

1.00 Introduction

The Indian Workers Association (Hindustani Mazdoor Sabha) is well known as an independent mass organization representing Indian people in Britain. As one of the oldest and possibly most active groups of immigrants, the organization has been active in the fields of politics, race relations, industrial relations and social welfare as well as many cultural issues. At the forefront of the struggle within trade unions, it has campaigned tirelessly against racism and on civil liberties issues. Pamphlets, memoranda and statements are frequently issued by the IWA and the press regularly interview IWA leaders. In this way the IWA remains permanently in the public eye.¹

The background of the IWA is deeply concerned in the politics of the national liberation struggle against British imperialism and bourgeois landlord classes of India. The struggle of Indian workers is difficult to isolate from the revolutionary international events which made it possible to break the domination of imperialism and capitalism. The British colonialist exploited the wealth of India. Indian raw materials such as cotton were an essential for the development of British Manufacturing Industry. Workers and peasants were exploited ruthlessly under the Feudal Zemindars system controlled by Britain, especially the tea gardens in Assam, Jute Plants in Bengal, workers in coal mines and the textile industry in

¹ Josephides Sasha , Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association 1991 p1

Bombay. British policy prior to 1947 made the lives of ordinary Indian people desperately miserable.

The uprising of 1857 was a great national revolt against British colonialists and although the action was crushed by force, the idea of revolt against foreign rulers endured for the next ninety years.² The revolt and fight for freedom was not for the benefit of people inside India alone. It was aimed at all Indian people wherever they were in the world. Whilst they were struggling for the freedom of India they also fought for improved working conditions for all workers. For this is reason they formed a Gadhar party in America^{3 4} and in Britain, two separate organisations, the India League and IWA.

The IWA was an organization founded and controlled primarily by Indians from the Punjab. DeWitt Johan wrote in his book, " wherever there are Punjabi immigrants in Britain, there is an Indian Workers' Association with an impressive membership".⁵ From the beginning it was strongly oriented towards left-wing politics. Most of its founding group were originally members of the Indian Communist Party and some also became members of the communist party in Britain. Today, a few of the founding group still hold communist sympathies though not all are members of the Communist Party. Others have migrated into the Labour Party and Socialist Labour Party.

² Ram, R The Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre 1978 p1

³ Bilga B.S. Gadar Party and Kirti Party (Punjabi Edition) 1989 p26

⁴ Sansra G.S. History of the Gadhar Party 1961 p80

⁵ Dewitt, J. Indian Workers' Association. London,1969, p1

The reputations and action of IWA leaders have contributed to the fame and even glamour of the association. They proudly mentioned the name of Jagmohan Joshi. Jagmohan Joshi, a leader of the IWA from the early 1960's, until his death in 1979, while still a young man, is widely considered to have been a central figure in black political action in the 1960's and 1970's. Sivandan refers to him as "the man who had initiated so many of the black working class and community movements of the early years and clarified for us all the lines of roll/class struggle".^{6 7} The journalist, Malcolm Southan, considered the success of an alliance of black groups to have been largely due to the abilities of Joshi.^{8 9} He was a central figure in the formation of many campaigning groups, and an important spokesperson at the time of the 'WILD CAT' strikes in the Midland foundries.¹⁰ In addition, he played an important role in mobilization against anti-immigration legislation as well as writing and speaking about racism and other political issues.

Other IWA leaders who achieved wider publicity for their activity in the IWA, include: Avtar Johal, an active trade unionist and shop steward in the foundries until the late 1980s when he accepted a post teaching trade union studies and now is the General Secretary of the IWA (G.B.)¹¹; Vishnu Sharma, an old campaigner who has been particularly involved on immigration issues and was an important member of the joint council for the welfare of immigrants; Ajmer Bains Retd, a school teacher, who is known for his poetry and who is

⁶ Josephides Sasha, *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association* 1991 p2

⁷ Sivanandan, A. *'From Resistance to Tebellion'* 1982 p53

⁸ Josephides Sasha, *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association* 1991 p2

⁹ *Sun* 11 January 1969

¹⁰ Josephides Sasha, *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association* 1991 p2

¹¹ The IWA and IWA (G.B.) are two separate organisations.

very active in the anti-racist movement as well as being a former editor of the IWA's 'Lalkar' newspaper, and a General Secretary of IWA (G.B).

