

NEWHAM 8 defence campaign

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August

Bulletin 1

8 ASIAN YOUTHS AGED 15-21 ARRESTED FOR DEFENDING THEMSELVES AND THEIR COMMUNITY FROM RACIAL ATTACKS HAVE BEEN CHARGED WITH CONSPIRACY TO ASSAULT PERSONS UNKNOWN.

The youths, arrested on Friday 24th September 1982, after incidents involving plain-clothes police officers were originally charged with offences ranging from threatening behaviour to actual bodily harm. In December an additional charge of conspiring to assault persons unknown was laid against all eight defendants. The youths were arrested after a series of violent attacks upon Asian schoolchildren by racist white thugs. Asian schoolchildren at Little Ilford School (Newham) were attacked by armed white youths on no less than three occasions in the week leading up to September 24th. In one particular incident 60-70 white youths with iron bars and sticks went on the rampage in the East Ham and Manor Park areas of Newham looking for Asians to beat up.

The case of the Newham 8 starts on October 24th. It is the prime responsibility of all black people and progressive groups to give support to the Newham 8 for at the end of the day it's not just the Newham 8 who are on trial ... it's all of us.

They stood for the community - we in turn must stand by them!



Our Experience

With racist attacks showing a sharp increase nationally, the question of self defence is again becoming an issue of fundamental concern to the well being of our community.

Last year even the Home Office (which has a sickening history of denying or under-

playing racist attacks) conceded that Asian people were over 50 times more likely to be attacked than white people, and Afro-Caribbeans 36 times more likely to be attacked. Moreover, since then, racist attacks have maintained an upward course towards frightening proportions.

Both nationally and regionally a worrying pattern of racist and fascist activity is beginning to emerge. This, inter-twined with mass unemployment in our inner cities, certainly means that these attacks are becoming a permanent fact of life for black people - who see no sign of them decreasing or going away.

The fascists are beginning to organise as effectively as they did in the late '70s. This is underlined by the national fascist mobilisation in Tottenham in July and by their attacks upon our community in parts of London, Midlands and the North (especially Dewsbury, Sheffield and Bradford). This organised fascist activity does not include the level of racist attacks that take place every day throughout Britain.

As we write we hear of a knife attack on an Asian youth in Southall (where the police ignored the attackers) while the week before two Bengalis in East London received extensive knife wounds from a raving racist mob. And this is just the pinnacle of an extensive range of attacks, most of which are not reported, highlighted or are just ignored for lack of any faith in the police to do anything about them.

In Newham, a 'front-line area', where we

had the dubious honour of receiving the highest National Front polls in the last election (an election that celebrated a great victory of protecting 'British citizens from fascist invaders') large chunks are becoming no-go areas for black people.

Our community is spat on in the streets, our houses burnt down, our windows are smashed and our members assaulted. The Newham police refuse, ignore or are unable to protect us from this onslaught - which has begun to gather more and more momentum in the past months. As a result on many of the estates in Newham families are imprisoned in their houses after dusk and many people are afraid to walk on the street.

In the face of so much injustice the black community has no alternative but to defend itself. And it is the youth that are often placed in a situation to act as guardians of the community. The Newham 8 defended themselves and their community after witnessing weeks of racist activity at Little Ilford School, which the police did little to prevent. When black people are hospitalised in Newham by racists the police mockingly feel that it is a family quarrel which they do not want to get involved in; but when black people, like the Newham 8, defend themselves from racist activity it is not then, a neighbourly dispute. In fact it becomes a political crime. So the Newham 8 are charged with conspiracy, a law over 100 years old (which is increasingly used against black people and trade union activists) and carries the possibility of a life sentence.

Self-defence is an activity that outlines the crime of the police's refusal to recognise the violent reality of our existence. Self-defence defines their inability to tackle the racist onslaught upon us. And self-defence shows up the racism embedded within the Newham police.

This is why the NEWHAM 8 DEFENCE CAMPAIGN clearly states:

- (i) SELF DEFENCE IS NO OFFENCE!
- (ii) THE ONLY CONSPIRACY IS POLICY CONSPIRACY!



Conspiracy

In December 1982, 3 months after their arrests the Newham 8 were additionally charged with CONSPIRACY TO ASSAULT PERSONS UNKNOWN. This was a political response by the police to the success of the campaign and the issues which it raised.

Conspiracy charges raise certain fundamental issues regarding the black community which must be explored if only because these charges will be used more and more against us: the increasing use of such charges by the State against black people who organise to defend themselves; these charges require a less stringent basis of prosecution evidence; that such charges stand in direct conflict to the harassment of the black community and the failure of the police to respond to racist attacks or effectively prosecute the perpetrators of these attacks; that they implicitly assume that the black community is under no extraordinary threat; that such charges criminalise a legitimate response against racist attacks and that they carry a heavier sentence.

This latent use of conspiracy charges is an unveiled, arrogant threat to the black community: if you organise to defend yourself, either on the streets or through the courts - a defence which concerns the basic survival of our community - then at each step the State will undermine your defence.

Growing up in Newham

Below a young Asian woman describes what it is like growing up in a racist Borough...

