

SUMMER OF '78

ANTI-RACISTS FIGHT BACK

Anti-racist youths in the East End of London saw their activities gather momentum as they gained confidence and went on the offensive. While the police and the establishment appealed to community elders to end what it saw as confrontational activities the anti-racist movement responded by forming the Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Committee.

he organisation initiated and participated in radical actions including:

- Sit down protests outside Bethnal Green Police Station, protesting against police brutality against Bengali youth activists and inaction against racist attacks. These events attracted thousands of participants.
- Occupation of the corner where Brick Lane met Bethnal Green Road, demanding the closure of the National Front stall selling their newspaper and other racist propaganda, and closure of their headquarters nearby in Shoreditch
- Patrolling at the top of Brick Lane/ Bethnal Green every Saturday night to stop the gathering of National Front thugs, who would congregate to plan their Sunday provocations and attacks.

- Black Solidarity Day – a day long strike in Tower Hamlets against racist attacks which brought the whole area to a standstill.

- Opposing The Greater London Council's (GLC) ghetto housing plan which had been created in the name of "safe" council housing for the Bengali community. This plan was flatly rejected by the local community who were against a segregated housing policy. The local people advocated multiculturalism and vowed to establish a multi-cultural community in Tower Hamlets.

The movement decisively defeated the National Front as a street presence in Tower Hamlets at the time and they were forced to close their offices in the area. However, there was still latent support for the racist party at the ballot box.

The anti-racist movement in the 1970s brought together progressive, secular and left wing political activists from different backgrounds into a united force. It was a movement that believed in a secular, multi-cultural and socially progressive society and freedom, equality and justice for all.

THE PEOPLE BEHIND A MOVEMENT

Rajonuddin Jalal, currently Secretary of the Altab Ali Foundation, and a leading anti-racist activist in the East End in the 1970s recalls:

"A tribute is due to the key activists, who led the anti-racist movement. Joe Abrams, a school teacher, Dan Jones, a trade unionist, and Patrick Kodikora and his partner Cathy.

Cathy Forrester and her family, who played a key role in mobilising local white people in support of the anti-racist movement.

Aloke Biswas, Brojon Chatterjee, Bengali left wing activists from Hackney who became a part of the movement in Tower Hamlets.

Reverend Ken Leech, who mobilised the church community in favour of the movement (and wrote the publication *Brick Lane 1978*). Pat and Alan Henman, Michael Myers, and the late Bill Kelly also became key supporters of the struggle against racism and fascism.

Paul Beasley, the leader of the council also became a key supporter of the anti-racist movement, as did Councillor Geoff White.

The youth organisations remained united, guided by Tasadduq Ahmed, Fakaruddin Ahmed and a number of youth leaders emerged as the vanguard of the movement, including: Zia Uddin Lala, Shoiab Ahmed Chowdhury, Akikur Rahman, Chomok Ali Noor, Sirajul Haque, Rafique Ullah, Sunahwar Ali, Kutub Uddin, Chunu Miah, Fakaruddin Billy, Shirin Mukaddar, Enamul Haque, Syed Mizan, Sirajuddin Ahmed, Jamal Hasan, Shams Uddin, Ataur Rahman Choudhury, Manuhor Ali, the late Abdul Bari and Kamrul Ahsan JJ, myself and many others.

Bengali women such as Anwara Haque and Amirun Nessa also played an important role in our activities."



RAJONUDDIN JALAL, SECRETARY OF THE ALTAB ALI FOUNDATION



HYDE PARK, LONDON W1, 14 MAY 1978. 10,000 RALLY AFTER MARCH FROM THE EAST END WITH ALTAB ALI COFFIN.

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