

COMMEMORATING ALTAB ALI DAY 4 MAY

AGAINST RACISM AND FASCISM



**BRICK LANE, 20 AUGUST
1978. DEMO BY TOWER
HAMLETS DEFENCE
COMMITTEE AND THE
ANTI-NAZI LEAGUE.**

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Cover photo: Brick Lane, 20 August 1978. Demo by Tower Hamlets Defence Committee and the Anti-Nazi League.



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INTRODUCTION



**PARK LANE,
LONDON W1,
14 MAY 1978.
PROCESSION
BEHIND
ALTAB ALI
COFFIN FROM
WHITECHAPEL
TO WHITEHALL.**

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COMMEMORATING
**ALTAB
ALI**
DAY ON 4 MAY

The annual celebration of Altab Ali Day on 4 May is an important event in the anti-racist and anti-fascist calendar. It gives us an opportunity to both reflect on the catalogue of racist murders that have taken place in Britain and also on the struggle against racism and fascism.

For anti-racists, the East End of London has long been a site of resistance against racism and fascism. It was in the East End that Oswald Mosley's Blackshirt thugs whipped up hatred against Jewish people in the 1930s. But they did not get it all their own way. When they tried to march through the Jewish districts on 4 October 1936 they were prevented by a mass of anti-fascists who used the slogan "They Shall Not Pass!"

The fascists and race haters never really went away and decades later they remerged under the guise of the National Front (NF), terrorising Bengalis just as Mosley's mob had terrorised the Jewish immigrants that had once made their home there many years earlier.

On 4 May 1978, Altab Ali, a young Bengali clothing worker, was

returning home from the factory when he was stabbed and murdered by racist thugs. It was the evening of the local elections. His death sent shockwaves through the Bengali community.

This pamphlet outlines how a mass anti-racist movement was built in the wake of Altab Ali's death. It shows how the skinhead thugs of the NF were defeated in the summer of 1978 by the organised resistance of the Bengali community and its anti-racist allies. The events of that summer became known as the "Battle of Brick Lane 1978".

Today's race haters may not sport the Blackshirt uniforms of Mosley's 1930s' BUF, or the skinhead haircuts and boots of the NF thugs in the 1970s, but they still organise, playing on peoples fears and prejudices. They too have to be defeated.

By telling the story of Altab Ali's murder, and of the anti-racist movement that was built in its wake, we hope that this pamphlet will inspire people to commemorate Altab Ali Day and oppose racism and fascism today in whatever new guise it emerges.

WHO KILLED ALTAB ALI?

RACISM! RACISM!

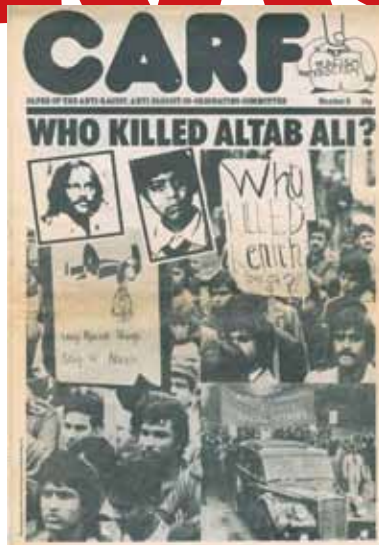
On 4 May 1978, Altab Ali was attacked by racists in the East End of London and left to die in a pool of blood.

The 25-year-old Bengali textile worker was travelling home from his workplace nearby, heading past what was then known as St Mary's Gardens when he was murdered in Adler Street off Whitechapel High Street.

The racist killing of Altab Ali was not an isolated incident in the East End. The following month a 50-year-old Bengali man – Ishaq Ali – was murdered in Hackney. Attacks on Bengalis were commonplace in the 1970s. Bricks were thrown through windows and excrement smeared over doors leaving many Bengalis in a perpetual state of fear. While young racist thugs engaged in "paki bashing", the media blamed the immigrants themselves for not integrating,

Politicians introduced tighter immigration legislation in the 1960s and 1970s, seemingly giving legitimacy to the idea that newly arrived Bengalis from East Pakistan (Bangladesh didn't exist then) did not belong in the country. With politicians and the media against them the Bengali immigrants were an easy scapegoat who could be blamed for everything, just as other immigrants had been blamed before them.

