

Fair Justice for All Campaign

In the summer of 2001 a number of northern towns became the focus for a series of social disturbances. In Bradford on the 7th July 2001, wide scale disturbances went on for many hours causing millions of pounds worth of damage. Coincidentally, the disturbances were on the same day that Bradford Council and the Home Secretary had banned a National Front march through the city centre, even though many supporters and activists still arrived, insisting the march would proceed. Reports in the local media at the time, suggested that unrest was sparked off as these far-right extremists left a local pub threatening violence and verbally abusing locals.

This resulted in the local community of mainly Asian Muslims being forced to defend itself or face violent attack. The national media however portrayed the disturbances as riots instigated by Asian Muslims, preferring to ignore the role of the far right in creating fear and inciting racial and religious tension.

White people who took part in the disturbances, some of whom threw petrol bombs, were charged with minimal offences, resulting in community service and minor sentences. Asian Muslims however, were charged with 'riot', despite their actions being often no more than throwing stones or simply being in the area. These extreme charges have seen excessive sentencing, ranging from four to eight years, sometimes merely for throwing a stone.

From the disturbances and their aftermath, the Fair Justice for All Campaign emerged. Led by local women in Bradford, whose families have been affected by the harsh sentencing, it is a grassroots community defence campaign launched in July 2002. Its aims have been to:

- raise awareness of the disproportionate sentencing
- to get sentences reduced through the proper legislative procedure of appeals
- provide a network of support for the welfare of those in prison and their families
- highlight the root causes of the problems and the circumstances that led young people to participate in disturbances

All those convicted of their involvement have shown remorse for their activities. Many were first time offenders who gave themselves up to the police and were in either full time education or employment. The Campaign therefore believes that these men have been victims twice over: of violent racist attacks against their communities; and of the institutional racism they have subsequently met. Many similarly believe that the families and the wider community in Bradford are also being punished.

The Campaign is therefore seeking justice. All involved denounce the disturbances but feel it is vital that racism in the criminal justice system is challenged and that equal justice and sentencing for all offenders is served, regardless of colour, race or religion.

Further Reading

www.fairjusticecampaign.co.uk

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FORUM AGAINST ISLAMOPHOBIA & RACISM