

FRIENDS OF NASIRA AS A LOCAL GROUP

We started as a locally based group. We wanted to show broad-

based opposition to the immigration laws from black and white people in the area, by support for Nasira. Until late 1980 Nasira didn't live in Longsight. The main factors deciding a local focus to start with were:

- the Law Centre being in Longsight.
- half the people in the

campaign living locally.

being local, with contacts going back 2 years.

- the old anti-racist group
- the area having large

Asian population, many of whom would be affected by immigration laws.

For the first half of the campaign, up to the first Appeal in May 1980, we concentrated on local work - street meetings and mailings. However, the communication was very often one way, information going out to names on a list. Possible gains from this work were that more people had a general idea about the effects of the immigration laws and Nasira's case.

But we failed to think of activities which local supporters could do apart from signing petitions or writing to MP'S. We failed to make good contacts with local trade union branches or the local Labour party ward; yet we managed to pass resolutions easily enough at higher levels of these organisations. We had little support from black groups locally. The Asian Youth Movement was not strong enough at the beginning of the campaign to change this situation.

FRIENDS OF NASIRA AS A CLOSED GROUP

We publicised the weekly meetings and they were held in a neighbourhood centre so they should have been easy to get to. But the number of people in the group remained about 12, mostly the same people. Meetings often lasted 3 hours, which many people thought far too long. On the whole decisions were taken by consensus so that everybody in the group could have a chance to talk about proposals. But often long drawn out arguments between 2 or 3 people developed and continued from week to week. Minutes were taken in a haphazard way, and decisions or discussions were not publicised to a wider group of supporters. All these things meant that people who came to an occasional meeting, or people who wanted to be involved without having to sit through our meetings found it hard to know what to do. Outside observers saw us as an active self-sufficient group. This meant we stayed small and static.

FRIENDS OF NASIRA AS A WHITE GROUP

If we produce anything for distribution I think we should write something on the problems this meant. I am not convinced we were right to exist as a white group calling on black people to support us, which I think we were increasingly doing. Once we had started though, as we were resistant to changing, we had to go on, simply to support Nasira.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

More than other individual campaigns we kept closely in touch with Nasira's legal case. Decisions about how to present the case were taken by the whole group as political decisions. The dates of appeals set the timetable for political work, with vigils, demonstrations and public meetings leading up to them.

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More than other individual campaigns we kept closely in touch with Nasira's legal case. Decisions about how to present the case were taken by the whole group as political decisions. The dates of appeals set the timetable for political work, with vigils, demonstrations and public meetings leading up to them. This concern with the detail of the law, while useful, may have been a reason for new people finding it hard to get involved. We were criticised for giving the legal channels credibility by placing so much energy in fighting the Home Office in their courts. Many of us slipped into a semi-professional attitude to the immigration laws, gaining status from understanding

their intricacies. But this didn't necessarily help us understand how to fight the laws.

AN INDIVIDUAL CAMPAIGN? How we connected Nasira's struggle to other campaigns and wider issues.

Friends of Nasira were criticised for basing our appeal for support on pity: presenting Nasira as a Wronged woman, double-crossed by her husband and hounded by the Home Office. Were we trying to get support from guilt stricken whites? This criticism had some justifications. However we did try to show in our leaflets that Nasira was only one of many people threatened by the racist laws, not merely a wronged individual who the Home Secretary should allow to stay on compassionate grounds. The political perspective that many people in the campaign shared was that through showing the effects of the immigration laws on Nasira's life, some basis would be laid for opposing the immigration laws. Especially for white people these laws seem complicated and abstract. We wanted to show the personal effects of the law, and strength Nasira had in resisting the deportation order. This approach was probably well suited to what we at first were; a white group addressing ourselves largely to white people in a local area. But it wasn't enough to win Nasira's case.