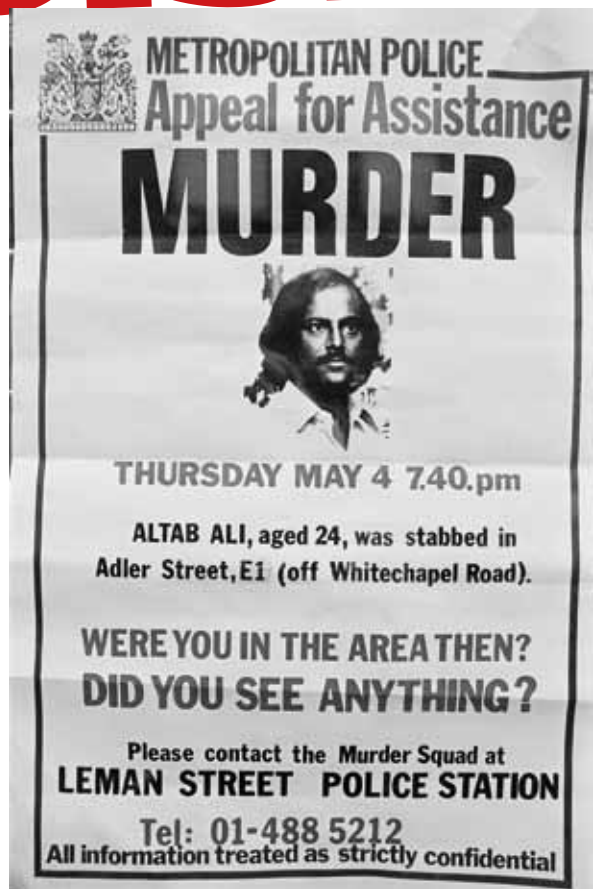
For racists, the East End of London was fertile ground. Job opportunities were limited to low-paid and unskilled jobs in small factories and the textile trade. The Bengali community bore the brunt of the racist activity in the area and were targeted by organised racists. Provocative activities by the fascist



National Front (NF) in the area around Brick Lane often ended in violence. The night that Altab Ali was killed was the evening of the local elections when 41 NF candidates stood in Tower Hamlets.

Altab Ali's death enraged local people and became a symbol of race hatred in the area. In its wake a powerful anti-racist movement was built. At a hastily convened meeting a new body, the Action Committee Against Racial Attacks, brought together all the major groups in the Asian community, Tower Hamlets Against Racism and Fascism, the Trades Council and the rapidly growing Anti Nazi League, to organise a national demonstration against racial attacks.

Ten days after his murder, on 14 May 1978, 10,000 Bengalis gathered in Brick Lane to join one of the largest demonstrations by Asians that had been seen in Britain. They marched to Whitehall – the centre of British government –



**POLICE
POSTER,
HENEAGE
STREET,
LONDON
E1, 1978**

© PAUL TREVOR

behind Altab Ali's coffin, in a long procession led by Asian youth and their anti-racist allies. All over London hundreds of Asian cafes, restaurants and shops closed in sympathy.

Slogans highlighted the anger many felt at the government's failure to do anything about racist attacks, the level of police racism and criminalisation by the government of immigrant communities. The demonstrators shouted "Law and order for whom?", "Self defence is no offence", "Black and white unite and fight", and "Who killed Altab Ali? Racism! Racism!"

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.

The 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, Aatur 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.

