

Black Women for Wages for Housework

English Collective of Prostitutes

Wages Due Lesbians

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Dear Sisters & Friends,

We would like to draw your attention to the enclosed leaflet about the Campaign to Defend the 'Bradford 12' and its forthcoming activities. We think the issues raised by this case are of particular importance for women in the lesbian and women's movements and for men in the gay movement.

The case of the 'Bradford 12' concerns 12 Asian youths who were arrested in July 1981, then held without bail for three months, and who go on trial on April 26th accused of 'conspiring to destroy or damage property by fire or explosion and to cause grievous bodily harm'. These charges carry a maximum sentence of life imprisonment and are a blatant attempt by the Establishment to undermine the power of the Black community, not only in Bradford but throughout the country.

'Conspiracy' trials are not new. They have always been a favourite weapon for the State to use, not only against particular communities but as an attack on organising. For example in the 'Islington 18' case, 18 Black youths were arrested eight weeks after a 'riot' at the 1976 Notting Hill Carnival. They were later tried on twenty 'conspiracy to rob' charges - mostly from persons unknown on days unknown. In another case, that of the 'Shrewsbury 12', trade unionists who organised flying pickets during the building workers dispute in 1973 were accused of 'conspiracy to intimidate'. More recently, five members of the Paedophile Information Exchange were charged with 'conspiracy to corrupt public morals', based on a penfriend service PIE provided for adult paedophiles. It is not accidental that all those arrested in the Bradford case have been involved in community organising. Nor is it an accident that the Establishment has chosen to make this test case - as part of the backlash following last summer's rebellions - in Bradford, where the Black community is well established and has a long history of fighting back. The gay community in Bradford also has a history of fighting back. In fact it's where the Black and gay community organised together against the National Front and won a major victory. Looking at this history we can see how it is relevant to the situation today, in particular how it relates to women and gays and the 'Bradford 12'.

In 1977 the National Front intended to make its headquarters in Bradford and planned to hold a march, followed by a public meeting in the centre of Manningham, an inner city suburb of Bradford. A large proportion of the community living in Manningham was, and still is, Black and immigrant. It is also a 'red light' area where prostitutes live and work and where many

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gays live. That community then, as now, bore the brunt of the economic crisis, of poverty and unemployment and of police repression. Manningham is in many ways typical of the inner city areas where last summer's rebellions took place.

Local people were furious and disgusted not only that the National Front planned to march through their streets, but that the police and the authorities first gave permission for the march and the meeting to be held, but then allowed it to continue by protecting it from a counter demonstration led by gays and Blacks. (The same happened in Southall last year when the police protected skinheads who were attacking the Asian community.) That night in Manningham there was a 'riot' described as the worst street violence seen in Bradford this century. It was a rebellion directed against the police. Women and children were both very much part of the fight in which the people of Manningham took back their streets.

The 1977 offensive against the NF marked a turning point in relations between the gay and the Black community, between white and Black and between West Indians and Asians. Different sectors of the working class which are set apart from each other (although in many cases they are the same people) came together to fight a common enemy. the barriers dividing them were temporarily broken. Subsequently the Manningham Defence Committee was set up to co-ordinate further resistance to the NF and a 'sitdown' protest against a NF motorcade through Manningham was organised by gays. Due to the pressure of this local opposition, the NF were unable to make their headquarters in Bradford - the people of Manningham had won a major victory.

Later in the same year the police focussed their attention on the gay community. Many of you may remember the formation of the 'Bradford Campaign to stop the Witchhunting of Lesbians and Gay men'. The campaign was started to fight back against systematic surveillance and harassment of the gay community by the West Yorkshire police. On the pretext of hunting the murderer of a young man, gay people were taken from their workplaces for questioning without warning, gay organisations were raided and gay people's homes were watched. Altogether 3,000 lesbians and gay men came under direct pressure from the police.

At the same time a police surgeon tried to whip up public outrage against gays by a series of wild allegations made in the local press about 'vice rings' involving young boys in Bradford. Women were very much in the lead of the campaign which saw the harassment of the gay community as part of a much wider attack by the police and the Establishment against the whole community in Manningham. As a result of their organising, which included a very successful march through the centre of Bradford and gathering support from women's groups, immigrant and community groups and local trade unions, the gays won a significant victory. The police were forced to drop their 'vice-ring' allegations and wound down the harassment. The gay community made clear that it refused to be cut off and separated from the rest of the community and refused to tolerate harassment lying down for fear of being exposed.