The aim of this paper is to provide a historical perspective of the impact made by the Indian Worker's Association on British society and politics since its establishment in Great Britain in 1938. Within the ambit of my dissertation it is not possible to detail a complete history of the IWA (G.B). The objective is to give a brief and concise account of some fundamental IWA achievements and campaigns. In part One of my study I shall examine the history of the IWA. Part two then looks at the divisions leading to splits in the organisation after 1960 whilst part three examines the its contributions to anti-racism and trade unionism in Britain up to the present day.

Part One

2.0 History

2.1 Formation of the IWA in support of independence for India.

The Indian Workers Association (IWA) has a long and proud history of achievements. However, the primary and most notable achievement of any organization is reflected in its continued existence. In this respect the IWA has been around for almost 60 years, standing up for the rights of its members and the community and exerting a level of influence over government agencies, which is second to none. Local and national radio, T.V. and newspapers have covered numerous IWA campaigns over the years.^{12 13}

The first Indian immigrants were living in Britain as early as the 1920's when there was a small community of Indian seamen in port cities and Indian Peddlers in the Midlands and the North. The Indian Worker's Association was officially formed on 23rd December 1938, by several workers of Indian origin living in Coventry. It was formed as the Hindustani Mazdoor Sabha, which in later years was translated, into the Indian Workers Association. It was formed after the Gadar Party was disbanded in the U.S.A to continue the work for the independence of India.¹⁴ The founder members were Charan Singh Cheema, Anant Ram, Chowdhry Akbar Ali and Ujagar Singh.

¹² *Leicester Mercury*, 22 January 1996, p.5A.

¹³ *These Days*, 6 June 1993, p.7 & 8.

¹⁴ King Johan , Three Asian association in Britain 1994 p64

Shaheed Udham Singh was also one of the initiators of the Association but did not work openly in the organisation. He often said to his friends, “still you don’t know what I am doing but one day you will be proud of me.”¹⁵ He came from India for a special task, in search of the degenerate culprit responsible on 13th April 1919 for the massacre of hundreds of people in the Jallianwallah Bagh, Amritsar.¹⁶ He located Michael O’Dwyer former Governor of Punjab and assassinated him in 1940 at Caxton Hall in London.¹⁷ At the time the police rounded up IWA founder members but no evidence of conspiracy was found. However, the IWA organised a collection for the defence of Shaheed Udham Singh.¹⁸

Early IWA work consisted of campaigning for the independence of India particularly through work in the Trade Unions and Labour movement. The IWA not only raised money for the independence movement of India but also publicised the issue of independence amongst Indian immigrants and the British. Due to the Second World War the IWA could not organise public meetings and so were prevented from taking a substantial role in the May Day procession, according to the Coventry Telegraph on May 1942. It was well publicised by the British media under the headline ‘ Indian in May Day procession ‘ and a flag being carried conveyed the explicit political message “ Free India to Fight Fascism “; IWA leaders were well acquainted with the background of Indian national politics. On subsequent May Days at Coventry Krishana Menon (First Indian High Commissioner of London and Defence

¹⁵ *Punjab Lives in England*, 4th issue, p.23

¹⁶ Ram, R *The Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre* 1978 p90

¹⁷ *Daily Mirror*, 14th March 1940, p.1, 4 & 22.

¹⁸ King Johan *Three Asian association in Britain* 1994 p66

Minister and General Secretary of India League) was invited as the IWA's main speaker. The IWA became affiliated to the India League in 1946.

To propagate their aim and objective, the IWA started a monthly paper 'Azad Hind' (Free India) in Urdu in January 1945. Babu Karam Singh Cheema was appointed as Manger and Vidya Parkash Hansrani Chief Editor. The IWA observed martyrdom anniversaries of Sheed Bhagat Singh , Sukhdev , Rajguru, Lala Lajpat Rai, Babar Akalis of Kama Gata Maru heroes of the struggle for independence. In addition, tributes were paid to all who died in the cause of the country's emancipation. The aim of the IWA monthly paper 'Azad Hind'- (Free India) was to see India Free from foreign slavery and was influenced by the actions of the Indian National army (INA) and the establishment of the Azad Hind Government of Free India which proclaimed itself on 21st October 1943 as the provisional government of Free India. The declaration of this Government was printed in the monthly paper of the IWA in May 1945. According to Azad Hind, the IWA was full with the spirit of patriotism and nationalism. Unity and sacrifice was their motto. In many articles of the Azad Hind, the association wrote the slogan, 'Long Live Revolution' and glorified the establishment and achievement of the socialist state in the Soviet Union.