© PAUL TREVOR

THE BENGALI COMMUNITY IN LONDON'S EAST END

There are records going back to 1605 of people from what is now known as Bangladesh residing in the East End. Then South Asian seamen, known as *lascars*, including Bengalis, began to settle in London's East End – not far from the docks – from the 1850s onwards. They had been recruited by the East India Company, long before the Indian subcontinent gained its independence from the British in 1947.

From the earliest records of their arrival the Bengali seamen in London were politically active with the formation of organisations such as the Society for the Protection of Asian Sailors in 1857.

WELFARE POLITICS

An early and influential Bengali figure connected to the East End of London was Ayub Ali Master. He started the Indian Seamen's Welfare League in 1943 and also hosted meetings of the East London branch of the India League which campaigned for full independence and self-government for India.

In the 1950s and 1960s, when the British government actively recruited and welcomed immigrant workers from former colonies the Bengali population of East London grew and the men, both seamen and others who had come by air, had established the Pakistan Welfare Association (which became the Bangladesh Welfare Association after Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971) for the welfare of their fellow countrymen.

The Bangladesh Welfare Association (BWA) building at 39 Fournier Street, stands next to the Brick Lane Mosque, which was formerly a synagogue, and before that, a Huguenot church. The BWA building is connected with generations of immigrant experience: it was the base of Huguenot

charitable work with the local poor, and Jewish charities were based there at the end of the 19th century.

WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

By the end of the 1960s and early 1970s political developments in Pakistan and especially in East Pakistan, where Bengalis came from, were moving fast. Pakistanis were campaigning against military rule. In addition the Bengalis of East Pakistan were engaged in a political campaign highlighting the disparities between East and West Pakistan. As resentment grew against the ruling elite based in West Pakistan, East Pakistanis demanded autonomy and this turned into a fully fledged Independence War in 1971.

During Bangladesh's War of Independence in 1971, Britain's Bengali community played an important role in highlighting the atrocities taking place in Bangladesh, lobbying the British government and the international community and raising funds for refugees and Bengali freedom fighters.

THE YOUTH ORGANISE

From 1975-1976 many British Asians, including Bengalis who lived in the East End of London, were experiencing racism, social deprivation and high levels of unemployment.

For the 10-15,000 Bengalis living in Tower Hamlets, who were under constant attack from the racists, Altab Ali's murder in 1978 was a turning point, especially for the youth.

They rapidly became politicised. They began to organise youth groups, community and campaigning organisations and linked up with other anti-racist movements and groups. The groups



that came out of this struggle were the Bangladesh Youth Movement, Bangladesh Youth Front, Progressive Youth Organisation, Bangladesh

Youth Association and the Bangladesh Youth League amongst others. 1978 saw the emergence of the second generation of Bengali community activists who would later enter mainstream politics in the 1980s.

From the 1970s-1980s Bengali community politics moved away from preoccupations with

political struggles in Bangladesh to activism in the UK. The second generation of Bengali youth was at the forefront of this political

FROM THE 1970S-1980S BENGALI COMMUNITY POLITICS MOVED AWAY FROM PREOCCUPATIONS WITH POLITICAL STRUGGLES IN BANGLADESH TO ACTIVISM IN THE UK.

PIC MIAH FAMILY
 (© LOCALHISTORY@
 TOWERHAMLETS.GOV.UK)



SOLIDARITY WITH BANGLADESH



BENGLIS CAMPAIGN FOR AN INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH, TRAFALGAR SQUARE, 1971

The borders of Bangladesh had been created by the British Partition of India in 1947, when it became the eastern wing of Pakistan (East Pakistan), separated from the western wing by 1,600 km (1,000 miles). Despite their common religion of Islam, East and West Pakistan were very different.

In East Pakistan the language was Bengali whereas in West Pakistan it was Urdu. They were also very different from each other culturally. The government was based in West Pakistan and many East Pakistanis (Bengalis) felt that it was not interested in their affairs.

West Pakistan dominated the divided country politically and economically. The military dictatorships of Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan, both West Pakistanis, only increased East Pakistan's feelings of isolation and resentment.