After the first Appeal many of us were involved in re-activating the Manchester co-ordinating committee against immigration laws. One issue of a bulletin was produced outlining the cases of all the people we knew about in the region under threat by the laws. The Law Centre provided a lot of this information. It was quite widely distributed by unions, CRE's and shops. This is still a possible activity for anti-racists in Manchester. Through the number of cases in the bulletin it became obvious that there would never be enough people to mount individual campaigns for all those affected by the laws. We began to look for connections between cases, classifications which could help us start more general campaigning work:

- families divided through refusal of entry.
- deserted women threatened with deportation.
- cases of marriage breakdown, men and women.
- students deported after failing exams.
- people in need of health or educational facilities who the Home Office claimed were a 'burden on the state'.

The women in the group began meeting to discuss how women were specifically affected by the laws. Campaigns for Jaswinder Kaur and Nasreen Akhtar were starting in Leeds and Rochdale. Both these women had been beaten by their husbands. Nasreen had been kicked out and Jaswinder had left. These three cases seemed to suggest the Home Office was trying to deport more and more single women who no longer live with their husbands. The support from women's Aid for these cases was important for showing the trapped position of black women facing violence from men and from the State.

Cynthia Gordon's campaign started early in 1981 with a black support group in Moss Side. The 4 campaign decided to work together so that all four won. A joint demonstration for Cynthia and Nasira was held in June '81. A delegate structure from the 4 campaigns was started and a national demonstration planned with delegates from black groups.

This account shows how we progressed from individual to joint campaigning. However the theoretical basis for the choice was not agreed on within the group. Some people were in favour of working round the issue of marriage breakdown, for instance. The choice of direction was in the end mostly pragmatic: we united with campaigns already existing in the region. The 4 campaigns had some successes: the media are still referring to Jaswinder's and Nasira's victories when discussing Nasreen's case. As we changed from an individual campaign to campaigning

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NATIONAL WORK

Were we the best people to attempt this?

How using MPs and the media did work, even though none of us was happy about relying on them.

Advantages of Anwar's victories: LIAG and other groups in towns prepared to hold meetings and take action.

Future possibilities of a network of action groups ready to work round several cases.

Media distortions and tendency to concentrate on the most heartrending cases.

WORKING IN A MIXED GROUP

The Friends of Nasira was a long campaign with a small and fairly unchanging group of people. More than half were women, which is one reason why I felt committed to the campaign. Our attempts to take consensus decisions were, I thought, partly a result of feminists in the group. However conflicts were often resolved by rhetorical speeches and votes. Several women opted out of all discussion at meetings, and the men in the group made no attempt to find out why. Many political clashes came up in the meetings, and this was necessary. But often unnecessarily long drawn out arguments were held between men who seemed to be trying to prove themselves. The other tactic used by men in the group was unquestioning support to each other, and referring to outside groups or authorities with which only they had links. These are not simply annoying personality traits which were co-incidentally seen in the men in the group. Male battling and bonding are tactics used to exclude and ignore women's experience. The consequence of working in a mixed group for women is exhaustion. I feel that the political basis for consensus decisions should have been examined thoroughly, not seen simply in terms of inefficiency. More attempts could have been made by all of us to find out how our lives were going. Our own lives definitely influence how we behave in groups, why we take on too much work, or none at all. If we had had this understanding we could have avoided a lot of factions and inequality in the decision making. Our own political differences could have been more openly discussed. I am not interested in staying in another mixed group for this period of time unless the men look critically at their own behaviour in groups and adapt their politics accordingly.

TACTICS

Maybe it's useless to separate this from the rest, but I think we lacked imagination in planning political events: once the idea of yet another demonstration had been raised we stopped thinking of other methods of working. This sort of thinking needs time, maybe not in meetings. However food and music on the demos definitely helped!

On the whole I think we should have been more open to changing the campaign last summer: maybe we could have continued doing local work, but tried to hand national work over to black groups, particularly the AYF who are in a better position to do this. We could still have used the resources of the Law Centre, mailing lists etc. Although we expanded our operations I think we also solidified; organisations shouldn't carry on existing for their own sake, without making sure they are the right people to do the work.