

# STRIKE NEWS

## SUPPORT 21 ASIAN TEXTILE WORKERS

### The Struggle To Date

Like much of the second generation textile industry in West Yorkshire Aire Valley Yarns is situated in a pleasant tranquil village called Farsley, Pudsey, between Leeds and Bradford. This spinning firm is neatly tucked away off the main road, Coal Hill Lane. Looks are deceiving for this firm is currently a battleground between Asian workers and management — for ten weeks 21 Asian workers have been on strike against low wages and appalling conditions.

Aire Valley Yarns is one of many small firms reared on the diet of Thatcherism. Many of the large firms in the textile industry have closed down and there has been the growth of small businessmen as individuals take up those ends of industry not profitable to the larger firms. The 'new' entrepreneurs are able to make a start in the textile industry by operating with minimum overheads, scouring the length and breadth of the land for machinery that bankrupt firms are only too glad to sell off cheaply.

#### THE GROWTH OF AIRE VALLEY YARNS

Aire Valley Yarns is a typical example of these sweatshops. The firm began production in 1978 with a declared capital of £4,500 and by 1982 it had a turnover of £3/4 million. Bedford and Rawson, the managing directors followed the tradition of using immigrant labour in textiles and recruited Asian workers from the Asian community in Bradford.

Employers like Bedford and Rawson are well aware of the vulnerability of Asian labour with high unemployment in the area, they are firm in the belief that they have sufficient power to single out this section of the work force and make it submit to the most ferocious exploitation.

#### SLAVE LABOUR

Workers are divided into two twelve hour shifts, paid a basic rate of £1.02 per hour and compelled to work a 60 to 72 hour week overtime is compulsory. Rates of overtime pay are arbitrarily fixed. When questions were put to the management about how wages were calculated (since this information is not available on wage slips) workers were threatened and told in no uncertain terms that 'if you don't like it you can leave'. Management and workers know that there are thousands of other workers who are willing to take their place. This is the type of wage

system and conditions that Asian workers must accept under the Thatcher/Tebbit edict.

The conditions under which they must labour are primitive and intolerable, they remain so largely to ensure that these shoestring operations survive and expand. In practice this means measures of health and safety which most workers take for granted are ignored. Machines are put before the lives of workers. There is inadequate protection against wood dust, the guards on Carding machines (responsible for 23% of accidents in the textile industry) do not work, spinning machines (which run up to 500 mph) have loose brakes which do not work. No first aid box exists on the premises. These conditions mean that no one could hope to work at Aire Valley Yarns without suffering some kind of physical injury whether burns on the hands, caused by stopping the spinning machines, or as in the case of one worker, temporary loss of eyesight as a result of heavy dust. He now has to wear glasses.

#### THE WORKERS FIGHT BACK

Bedford and Rawson have had to continuously employ divide and rule tactics to stop the frustrations of the workers erupting into open revolt and prevent them from becoming a united workforce. Management cultivated an Asian pet, Shaukaut Ali, who was used to police the workforce and snuff out attempts at organisation by pointing out 'troublemakers'. Such potential leaders were isolated or bribed with money or carpets. The better jobs were never offered to Asian workers. Matters were brought to a head when a section of the workers approached fellow worker, Liaquat Ali who had former experience of Trade Union





organising, he got membership forms for every one. Management found this out and summonsed Liaquat to the office and threatened him with dismissal if he persisted. Liaquat refused to obey, they then offered him sums of money, he still refused to obey and was promptly sacked. His fellow Asian workers responded to his sacking by walking out (day and night shift).

When P Booth the National Organiser of the Textile Trades Group managed to get a meeting with management he was told that Liaquat's dismissal arose out of the need to make workers redundant — this statement hardly holds water since that firm had just moved to a seven day week.

### THE STRIKE DEVELOPS

Two days after the strike had begun (14 March 1983), all of the 21 workers on strike received their dismissal notices. The TGWU quickly moved to make the strike official and the strikers are receiving strike pay of £12 a week. The dispute went before an industrial tribunal on 17 May and was adjourned to June 13. Liaquat Ali is fighting the case on the grounds of unfair dismissal.