The situation reached a climax when Bengali nationalist leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's Awami League won a clear majority in the elections of 1970 and West Pakistan's leadership refused to allow him to form a government.

On the night of 25 March, the Pakistani military began a violent effort to suppress the Bengali opposition. Bengali members of military services were disarmed. The operation was called Operation

Searchlight by the Pakistani Army and was carefully devised by several top army generals to "crush" the Bengalis.

Sheikh Mujib was arrested and taken to West Pakistan. General Yahya Khan banned the Awami League. 10 million Bengalis fled to India, but eventually the troops from West Pakistan were defeated by the Bengali freedom fighters with Indian and Soviet assistance.

For many, Bangladesh's War acted as a conduit between the elders and the young anti-racists activists of 1978. Nooruddin Ahmed, one of the anti-racist activists at the time recalled:

"I think there was definitely a parallel between Bangladesh's independence movement of 1971 and the anti-racist movement of 1978. The elders were not politically active in the UK because they had different kind of priorities. But they had clear political consciousness, that's why they formed the Bangladesh Welfare Association.

"Because at that time they felt they needed to give people advice on welfare and immigration rights. And they did it because they had clear political minds. If you look at the first demonstration in 1978, after Altab Ali's murder, it was the elderly who took the initiative, and then the young people joined in. Obviously the young people were able to march ahead of older people but they never left each other behind."

struggle. The youth organisations were consolidated into the Federation Bangladeshi Youth Organisations (FBYO), an umbrella body set up in 1980, which spearheaded campaigns for better housing, health and education and against racism.

The youth took the opportunity to gain access to the local political system and to various funding streams channelled through the local council, the Greater London Council and the local education authority. They also saw the importance of building alliances with activists outside the Bengali community, such as other Asian activists from Hackney, Newham, Camden, Southall, Birmingham and Bradford and those from the white majority community including Jewish activists in the East End.

BLOOD ON THE STREETS

For Bengalis in London's East End in the 1970s "Paki bashing" was a common experience. White racists, often whipped up by the National Front and other far-right groups, gave racism a very real and frightening presence in the area.

However, the Bengali community did have anti-racist allies, most notably among organised workers in the trade union movement. In 1978 Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council produced a publication called *Blood on the Streets*, outlining the racist climate that existed in the East End at the time.

Blood on the Streets numbered a hefty 100 pages putting the then current situation into context by examining the role of the National Front and other racist groups and their history of activity in the area.

The East End had been a breeding ground for extreme right wing political activity since the turn of the 20th Century. In the early 1900s the British Brothers League championed by the Conservative MP for Stepney, Major William Evans-Gordon, mounted a virulent campaign against Jewish immigrants in East London

that led to the first immigration legislation, The Aliens Act of 1905. Numerous proto-fascist and then fascist organisations were to follow, the most notorious being Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists in the 1930s. Mosley and the British Union of Fascists had thousands of supporters who blamed Jews for high unemployment and social evils in the area. Violent attacks took place against Jews although the anti-fascist movement fought back, most famously at the Battle of Cable Street in October 1936 when the fascists were prevented from marching through the East End's Jewish districts.

Unrepentant, even after the crimes of fascism in Europe were revealed after the Second World War, the fascists continued their activities. With the passage of time the organisations splintered and took on new names. The most well known group in the 1970s were the National Front (NF) but there

were also smaller organisations such as the notoriously violent British Movement, Column 88, and the shadowy umbrella organisation, the League of St George.

In the 1974 General Election the NF stood in the Bethnal Green and Bow parliamentary constituency and polled 7% of the vote – over 2000 votes.

In the 1977 Greater London Council elections NF candidates polled over 19% of the vote in Bethnal Green and Bow. In Hackney South and Shoreditch the NF polled 9.4% of the vote.

In the 1978 local council elections – the evening of Altab Ali's murder – the NF fielded 41 candidates gaining 9.4% of the vote and collecting a total of 7,000 votes in Tower Hamlets. It was a significant vote for a fascist party but it wasn't the landslide that they had expected. It was to herald a new wave of violence.

