more racism that we suffer on the streets, the more money and grants they seem to get' said 17-year old Aj. He was arrested and beaten for refusing to call a policeman 'sir' on the march. 'I saw little boys only just into their teens being attacked by the racists, and then being beaten back and arrested by the police when they defended themselves. Round here it takes three policeman to arrest one 14-year old Bangladeshi. If the coppers weren't around, we would drive all the local racists off the streets. The time for diplomacy with the police is over. We have to defend ourselves, not talk to the people who turn a blind eye to what is happening.'

If there was any doubt that the quangos funded by the local council were a hindrance to the building of a real anti-racist initiative, then here is the conclusive proof. Bangladeshi youth who are forced to bear the brunt of racism that is currently on offer know that their only defence is to get the police off the streets. It is only then that the local racists can be isolated and driven back. The question 'what are you doing in this country' was rammed down the throats of the Bangladeshis by the local racists and the police alike. They replied by throwing off the burden of useless talking shops and tackling the racists head-on. It's time that anti-racists everywhere took inspiration from this and acted accordingly.



p&p WAR, BM WAR
London WC1N 3XX.
01-375 1702