Mr S.A.Dang President of the All Indian Trade Union Congress and Communist leader came to Britain in 1945 to attend the World Trade Union Congress in London. He addressed the IWA public meeting at Coventry in 1945 and said " our land is in the grip of poverty, famine and exploitation due to the strong hold of imperialists and the people have no

national government of their own. British imperialism destroyed and plundered the economy”.¹⁹

The leader of independent movement Sardar Ajit Singh, uncle of Martyr Bhagat Singh was welcomed by “hundreds of Indians on his arrival at the Liverpool Street, Railway Station, London, shouting “ Long live Sardar Bhagat Singh, Long live Sardar Ajit Singh". Ajit Singh and Lala Lajpat Rai were arrested along with several other freedom fighters and taken to Mandley Jail in Burma where Ajit Singh remained in exile. He had been charged with provoking the peasants not to pay an increase in water charges, Bhagat Singh was hanged along with Rajguru and Sukhdev on 23rd March 1931 in respect of his revolutionary activities.²⁰ Again on 31st December 1946 Sardar Ajit Singh was publicly honoured by the IWA in London as a patriot and freedom fighter, whose words resound, “ It is better to die for the cause of freedom rather than to live the life of a slave”.²¹ The IWA also presented him with a bag containing one hundred pounds and letter of honour.

The famous peasant leader Professor G. Ranja also addressed a public meeting organised by the IWA in June 1946. He pronounced his appreciation of the IWA’s objectives of seeing India as a free Nation and stressed the need to pursue the cause of socialism. The interim Government in India came into force on 12th August 1946 under the leadership of Congress and the Muslim League joined the Government in 1946. While the

¹⁹ *Old Document of IWA*

²⁰ Singh, J. *Collected work of Shaheed Bhagat Singh and His Comrades* 1985 p19

²¹ *Azad Hind Paper* 1947

Congress and the Muslim League were fighting among themselves over the division of India. The Interim Government unleashed suppression of those revolutionary forces that had been active in the unification of India. Meanwhile, IWA leaders addressed the May Day rally on 4th May 1947 and demanded to know, “why British Imperialism is bent upon dividing India?” The unreasonable, unwise, impracticable and dangerous demand of Pakistan is keeping us a bit far off from our national unity and we will strive to keep that unity. The country shows signs of revolution. Rise O Countrymen! Shake of your shackles of slavery”.²²

Three months after the May Day rally address by the IWA president, India was divided on the basis of religion. The jubilation of gaining independence from British rule could not put off communal riots, communal hatred and genocide of innocent people. During the fight for the independence the IWA took a stand for the world's oppressed people as well. For example, the IWA supported the struggle of the Palestinian people for the self-determination of their country. An article on this issue appeared in *Azad Hind* in December 1945 and provides evidence that the IWA stood by the side of oppressed nations. After the independence of India the IWA was still very concerned with such matters because those involved in it felt that independence was a compromise between the colonisers and the feudal lords. “On August 15th 1947, British imperialism went into the background and the big bourgeois, big landlord Congress government came to power”.²³

²² leaflet of IWA On May day 4 May 1947

2.2 The role of the IWA after Independence of India and centralisation of the IWA (GB)

The independence of India in 1947 coincided with the period when Britain was recovering from the Second World War. At this time Britain was presented with a serious shortage of labour. In its time of need Britain did not discriminate. Amongst the new workforce from abroad came former Polish soldiers, former Ukrainian prisoners of war who were not willing to return to the USSR, people from many other parts of Europe as well as continued Irish immigration.

The years around 1950 witnessed the first considerable arrival of people from the Far East, India and Pakistan who largely arrived in ships. The Indian immigrants were mostly from central Punjab and Southern and central Gujarat, two small regions of India. The rural areas of these two regions were over populated with average land ownership of a scale, which could not support large families. Rather than face the prospect of the mounting debts and perhaps eventual foreclosure, these families often sent their younger sons to earn money outside of the rural villages. Since the peasants of Jullunder and Hoshiarpur were not utterly poverty stricken, they could afford to give their sons enough money to set out and make a living abroad.