While attacks on Bengalis, and other visible minorities, was commonplace the fascists also singled out white anti-



DAN JONES REFLECTS

IN 1983 THE TOWER HAMLETS ARTS PROJECT (THAP) PUBLISHED A BOOKLET CALLED AUSCHWITZ AND EAST LONDON WHICH SUPPORTED AN EXHIBITION MOUNTED LOCALLY WHICH MADE LINKS BETWEEN EXPERIENCES OF RACISM PAST AND PRESENT. IN THIS BOOKLET, DAN JONES, AT THAT TIME A YOUTH WORKER AND SECRETARY OF THE TOWER HAMLETS TRADES COUNCIL, REFLECTED ON THE 1970S AND THE BATTLES THAT HAD BEEN FOUGHT AGAINST THE RACISTS IN THE EAST END.

"I find it difficult to write about the late 1970s in the East End. My memories are full of death, marches and funeral processions.

I walked behind the coffin of Altab Ali, a young clothing worker from Wapping, who was stabbed to death in Whitechapel. I remember the massive outburst of grief and the dignified defiance by Bengali workers that followed his murder. I remember the murders of Ishaq Ali and Michael Ferreira in Hackney, the deaths of Kenneth Singh of Newham and of the Khan family in Walthamstow. My friend Blair Peach, a member of the Trades Council and teacher of handicapped children at Phoenix School in Bow, died at the hands of the police in the Southall disturbances. Ten thousand of us, black and white, Sikh, Muslim, Christian and Jew gathered in the bleak East London cemetery for his burial.

There were times in the late '70s when thousands of Sylheti (Bengali) workers from the factories, sweatshops and restaurants of the East End took to the streets in massive marches and protests demanding an end to racist incitement and attacks. The Trades Council published its indictment of racialism, *Blood on the Streets*. Protests remained peaceful and multi-racial despite continued provocation and a deadening lack of response from the authorities. A new generation of young cockney Bengalis was emerging, no longer prepared to cower in fear or to accept discriminatory treatment – a movement that has begun to make a fundamental political and social impact on our area.

The Asian community continues to demand fair treatment in housing, employment and civil liberty, and

BRICK LANE, 1978. © PAUL TREVOR



racists for attack. Labour Party workers were beaten and numerous premises of left wing organisations suffered arson attacks. Some people came under attacks in their own homes.

On one of the worst occasions of fascist violence, 11 June 1978, 150 white youths ran down Brick Lane shouting "kill the black bastards", smashing the windows of a dozen shops and car windscreens of Bengali shopkeepers. One shopkeeper, Abdul Monan, was knocked unconscious by a hail of rocks and stones hurled through his shop window. He lost two teeth in the attack and needed five stitches to his face.

In that attack some local Bengalis and anti-racists fought off the racists and managed to hold 20 of the white youths for 10 minutes until the police arrived. However, the police released all but three of the youths who were eventually only charged with the minor offence of threatening behaviour.

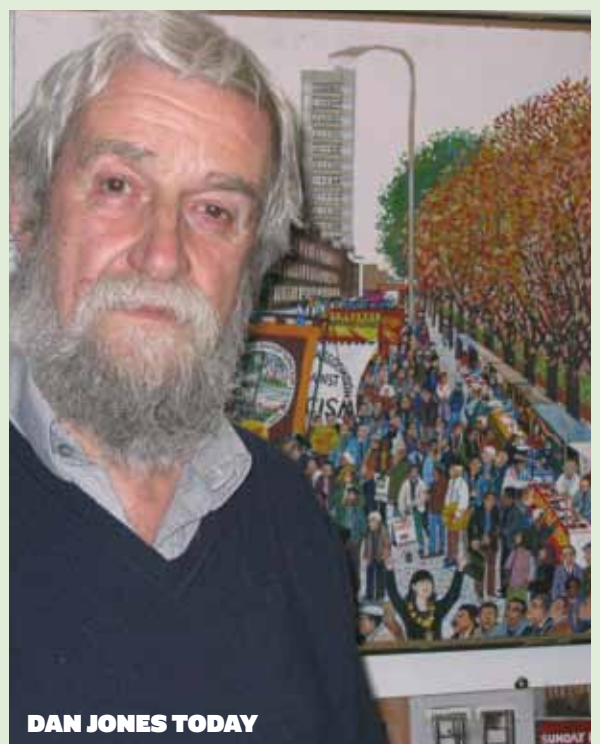
After a number of confrontations the fascists were eventually driven from the area and the activities of the summer of 1978 became known as the "Battle of Brick Lane."