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Since last summer's rebellions, the whole question of police attitudes and methods, of bias and discrimination, has come under close scrutiny, not only in response to issues raised by the Black community, but in response to widespread criticism from many different sections of the community. Women have a long and bitter experience of police bias and discrimination by the courts - whether we're lesbian mothers deprived of custody of our children, whether we've gone to the police to report a rape or domestic violence, whether we work as prostitutes and are regularly victimised by the police, or whether we're Black women defending our children whose only 'crime' was to be on the streets whatever our situation, women's experience at the hands of the police is now beginning to emerge publicly. In addition, gay men, especially those under 21, and those on the game, are regularly victimised and harassed by the police. Others have lost their jobs as a result of court appearances on trumped-up charges, or for breaking laws designed to control their sexual lives.

A value judgement is being made constantly by the police about who deserves protection and who doesn't, about who is considered to be a danger to society and who isn't. It's noteworthy that the police force who so diligently tracked down the 'Bradford 12', the West Yorkshire police, is a force which has a particularly offensive record of harassment, bias and of complete failure to protect women from violence. Their priorities were clearly revealed during the Yorkshire Ripper case - it took 5 years and £4m to catch Sutcliffe because the police didn't make catching him their priority while the victims were prostitutes. The Home Secretary even admitted that the police had made 'errors of judgement', and still West Yorkshire's Chief of Police, Ronald Gregory, said that he had 'no regrets about his force's performance'. The ECP commented:

"As representatives of the community of most of those women who were attacked or murdered by Sutcliffe, those who paid dearly for these 'errors of judgement', sometimes with their lives, we know almost by habit where to look for the fundamental cause of these errors. Gregory's lack of regret is the key: from the beginning of the inquiry in 1975, a judgement was made about the value of women's lives - specifically the value of prostitute women's lives. The fact is that the murder or brutal attack on prostitute women was not regarded by the police as a serious enough offence to warrant large scale police mobilisation. In each murder case the police deliberately made the distinction between prostitute victims and so-called 'respectable' and 'innocent' victims, downgrading the murder of prostitutes, who are by implication 'guilty', as irrelevant, unimportant, almost desirable. ...it must be established that every women, regardless of age, occupation, race, nationality or lifestyle, is entitled to police protection. Police who are seen not to provide this are part of the problem, not the solution, and must be given their cards." (1)

Women, especially those of us who are Black, lesbians and/or prostitutes, know only too well the effect of police harassment,

(1) "Lie back and think of English Justice" by the ECP, January 1982.

of racism in the police force and the courts, of court procedures biased against us and of attacks by the State against our organisations. We have constantly to defend our communities from violence, both from the State and from individuals. We have fought against immigration laws which penalise us doubly as Black women. As the economic crisis deepens we are fighting against unemployment and poverty for our survival and we're fighting not only to survive but to be able to live where we choose, how we choose and with whom we choose.

In fighting for these rights we are dependent on our organisations and on people who are prepared to stand up with us, and who thereby put themselves at risk. The 'Bradford 12' were, and are, part of that fight. Taking a stand with the Bradford 12 is to make clear that the women's movement and the lesbian and gay movements belong to and speak for working class, Black and white, anti-racist and anti-fascist women and men.

Black and immigrant women have always defended men and young people from racism, injustice, harassment and brutality by the police and the courts. What distinguishes the men in the 'Bradford 12' is that they have put themselves on the line to defend Black and immigrant women - some were key people in the successful campaign to get Anwar Ditta's children back into this country. Not to defend the 'Bradford 12' is to take a stand against Black and immigrant women. It is also to strengthen the government's hand in attacking all of us, because it allows them to pick us off one by one, isolated and divided from each other. We can be certain that if the Bradford 12 are found guilty, we will all be guilty by implication and weaker as a result.

The Bradford 12 Mobilising Committee is calling for all the charges against the defendants to be dropped. In addition to pressing publicly for that, you may also like to consider what else your organisation can do: affiliate to the campaign, come on pickets and demonstrations, circulate petitions, hold benefits or socials to raise money, write to local and national newspapers.

We will be glad to discuss concrete suggestions with you, or you can contact the National Mobilising Committee directly.

Power to the sisters and therefore to the class,

Wilmette Brown

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for Black Women for Wages for
Housework, and Wages Due Lesbians.

Anne Neale

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