Management's pet Shaukaut Ali has been active in recruiting scabs. Management have attempted to bribe individual strikers. Liaquat Ali has received threatening telephone calls and had his car tyres slashed.

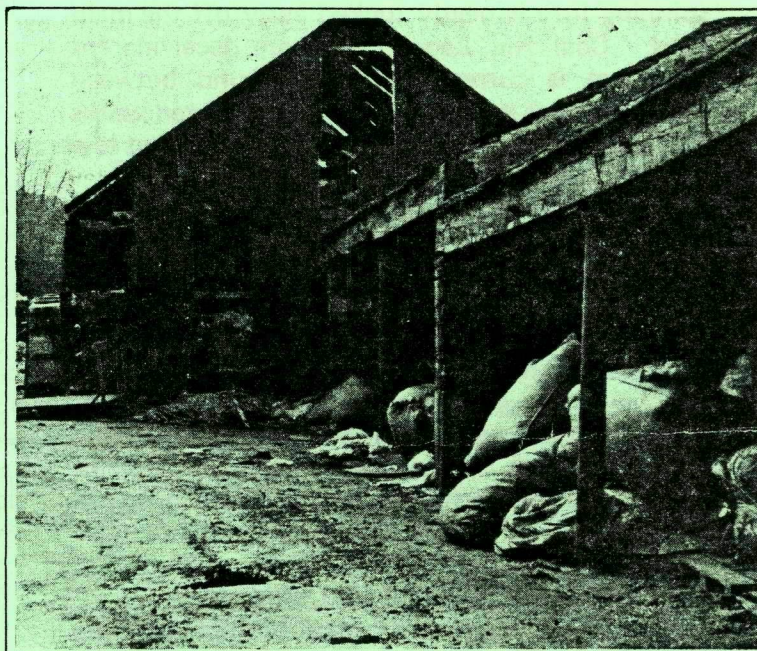
A high court injunction was served against P. Booth the TGWU official and P. Attack a shop steward at Busfields a dyeing firm in Guiseley. The injunction was served against Booth and Attack for 'inducing' workers to black goods from Aire Valley Yarns. The workers at Busfields refuse to be intimidated by Tebbit's law and blacking continues 'uninduced'.

Scabs have been recruited to work in the

factory. They are ferried to and from work by management in cars which accelerate as they approach the picket line. The offence of driving 'without due care and attention' has not been acted upon by the police - they stood idly by and allowed Vilaquat Khan to be mowed down by Bedford.

### THE POLICE

The police came to the factory ready to execute Rawson and Bedford's will. The picket line has been visited by formidable forces of police, dogs, the task force, superintendants and inspectors. So far one person has been arrested on the picket line.



*premises of Aire Valley Yarn*

### SUPPORT GROWS

A 24 hour picket has been mounted despite the unpredictable weather. Six of the strikers man the entrance to Aire Valley Yarns usually joined by supporters. Most lorries delivering goods have been turned back.

Health Service workers from Leeds have loaned a Caravan to the strikers. Management are having their post delivered to a nearby house because post office workers refuse to cross the picket lines. Donation have been sent to the strikers from workers in Leeds, Ireland, Wales and London.

Public meetings have so far been organised in Bradford, Leeds, Manchester, London and Sheffield.

The strikers have remained strong in the face of extreme hardship. Many have families to support and bills to pay. The strike is now entering its tenth week and needs widespread support if they are to win their demands:

1. Reinstatement of Liaquat Ali
2. Reinstatement of all workers
3. Trade Union recognition

Support them financially. Support them by sending messages. Support them by organising or attending public meetings on the strike. Support them by attending the Mass Rally in Bradford on June 18th, 1983.

Messages of support and donations to:  
Aire Valley Yarns Strike Committee c/o  
34 Dirkhill Street, Bradford BD7.