the right to live and work in peace like anyone else, but the pattern of racist attacks continues. Black people complain of harassment by the police and often that the victims of racist attacks are the people arrested while racist incitement is ignored. Now the black people face a whole new generation of discriminatory practices by the State: passports are demanded by officials in housing departments, dole offices, education offices and hospitals. The screw tightens as Britain's increasingly racist laws and rules on nationality and immigration break up black families and treat black people as second class citizens.

As the whole political climate moves in a more racist direction, what were once the mouthings of a tiny fringe of extremists have now become the common currency of major parties. The struggle

against the ideas of Hitler and his heirs continues today. We have driven the National Front from their Shoreditch headquarters, action is at last being taken against the bookstall that has sold Nazi propaganda against Jews and black people at the Sunday market in Brick Lane for many months. But Sieg Heil salutes and racist chants still echo from the North Bank at West Ham football ground, and outside the schoolgates our children are handed poisonous leaflets that claim the Holocaust was a Jewish lie. We despair since white unemployed youth are still attracted to the British Movement.

Racism flourishes where there is insecurity, unemployment, bad social conditions and an easy scapegoat. It will not disappear until we tackle fundamental problems and attitudes that lie deep in our area."



ALTAB ALI – THE POLITICAL HERE TO STAY, HERE TO FIGHT!

More than three decades have passed since Altab Ali was murdered on that election night of 4 May 1978. Cut down in cold blood by racists, his memory nevertheless lives on.

To a generation of activists the name Altab Ali conjures up not only a time of great pain but also a time of resistance. A time when a movement was built that fought against racism and for the rights of all who live in London's East End regardless of the colour of their skin or their religious background.

The racists sought to totally isolate the Bengali community but in response the anti-racists – black and white – built alliances that have lasted a generation. It was a time when the Bengali youth created a movement that empowered their community and left a legacy that endures today.

Rajonuddin Jalal, who was one of the founders of the Bangladesh Youth Movement (BYM), recalled: "I was involved in the formation of the Bangladesh Youth Movement (BYM). The BYM was the brainchild of the late Shahjahan Lutfur Rahman, a teacher and barrister. It was a crucial youth organisation organising against the then National Front (NF) back in 1978. I was involved in setting up many cultural projects in Tower Hamlets, for example The Kobi Nazrul Centre.

"The youth movement played an important role against the fascists when they became organised and active in Brick Lane area, following the murders of Altab Ali and Ishaq Ali. BYM was one of the leading organisations that organised the first protest march that involved thousands of Bengalis coming out in the streets of London, marching from Whitechapel to the House of Commons and back. The slogan was 'Here to stay, here to fight.'"

Asked what the purpose of the BYM was he says:

"If you go back to 1976, then you



would find that the existence of the community was not really acknowledged in the wider arena so having a youth movement as an organisation itself was an important achievement. Later on it became a very important organisation in that it was mobilising the community against racism, racial attacks and racist agitation as well.

"So it was an organisation that mobilised the young people and the community at large, it gave a voice to the community, it organised to support people who were victims of racial attacks on housing estates, and on streets. Later on it played a role in politicising the community."