²³ *Janashakti Monthly Paper November 1996 p17*

The IWA began to re-appear in Britain with this post-war immigration and local IWA groups emerged in Leamington, Birmingham, Southall, Wolverhampton, Derby and Nottingham. In Leicester an IWA branch was set up around 1954. Until mid 1960 there were more Punjabi people than any other immigrant community in Leicester. However, with the arrival in 1968-69 of Gujarati people from East Africa, their numbers overtook those of the Punjabi community.²⁴ Nevertheless Punjabi Indians continued to dominate the IWA both in Leicester and nationally. One of the reasons for the prominence of the Leicester IWA branch is the relatively large resident Indian community. According to the 1991 Census figures, the Indian population in Leicester was 60,297 of a total city population of 270,493, amounting to 22.3 per cent.²⁵

During the 1950's most Indian immigrants entered Britain on forged passports following the decision of the Indian government to restrict the emigration of Indian Nationals. The immigrants however, bought forged passports from travel agents. According to the pamphlets published by the IWA, the Indian government admitted in Lok Sabha debates that during one period, only 5,000 passports were issued but 17,000 men managed to emigrate to England.²⁶ These forged passports led to many problems with some Indians denied entry to Britain when British officials found their documents to be invalid. Other Indians, having entered Britain and then visited India, found that the Indian authorities were checking for forged passports.

²⁴ *India Abroad London Edition*, 3 February 1995, p.19.

²⁵ Census 1991 LBS Table 6.

²⁶ Dewitt, J. Indian Workers Associations In Britain. London, 1969, p.92.

In early 1956, leaders of several IWA's made a joint appeal to the Indian High Commissioner to issue valid passports to every Indian working or living in England. This was to clear the system of forged passports and give individuals the legitimate right to work and travel without the fear of deportation. The following year a delegation met with the Indian Prime Minister Jawharlal Nehru, during his visit to London for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers conference. Following the meeting the High Commissioner issued valid passports as requested by the IWA to all Indians who gave in their forged passports and the racket of forged passports faded away. This was one of the first campaigns to eventually succeed, bringing prestige to the IWA's in Britain.^{27 28 29}

On 21st September 1958, the local IWA groups were centralised under one umbrella, the IWA (G.B) and adopted a constitution, spelling out its aims and objectives. These included, organising Indian immigrants to safeguard their well being, promoting co-operation and unity with Trade Unions and the Labour movement and fighting against racial and sexual discrimination. Also included was the need to work with other organisations, national and international, striving for friendship, peace and freedom and undertaking social welfare and cultural activities to further those aims and objectives.³⁰ Hereafter the IWA's became the most important Punjabi association in Britain and involved mass participation of the Indian

²⁷ Josephides Sasha, *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association* 1991 p14

²⁸ Aurora, G.S. *The New Frontiersmen Bombay: Popular Pakistan* 1967 p45

²⁹ Desai R *Indian Immigrants in Britain* 1963 p105

³⁰ *Constitution Of The Indian Workers Association* 28th February 1959

community. John estimates that some cases more than half the adult male Punjabi population may have joined their local IWA.

In 1960, Reshmi Desai stated that about three-quarters of the Indian immigrants were from Punjab, especially the two small districts from the heart of Punjab, Jullunder and Hoshiarpur.³¹ As well as for the reasons described above, another reason for the large number of Sikhs arriving from the central Punjab was their long martial history and subsequent military relationship with the British. In 1920 they formed one fifth of the British army in India, although they only formed one percent of the country's population. Similarly, in the First World War, of 500,000 Punjabi recruits, the Sikh community alone, provided 90,000 men.³² Therefore coming to Britain did not present any great problems. Most of them planned at first to stay for only a few years; long enough to earn sufficient money to buy more land for their families back in India. However, after the arrival of their wives, many of the immigrants had changed their minds about returning to India preferring their children to be educated in Britain.