"There's no sanctity even in one's home for fear of attack. In 1966 walls were daubed 'NIGGERS GO BACK TO JUNGLE'. Queens Market Upton Park '76 - 'WATCH OUT WOGS ABOUT WATCH YOUR PURSE'. Commuting between Plaistow and West Ham '83 - 'BURN BLACK SHIT'. (The authority fail to erase - the attacks continue.) If that is not naked, explicit racism, then what is?

In the past our cries have been ignored, our problems dismissed. For the first time in Newham things have been exposed and challenged and anyone who says: 'There's no discrimination and outsiders are causing trouble' is a hypocrite. The Newham 8 case is the tip of the iceberg. Every day is a struggle for the silent minority."

Activities in Newham

Since the arrests, the Newham 8 Campaign has concentrated its activities on different parts of the local community.

Because the arrests primarily spring from racist attacks in and around schools we have got consistent support from local school students and teachers. The commitment of the former was shown by a picket of the courts on 5th November which was supported by a historical borough wide strike of students - in many schools, classes were forced to be cancelled due to empty classrooms.

Besides beginning to do regular street meetings and leafletting we have taken the campaign to and have got support from a wide spectrum of black groups. The East London & Essex Branch of the I.W.A. (GB) have been especially supportive to the Campaign.

Labour Party Young Socialists and trade unions have allowed us to address a wide range of audience at their meetings. We must also give a special thanks to the workers at Sunblest Bakery and Fords Dagenham who spontaneously raised large collections on hearing of the arrest of the Newham 8.

Around the Country

Several groups of supporters such as North London & Birmingham Newham 8 Support Groups, Leicester Black Workers Group, Nottingham Campaign against Racism and Fascism and Sheffield Asian Youth movement have been very helpful in getting the campaign public support by distributing information and sending in crucial financial support.

NALGO branches both in Newham and throughout the country, have played an important role by putting across to their members the facts about the Newham 8 and their donations have been an important source of funds for the functioning of the campaign.

An important gain we have gained from the Campaign is the extensive contacts with anti-racists and defence committees around the country. We are considering holding a national workshop early next year with defence committees and campaigns from around the country.

Model Resolution

This Branch/Organisation notes:

1. With anger and concern, the arrest of 8 Asian youths aged 15-21 for defending themselves and their community from racist attacks.
2. Increasing use of conspiracy charges against black and trade union activists.

This Union Branch/Organisation believes:

1. That given the increase in racial attacks and the failure of the authorities to protect black people against these attacks, black people have no alternative but to defend themselves to ensure their well being.
2. That by using conspiracy charges, the struggle of black people against racism is being criminalised.

This Union/Organisation resolves:

1. To invite a speaker from the Campaign (if appropriate);
2. To support the Newham 8 in their fight against racism;
3. To make a donation/raise a collection for the campaign, and publicise the case;
4. Write to the Home Secretary to demand that these charges against the Newham 8 be dropped.

NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION

AGAINST RACISM AND RACIST ATTACKS
1.00 p.m. Saturday 24th September
Plashet Park, E12. ➔ East Ham.

SUPPORTED BY

CAMPAIGN AGAINST POLICE BILL,
ROACH FAMILY SUPPORT COMMITTEE,
DEWSBURY DEFENCE COMMITTEE,
LEICESTER BLACK WORKERS GROUP,
SHEFFIELD AYM, BRADFORD AYM,
ETC.

List of Supporters

Barking NUT, Race Today, Big Flame,
IWA (GB) - A.Johal, IWA (GB) - P.Singh,
Friends of Blair Peach, National
Convention of Black Teachers, Labour
Party Young Socialists, Newcastle
University Anti-Racist Society, Sheffield
Anti-Racist Co-ordinating Committee,
Inner London Teachers Association, Newham
NUT, Hackney Legal Defence Committee,
Nottingham Campaign Against Racism/
Fascism, LSE Students Union, Camden
& Haringey Troops Out Movement, Troops
Out Movement, Redbridge Campaign Against
Racism/Fascism, Newcastle Trades Council,
Fords Dagenham (TGWU 1/1409 branch),
Lewisham Community Development Forum,
Newham Womens Group, League of British
Muslims, GLC/ILEA NALGO, London Campaign
Against Racism and Fascism, Newham NALGO,
University of East Anglia Students Union,
Brixton Defence Campaign, All London
Teachers Against Racism and Fascism,
City of London Poly Students Union,
North East Lancashire Campaign Against
Racism and Fascism, Sheffield AYM,
London Armagh Co-ordinating Group,
City & East London College NATFHE,
Ealing NALGO, Waltham Forest NALGO, City
of Liverpool Branch NALGO, Birmingham
Campaign Against Racism/Fascism,
Merseyside County Branch NALGO, Knowsley
NALGO, Leeds NALGO, Harry Cohen MP,
Durham University Students Union.

PICKET

24th OCTOBER

The trial begins, we want
people to pack out the
court at Snaresbrook for
the length of the trial.

What you can do to support us

There are only two more months to go to the date of the trial. It is really important for people to get their branches, organisations and groups to send in messages of support and also donations/collections. All this will be urgently required in the run-up to the National demonstration and the daily pickets of the courts.

We would like supporters to mobilise as many people as possible for the National Demonstration on Saturday, 24th September, in East Ham. We intend to make this the first national anti-racist march under Thatcher II.

SELF DEFENCE IS NO OFFENCE