As the battle on the streets came to their conclusion by the end of 1978, the youth leaders and youth organisations redefined the agenda for the future. They established a national organisation, the Federation of Bangladeshi Youth Organisation (FBYO), which involved the following organisations: Bangladesh Youth

Movement; Bangladesh Youth Association; Progressive Youth organisation: Bangladesh Youth League Birmingham, Sunderland Bengali Youth Organisation; Bangladesh Youth Approach; Shapla Youth Force; Weavers Youth Forum; Bangladesh Youth League; Bangladesh Youth League Luton; Eagle Youth Organisation; Overseas Youth Organisation; Hackney Bangladesh Youth Organisation, Wallsall Youth Organisation; Bradford Youth Organisation and the League of Joi Bangla Youth amongst others.

The FBYO also published the bilingual *Jubobarta* magazine and was involved in the production of three documentary films for Channel 4.

The Bangladeshi community could no longer be ignored. The government of the day launched the Home Affairs Select Committee Report on Bangladeshis. The Tower Hamlets Association for Racial Equality (THARE) and the FBYO played a key role in compiling this



LEGACY

JAGONARI WOMEN'S CENTRE

ALONGSIDE THE RISE of the anti-racist movement women organised in the Bengali community. Supported by the FBYO and other organisations, they were successful in obtaining a plot of disused land on Whitechapel Road where they established the Jagonari Women's Centre.

The leading lights in the organisation were Shila Thakor, Mithu Ghosh, Pola Uddin and Alma Chowdhury. This organisation did a lot of good work for women. The work was made possible with support from the Spitalfields Project and the GLC.

The FBYO, THARJ (Tower Hamlets Association for Racial Justice) and Jagonari helped to initiate specialist health projects for the Bengali community, including nursing training courses and the Maternity Liaison scheme in the Tower Hamlets NHS. These organisations were also involved in the initiation of social work training courses – led by Jalil Bhuyia – for Bengalis with Tower Hamlets Council.

ALTAB ALI PARK



TWENTY YEARS AFTER he was killed, the park adjacent to where Altab Ali was attacked was renamed Altab Ali Park after years of campaigning by local anti-racists. Prior to that it was named St Mary's Gardens, the site of a 14th Century church called St Mary's Matfelon. The church was painted bright white giving the local area – Whitechapel – its name. It was bombed in the Blitz during World War II, today only a few graves stones remain.

Altab Ali Park contains an ornamental wrought iron gateway arch at the entrance. It includes interwoven bands of orange-coated metal wrapped around and interwoven through the tubular framed

structure decorating a black tubular framed arch, in Bangladeshi style.

The park also contains a smaller replica of the Shaheed Minar – the Bengali Martyrs' Monument – commemorating the killings of Bengali language movement student activists in 1952 (the original is in Dhaka, Bangladesh).

In 2012 a set of permanent display panels were mounted on the wall of Altab Ali Park just next to where he was murdered. On this panel it says: "His death marked a turning point... The Bengali youth, the Anti Nazi League and the Rock against Racism groups were born out of the events of 1978 and far right extremists suffered a huge setback."



report, articulating the needs and aspirations of the Bangladeshi community in all spheres of British life. By now this was not an immigrant community but a community of British Bengalis in the UK.

1982 saw the first Bengalis elected to Tower Hamlets Council. Nurul Haque, an independent candidate from Spitalfields became a councillor defeating a Labour candidate. This was followed by Ashik Ali, a Labour candidate, who became a councillor in St Katherine's ward.

Today Tower Hamlets Council boasts the largest number of Black/Asian/Bengali councillors in the country with a total of 32 Bengali councillors. The Greater London Authority has Murad Qureshi as an Assembly Member. The general election in 2010 saw the first Bengali, Rushanara Ali, enter the House of Commons.

Today, anti-racists face new challenges from the British National Party, English Defence League and other sectarian extremists in our communities who try to offer simple solutions to complex problems, as fascists and racists have always done. Yet we know that these ideas can be beaten. That is the legacy of Altab Ali's death and the movement that beat the racists back in 1978.

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