From the beginning, the IWA was strongly oriented towards left-wing politics and most of its founding group were originally members of the Indian Communist party in Britain. The leading member of the IWA's are still communist sympathisers today though not all are members of the Communist Party. The remaining majority of members have a range of political affiliations including Akali, Congress Party (Indian Political Party), British

³¹ Dewitt, J. Indian Workers Associations In Britain, 1969, p.8.

Labour Party and British Socialist Party. The IWA has regularly had to point out that it is not a Communist Party and the vast majority of its membership are not party members. As one Communist leader said, “ If a large section of the membership were members of the party, then the time would be ripe for revolution, but unfortunately that’s not the case”.³³ However the sympathisers of communism are over-represented on the executive committee of the IWA. According to one leader of IWA, “ the reason why their influence is so great is because their cause is the cause of all poor people; they are known as the fighter”.³⁴ They are however keen to state that they do not expect their other members to join the Communist Party because they wanted the IWA to be a broader organisation.

The IWA has developed in two ways. The national organisation, IWA (G.B), has become a left wing pressure group, which aims to raise the consciousness of Indian workers, to fight to improve their working conditions and channel their support for left wing causes. After the 1960,s the IWA suffered an ideological split reflecting the divisions of the Communist Party of India (CPI)³⁵ and the Communist Party of India –Marxist (CPI-M) whereby the Southall Independent IWA aligning itself with the CPI broke away from the IWA (GB) which aligned itself to the CPI-M. The national organisation suffered a further split in 1967 in which Jagmohan Joshi and his followers supporting the Communist party of India – Marxist Leninist (CPI-ML) established their own IWA (GB) endorsing a peasant revolt in Bengal. The opposing faction led by Prem Singh, still called themselves by the

³² Singh, G. *Communism In Punjab*, 1994, p.21.

³³ Josephides Sasha , *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association* 1991 p12

³⁴ Josephides Sasha , *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association* 1991 p12

³⁵ Singh, G. *Communism In Punjab*, 1994, p.254-55, 259-60, 272

same name and remained loyal to the CPI-M. Prem Singh's faction split again in 1983 leading to the emergence of a third IWA (GB) led by Naranjan Noor. In 1991 the third IWA (GB) group were reconciled with Singh's organisation. Attempts were made to merge the remaining two 'GB' groups but failed when IWA (GB) branches within the Joshi faction, from Leicester, Coventry, Willenhall, Woolwich and other branch members from Birmingham, Derby and 'London side' refused to give their support. Instead these branches, led by Ajmer Bains, organised their own national association. Now there are two IWA(G.B) organisations and one independent IWA branch in Southall.

Part Two

3.0 Organisational split

3.1 Moderates and radicals: The 1961 split

In 1961, the first split occurred in the IWA (G.B) at the national meeting in Birmingham. A difference of opinion between the IWA Southall leadership and the leadership of the IWA (G.B). This was the first time that the IWA of Southall withdraw from national organisation. At that time Vishnu Sharma , a leader of the Southall IWA said “ the Communist dominated group which was completely in control of the IWA (G.B) was leading the organisation into a sectarian direction which he did not wish to follow. For this reason he decided to take Southall out of the national association”.³⁶ Although he himself is a communist and sympathiser of the Communist Party Of India (CPI). Some commentators with the IWA said the split was a reflection on the split within communist faction in India, where the Communist party of India (Marxist) CPI-M was going its separate way from the CPI. IWA Southall wished to remain with the CPI, while the national leadership in Birmingham was inclined towards the CPI (M). However the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) only recognised the CPI. So those Indians who sympathised with the CPI(M) could not work with CPGB. Therefore they left the CPGB and formed their own Association of Indian Communist in 1965.^{37 38}

³⁶King Johan , Three Asian association in Britain 1994 p67

³⁷ Josephides Sasha Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association 1991 p17

