

A VICTORY FOR BLACK PEOPLE

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Last month we reported on the historic victory of the Bradford 12. The following article is an attempt at summing up the main lessons of the trial and the campaign. It was written by a member of the Revolutionary Communist League who was extremely active in the Bradford 12 Campaign. We welcome comments and contributions from readers, particularly from activists in the Campaign.

"People say it's a victory for the Bradford 12. But it's not. It's freedom for us, but victory for black people generally: the right to defend ourselves." - Saeed Hussein.

The central issue in the trial of the Bradford 12 was a simple but fundamental one: the right to self defence of national minority people in this country.

On July 11 last year, the Bradford 12 had discussed, and some of them made, petrol bombs which, as it turned out, were never used. The police and prosecution argued they were made for use 'in a riot'. The answer given by the twelve was self defence. Tariq Ali had said in his statement made in police custody last July: "It is my belief that when a people are attacked, it is their right to act in self defence. The nature of that defence depends upon the nature of the attack... We

decided that an organised defence of our community was necessary."

Tarlochan Gata-Aura explained in court: "My personal experience is that the police have never defended our community. There is an absence of the will to help... The police have always protected the fascists."

The 24 police witnesses for the prosecution provided good evidence for the self defence argument. They simply denied

the existence of racist attacks in Bradford or any reason for the Asian community to be afraid of violence from racists. They denied knowledge of specific local and national attacks and even of the Home Office study in which West Yorkshire had been one area studied.

The defence witnesses showed the day to day reality for black people - escalating violence which culminated in the first ten days of last July. On July 2 Mrs Khan and

her three children were murdered in an arson attack on their home in Walthamstow. On July 3 racist and fascist skinheads attacked Southall. Many in the Asian community feared a new attack the following weekend: there were threats to invade Southall on 10th and skinheads did in fact go to Luton to attack black people in their homes. They did not appear in Bradford but many thought they would and rumours were everywhere. Saeed Hussein told the court that these events "affected my mother so much that she got my brother to seal up the letterbox. Southall usually seems quite far away, but on that day, it seemed like the end of our street."

Both the judge and the jury were aware of the importance of the issue. In ending his summing up, the judge directed the jury: "You set the standards. If you think that a store of such devices to use against opponents yet to come goes beyond reasonable self defence, and that chaos and confusion in the country would follow, then the verdict must be guilty."

The jury - 1 Asian, 4 Afro-Caribbeans and 7 white people - set a clear standard with their courageous not-guilty

verdict.

"Self Defence is No Offence" has been raised before by national minority people in this country, as it has elsewhere as in the US by the black liberation movement, as the oppressed rise up against their oppressors. It will be taken up more and more by black people in their fight back against organised fascist violence and against state racism. Hence the importance of this victory. And the fact that this fundamental right challenges the state's monopoly to the use of force.

THE UPRISINGS

It was the state's monopoly of force that was challenged on the streets of England's cities last summer by the wide spread uprisings led by the black youth. In some places people responded to racist attacks - as in Southall. Elsewhere the target of their anger was the police, seen as an occupying army in their communities, as in Brixton and Toxteth. This was the wider context of the arrest of the Bradford 12.

Tariq Ali says in his letter to supporters: "The state made a mountain out of a molehill. In so doing, they made a monument to our beliefs. That is, we will defend ourselves

by whatever means necessary."

There have been no show trials of fascists, no charges of conspiracy to attack the black community. No culprits have been found for the murder of 13 young black people in Deptford or the Khan family in Walthamstow.

But when the police found the store of petrol bombs, instead of charging the 12 with minor offences, they blew the whole thing up into a show trial. It was clear that the members of the UBYL were well known for their history of militant defence of the black community. They were arrested, held incommunicado, statements forced out of them and written up by police, denied bail and held on remand for three months. They faced life sentences. When bail was granted, it was with strict conditions, including the political gagging.

The state attempted to make criminals of the strongest defenders of the black community. It was part of their response to the rebellion of last summer.

The response of the national minority community was central to the victory. The unity of the twelve, the courage of the jury and the political defence taken by the barristers settled the matter in court. But the political

campaign outside the court was the backbone. The mass meeting in Bradford immediately after the arrests when 800 declared their support for the 12, the black youth who picketed the court week after week, the Gurdwaras (temples) who supplied free food, and black workers who came on marches and pickets, all played their part. In the courtroom witnesses from different communities, of different political affiliations told of the need for self defence. It was recognised that not only the twelve but the whole community was on trial. And the community supported their youth in the face of the attack by the state, whatever their internal differences.

BLACK LEADERSHIP

This support could have been much stronger if the campaign had been led by black organisations with strong roots among their people. In spite of this main weakness and many other mistakes, the campaign did organise broad-based support for the 12 and, hopefully, lessons will be learned from the mistakes. Right from the time of the arrests, it organised pickets and demonstrations. Support was built in most of the main cities of England which ensured that the issues were raised and the trial known about. Apart from the national minority communities, both Asian and

Afro-Caribbean, important support came from the anti-imperialist and women's movements.

Internationally, important support came from Sinn Fein and the IRSP. Parallels have been drawn between the state's response to the growth of a revolutionary movement here and to the Republican movement in Ireland. Many lessons are still to be drawn. The state will not take this defeat easily. An inquiry is already underway into the trial. The jury system, without which this victory could not have been possible, is under threat. In the north of Ireland, the twelve would have been sent down on long sentences by no-jury courts. The methods used by police have not been challenged apart from in the court.

This is an important victory which is one battle in a long fight. As national minority people strengthen their unity so too they will strengthen their leadership of a broad-based alliance against imperialism. Such an alliance will not only challenge imperialism in its homeland but strengthen its ties with those fighting imperialism all over the world. At a meeting in Bradford called to protest the deportations of black people, 500 people stood in one minute's silence in memory of those killed in Lebanon - expressing this internationalism.