

30th Anniversary of the Bradford 12

Written by Tandana

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2011 marks the 30th anniversary of the first major national youth rebellion in this country. July 11, 1981 saw the event that led to the arrest and charging of the Bradford 12 on terrorist charges. The Bradford 12 were members/supporters of the recently formed United Black Youth League who had marched during the day through Manningham to defend their community from attack by the extreme right National Front. The people of Bradford and justice loving people from across the country, refused to accept the criminalisation of the youth who had stood up to defend the city and following a strong national and international campaign the Bradford 12 were acquitted and the principle of the right to organised self-defense, including the use of weapons for this purpose was established.

The Bradford 12 case was fought in an era in which migrants to the UK from Africa and Asia, old and new and their descendants born here organised in Black organisations: their names whether Asian, African or Afro-Caribbean did not preclude unity among themselves and with progressive sections of the British population. It was a unity that resonated through the central slogan of the Bradford 12, Self-Defence is No Offence. The Bradford 12 campaign legal as well as political epitomised the uncompromising principle of the right to resist against racism here. And came out of an understanding that what was experienced in this country was a reflection of racist colonial oppression and imperialism with its shameless plunder and exploitation and the occupation of our countries.

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Today, the extreme right groups with a variety of names are still given police protection to rampage through communities. But other things are different, the working class communities like the one which the Bradford 12 had defended are in a far worse position. In the last 30 years they have faced increasing unemployment and poverty, over and above which come the Con Dem sledge hammer of benefit cuts and public service closures - a hammer forged by the hands of the previous Labour Government.

And in addition, people now live in fear of the ever-increasing armies of spies being paid by various projects such as the Prevent programme while some community centers and cafes refuse to allow campaigners meeting rooms to discuss the cases of those arrested under Britain's terror laws; and terror raids by the police means people often cross the road from those who have been raided.

New Claws - Old Racism

Muslims and Muslim 'lookalikes' are now gunned down in the interests of 'security'; with racism rearranged so that 'Muslim' becomes a central plank joining the 'Paki, Wog and Nigger' of yesteryear. To the old racism of colonialism and of Britain in the 60s, 70s and 80s has been added Islamophobia, nurtured by the last Labour government to meet the global needs of imperialism in the 1990s and facilitate the plunder of Africa, Asia the Middle East. This old racism with new claws continues on now hidden now open, now in attacks on people's homes and workplaces, now on the streets, and always in the establishment. Echoing the policy of Margaret Thatcher, David Cameron in a speech at the European Security Conference, declared not only the death of state multi-culturalism but unbuttoned the gloves, threatening to launch a 'muscular liberalism' against those opposing British colonial wars. He has taken anti-Islamic racism firmly into the realm of security.

Can the experiences of the Bradford 12 help us understand the present?

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- What are the implications of the idea of black unity which inspired the Bradford 12 for struggles taking place now?

- What has been the impact of the multicultural policies which were introduced in response to the youth uprisings of the 1980s in shaping identities today?

- How has imperialism changed and how does this affect our strategies here?