³⁸ Singh, G. Communism In Punjab, 1994, p.279

Others say that a split in the communist party did not happen until after 1964 whereas the IWA Southall and the IWA (GB) split took at least two years before that. It is possible that the split existed among Indian Communists in India long before the party was divided, they also existed among Indian communist here. It is also said that the IWA of Southall is dominated by the Congress Party, which is possibly the main cause of the division. As proof some point to the fact that Tarsem Singh Toor general Secretary of IWA Southall, who was assassinated in 1986, was at the same time Secretary of the Indian Overseas Congress.³⁹ The IWA Southall's invitation to Congress' Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to speak in Southall in 1979, and the opposition to this raised by Joshi's IWA (GB) are also given as evidence to support this suggestion. However, the reason for the split with the IWA (GB) was fundamentally a class split. The Southall position was one of not wanting to align with the communist party but wishing to unite with all Indian people, considering that all have something significant in common by virtue of being Indian. The IWA (GB) wanted to be an organisation of Indian workers and was concerned with the class interest of that specific group. On the issue of class, the IWA (GB) supported one group of Indians against the other. They supported strike action by an Indian workforce against Indian employers at Raindi Textiles and similarly at Supreme Quilting, Forward Trading Company and Loeffic Shirt Company.⁴⁰ Wherever conflict of interest arose the IWA(GB) did not strive for the unity of the ethnic group rather supported the working class.

³⁹*Asian Times, 14 February 1986*

3.2 Millitant and Communists the 1967 Split

IWA (GB) was mainly concentrated in the Midlands and had a branch in the Southall area. There was a dual system in Southall where a large section of membership came under the leadership of Vishnu Sharma and all the supporters of the midland IWA (GB) branches under the leadership of Jagmohan Joshi. However dual system broke down when a further split took place with the IWA (GB) in 1967. This split was related in a clear way to domestic Indian politics. Indian communists worked in the IWA (GB), as well as working within the Association of Indian Communists. There were number of differences between both organisations on a variety of issues regarding Britain, India and the wider international scene. The major difference concerned the Naxalbari Uprising in West Bengal in 1967. The uprising was not supported by the CPI (M).⁴¹ The CPI (ML) was formed by those Indian Communists who did back the rising. Two members of the politburo of the CPI (M) came to Britain to take part in a number of meetings of the Association of Indian Communist and the IWA (GB). They could not influence the all members of IWA (GB) and Association of Indian Communists to stay with CPI (M). The outcome was split between Jagmohan Joshi and his group who backed the uprising and those who were behind the CPI (M).

The Naxalbari uprising brought about an open rift which involved many other issues of conflict as well. Another main difference concerned the analysis of the global situation and international politics. The Joshi group was linked with China because China was

⁴⁰Josephides Sasha, Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association 1991 p18, 46to48

supporting the Naxalbari (Peasant movement). There was also a number of issues relating to Britain on which the two groups held different opinions. The position of Joshi's supporters regarding racism was that black workers, through their struggle against imperialism in their own country and their double exploitation in Britain, had become more politically aware. Black workers were therefore the group destined to lead the struggle and once they were involved in it white workers would join with them too. Singh's opposition argued that black workers did not have any special role to play and the initiative for the struggle had to come from the white working class. An additional difference arising out of this was that Joshi's group, because they saw black workers as having a special role, believed in forging an alliance with other black groups. The other side were however against this kind of alliance as they considered it a kind of inverted racism which would distance them from ordinary white workers, who they felt were the most important allies of all. The difference in these two positions was fundamental and led to Joshi's group becoming concerned with the black power issue and the other being more committed to a traditional class analysis. The black power dimension is a fairly controversial one and the IWA had to tread carefully in defining what it meant in order not to lose Indian members.⁴²

Joshi's group also believed in defence committees (which the other group thought were suicidal) and were strongly opposed to affiliating with Commission for Racial Equality

⁴¹ Judge ,P.S. *Insurrection To Agitation* 1992 p36

⁴² Josephides Sasha , *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association* 1991 p21-23

Committees or other government bodies and accepting state funding. Prem Singh's group were more ambivalent on this issue.⁴³

The IWA (GB) led by Joshi involved many non-Punjabis, both in its membership and through its alliance, and was oriented towards Britain and the international scene. The IWA (GB) Prem Singh was oriented more towards India. The language used by the two associations, for example, were very different according to necessity. The IWA (GB) Joshi published many pamphlets in English whilst the IWA(GB) Prem Singh published extensively in the Punjabi newspaper *Des Pardes*.

