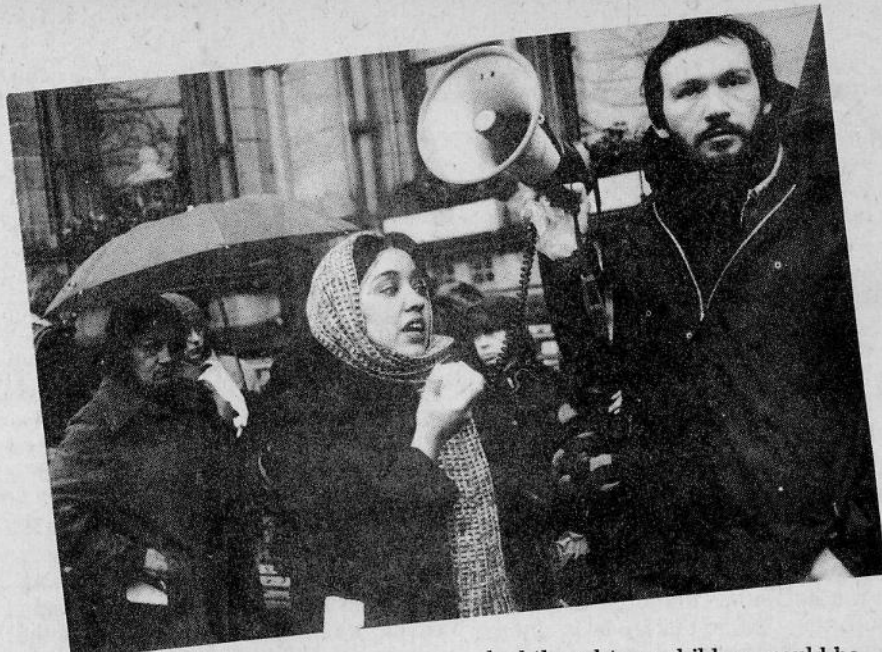


UP AGAINST THE "HOME OFFICE MONSTERS"

Anwar Ditta, born in Birmingham, living in Rochdale, is battling to bring three of her children to this country. The Home Office denies that these children, born while she was in Pakistan, are hers. "I told them I'm ready to accept 20 years in prison if they can prove those aren't my children," says Anwar. She talked to Sheila Woodhead, also from Rochdale.



for this fight have made it necessary. I know that I am right."

She spoke of the early days of the struggle, when the "Home Office Monsters" told them repeatedly to "be patient for a little while and see how things work out!" "When you're on your own, you're not very strong," she said.

"At first I thought everybody would fight along with me right away. I wrote twice to the local paper and called meetings. It surprised me when nobody came. I pushed my way into meetings where I thought people might help. But it wasn't until I went to a Manchester meeting of the Nasira Begum Defence Committee (an Asian woman threatened with deportation), that I first spoke out. There was no nervousness. Nothing could have stopped me speaking.....it was too important!"

At this meeting, and when she spoke at a demonstration that weekend, Anwar discovered something: "A person who is suffering, who is fighting injustice, who is going through hell, pulls support in a way that no third person could".

The phone calls and letters started to come in, and the Anwar Ditta Defence Committee was formed. Organised groups joined her struggle. Thousands of individuals write, and support comes from the Labour Party, which Anwar recently joined: "Although I'm fighting to bring my children over, this is part of a wider battle against racism, against racist laws and policies, and to make sure the labour movement, when a Labour government is returned, repeals the immigration laws that are causing such heartbreak."

Referring to Nasreen Ahktar, an Asian mother deserted by her husband and, as a direct consequence, under immediate threat of deportation, and to other local victims of institutionalised racism, Anwar said how important her success would be to them. "If I succeed, it will give the others courage and confidence to go on. I

had thought my children would be here before summer, but because it's so important to me, and to Shuja, the disappointments, no matter how much they hurt and distress, won't intimidate us."

When their appeal was turned down, and the Home Office declared the case closed, they were told to stop claiming tax allowances for the children, and that past allowances could be reclaimed. This means yet another tribunal. Their barrister has also advised them to appeal to the High Court on a point of law. The adjudicator who turned down their appeal against his own previous decision, admitted they were the parents — though the Home Office is refusing the children entry on the grounds that they're not. He held against them that they had lied on other points in the past — in particular, Anwar was on record as having married at 22, when she actually married at 14½, below the legal age in Pakistan.

Another legal sortie will increase their financial worries, and it's difficult to feel optimistic that the 'establishment' will part company from the Home Office. But Anwar's spirit continues to blaze.

On Saturday November 15, at 12 noon, there'll be a national demonstration in Rochdale. One speaker will be Jayaben Desai from the Grunwick Strike Committee, who also found that struggle eclipses traditional sex roles. Both women see their fight as part of a wider struggle to end the exploitation, racism and sexism that are features of capitalist society. It isn't enough that we join Anwar in her struggle, that we fight to reunite her with her children, central though that is. What is expected of us is that we fight to change a society capable of such inhumanity and divisiveness.

Money is urgently needed, and support — on the demo, and after. Contact Anwar Ditta Defence Committee, 127 Crawford St, Rochdale (Rochdale 39832).

Spare Rib 33

For four and a half years, Anwar Ditta and her husband Shuja Ud Din have been fighting to bring their three children, left with grandparents in Pakistan, to live with them here. During this time, Anwar has lost two jobs, as a direct result of her struggles, which have, ironically, multiplied her need to work. Now she makes pillow-slips at 1p each.

Like most homeworkers, her needs make her ripe for exploitation by unscrupulous businessmen. It isn't enough that they pay her so little; she has had to beg them to keep sending her pillow-cases to sew. She was told to "get out of your own problems" and had to sign a contract agreeing to sew and fold between 2,000 and 3,000 slips a week, if she wished to continue to receive work.

She had no choice, despite the tax deductions and the cost of hiring the sewing machine. She signed because she needs to send money to Pakistan to support the children she is campaigning to bring to Britain. But the pressures of the campaign mean she is preoccupied with the problems of squeezing gallons of work into pint pots.

Her day opens at 6.30am, as she prepares breakfast for herself, Shuja and daughter Samera, aged four and a half and born in this country. Before 8.30, when she takes Samera to school, she fits in some housework. By 9.30 she's at the sewing machine. Every day there are phone calls and interviews, meals to prepare, shopping, cleaning the house, washing. Frequently she has to dash from one meeting to another to gain support, and make up sewing time until four or five in the morning. The Saturday before I spoke to her, she'd addressed meetings in Todmorden, Walkden, Dewsbury and Bradford.

When I called to see her, she was preparing the evening meal, folding pillow-slips and nursing Samera, who was poorly. She talked about the traditional image of Asian women, saying, "I have stepped forward and there is no way back. Our fight to reunite our family has taken me out of Asian traditions, but the reasons