

GIOVANNI SINGH
ISHAQ MOHAMMED KAZI
SABIR HUSSAIN
PRAVIN PATEL
AHMED EBRAHIM MANSOOR
SAEED HUSSAIN
JAYESH AMIN
TARLOCHAN GATA-AURA
MASOOD MALIK
VASANT PATEL
TARIQ MAHMOOD ALI
BAHRAM NOOR KAHN

FREE THE BRADFORD 12

NATIONAL MOBILISING COMMITTEE

BOX JK, LAP, 59 COOKRIDGE STREET, LEEDS 2

In all aspects of the case of the Bradford 12, the conduct of the police and judicial authorities has highlighted a disturbing abuse of their powers, betraying a ruthless determination to achieve convictions and high sentences in a clearly political trial. It will be the political views of the defendants that are on trial when they come to court, for the conspiracy charges relate in effect more to their political activity than to anything else. A charge of conspiracy actually allows the politics of those involved to be used as evidence against them, while requiring much lower standards of concrete proof. The prosecution can cast a wide net and trawl in people who would not otherwise be able to be charged with any substantial offence. At the same time, the potential sentence in any given case is increased drastically, simply through the addition of a conspiracy count to the indictment. The conspiracy laws have been used before as a political weapon by the British State in major areas of struggle in order to repress any opposition outside the narrowest of official channels. They were used in India in 1924 to imprison the leaders of its Independence Movement; and in Britain in 1973, the Shrewsbury building workers who organised trade union pickets were imprisoned through the same device.

Against all principles of justice, the Bradford 12 spent 3 months behind bars without trial. In the face of successive weekly applications for bail by the defendants, the prosecution argued successfully in Bradford Magistrates' Court against bail being granted to some of them for 12 weeks. This was on the grounds, amongst others, that a political campaign against their arrest was active, though in fact, the Bail Act does not allow this as a reason for keeping untried defendants in prison. When bail was finally granted by 22nd October, it was only under the most stringent conditions – substantial sureties, surrender of passports, observance of curfew, and most disturbing of all, a total abstention from all public meetings and political activity.

This unprecedented attempt to gag the defendants was tantamount to a South African style house arrest, and effectively banished them from their own community and its support. However this overt act of repression has since been implicitly conceded to be inadmissible by Leeds Crown Court on 6 December 1981, when it converted the earlier comprehensive ban into one which excludes the defendants from only those public meetings which concern their defence. Nevertheless, the new ruling continues to maintain political conditions of bail that go beyond normal subjudice rules, and infringe the fundamental human rights of freedom of speech, movement and association.

The trial itself has been fixed to take place at Leeds Crown Court, in spite of a strong plea from the defence to have it in Bradford. Not only would a trial in Leeds be held in total isolation from the solid support that the defendants have in the Bradford community; it would ensure that a less than adequate representation of their community on any jury panel, since the black population in Leeds is proportionately much smaller than that in Bradford. Such a manipulative ruling clearly goes against the whole rationale behind a jury trial, viz., that the defendants must be tried by members of their own community.

The case of the Bradford 12 and the climate of the July uprisings in general have highlighted the intent of the State to criminalise black people and activists who manifest a growing spirit of defiance in the community. In contrast, criminals responsible for thousands of racist attacks every year are allowed to go free. The forces of 'Law and Order' would appear to be in virtual paralysis, and indeed connivance, when faced with known white racists who have organised repeated and violent attacks on black people and their homes. In Bradford alone, local people can document hundreds of such attacks, ranging from racist graffiti and slogans to assault, arson and firebombs, which have resulted in only minor charges, if any, being brought against the culprits. In fact, on July 24, one week before the arrests of the Bradford 12, two Asian homes were gutted in a vicious arson attack; two white men were charged, but released immediately on bail. On July 14, an Asian schoolboy was attacked by a gang of about 40 white youths with a petrol bomb and racist abuse; only two were charged, and that too only with assault and stealing petrol. When the forces of law and order have repeatedly and over a period of time shown that they are unable to provide protection and redress to the black community under attack, that inability can only be seen as a refusal. The latest example of such a refusal occurred on 23 August when the West Indian Community Centre in the Textile Hall in Bradford, the regular meeting place of the local Bradford 12 Defence Campaign, was firebombed and gutted. The police are treating the incident as an accident!

Over the last few years, the black people in Britain have demonstrated that they recognise the need, their ability and their right to defend themselves, be it through campaigns against the immigration and nationality laws, or on the streets of Brixton, Southall and Toxteth. The State has been unable to respond except in terms of even greater repression, and in effect the trial of the Bradford 12 represents a trial of the entire black community for its growing spirit of defiance to oppression. It is a show trial in every sense.

The wider implications of this trial are serious: a successful conviction of the Bradford 12 will set a further precedent in using the Conspiracy laws to intimidate anyone from organising outside the narrowest of official channels in opposition to the oppressive measures of the British State. It amounts to a major political attack, not only on the black community, but also on the labour movement as a whole and on democratic rights in general. Next time, the Conspiracy laws will be used against workers faced with redundancy and discussing planning to occupy their factory, or trade unionists planning militant action in defence of a dispute.

For justice to be seen to be done, all of the charges against the Bradford 12 must be dropped immediately. This trial must be stopped!