3.3 Further divisions in 1983

The further split occurring within the Prem Singh faction in 1983 arose out of a stand taken by the President, Naranjan Noor, who opposed the authorities in the case of a Wolverhampton schoolmaster who refused to allow Sikh boys to wear their distinctive turbans to school. Naranjan Noor persuaded the school authorities to change their mind over the issue, which resulted in considerable popularity with the membership of the IWA. The committee, on the other hand, took the view that Naranjan Noor should not have used the organisation to champion a religious cause. In the end Noor took his supporters out of the IWA, creating a total of three factions within the national organisation.^{44 45}

⁴³ King Johan , Three Asian association in Britain 1994 p68

⁴⁴ King Johan , Three Asian association in Britain 1994 p69

⁴⁵ Josephides Sasha, Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association 1991 p24-25

3.4 Unity and vision

Falling membership and resulting lack of the ability to act effectively in public led to the leadership of the IWA (GB) Joshi (now called Avtar Johal) and the IWA (GB) Prem Singh considering a merger. Without 'proper' consultation with the national executive committee Avtar Johal made a decision to unite with the IWA (GB) Prem Singh and Narjan Noor splinter group which were already reconciled. They merged at a meeting in Birmingham on 16 February 1991⁴⁶ but afterwards many branches of IWA (GB) Joshi such as Leicester, Coventry, Woollich, Willhenhall branches and many member of the Birmingham, Derby and 'London side' branches did not merge with them. They accused their leadership of uniting with the CPI-M. They called the members of their branches to build a broad based organisation and invited all political thinking members of their community to form a independent Association. After a proper consultation, they first called branch meetings to elect branch officers and later in 1993 they called a national conference in Woolwich to form a national organisation IWA (GB). Ajmer Bains was elected as general secretary of the IWA (GB) and a new constitution was passed stating their aims and objectives. There are still three organisations, two IWA (G.B)s and an Independent Southall IWA organisation.

⁴⁶ King Johan , Three Asian association in Britain 1994 p70

Part Three

4.0 The Anti- Racist and Trade Union Struggle

The IWA achieved notoriety in their campaign against racism and remained at the forefront of the struggle within the trade union movement. A particularly important aspect was in the area of anti-racist legislation and opposition to racist politicians. On the trade union front, the IWA discovered racism by employers and trade unions alike at a very early stage. They fought for fair access to jobs and insisted on their members joining trade unions. Where there were none, Indian workers organised themselves and formed unions for the benefit of all employees. The achievements in the areas of anti-racism and trade unionism have been many, some of which are included in the following events:

Under the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Control Act, the State could decide at the port of entry which blacks would be allowed into Britain, where they could go and where they could live. This was a breach of the civil rights of citizens whose British passports had been issued outside the U.K. Furthermore, if convicted of an offence within 5 years of arrival, they also faced immediate deportation. During these early years the IWA was instrumental in setting up support and advisory groups to alert the community to the dangers that this legislation imposed.

In 1964, came the General elections. Peter Griffiths, the Tory candidate for Smethwick fought on an openly racist platform with the slogan; “If you want a nigger neighbour, vote Labour.”⁴⁷ The IWA strongly condemned the actions of Griffiths while ensuring maximum support for Labour. Although the Labour Party was elected, Griffiths defeated a Labour Minister and demonstrated how racist remarks could be used in the highest of British institutions.

Labour then went on to prove that racism knows no barriers and its roots lie across the political spectrum. In 1965, Labour issued a White Paper on Immigration from the Commonwealth. It suggested that fewer numbers made for better race relations. Roy Hattersley stated, “Without limitation, integration is inexcusable, without limitation, integration is impossible.”⁴⁸ Immigration controls were tightened and no more than 8,500 employment vouchers per year were to be issued. At the time the IWA organized a demonstration in London against the White Paper.

Their opposition was primarily influenced by the setting up of a National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrant was set up giving rise to suspicion of a body which was brought into being through racist legislation (the 1965 white paper) and without consultation with immigrant groups. The perception that governments ' creamed off ' black leaders by giving them position on such bodies subsequently resulted in the IWA taking the stance of refusing to sit on committees in their individual capacity. The IWA (G.B) refused "to

⁴⁷ Sivanandan, A. *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance*, 1987, p.16.

collaborate with the government's racialism by co-operating or participating in the various white washing committees that were being set up, in particular the National Committee for commonwealth Immigration".⁴⁹ They also suggested that "The National Committee should be dissolved and a conference of all immigrant and inter-racial organizations called. Race relations have now become a sizeable industry but the interests and views of the immigrant communities have been neglected. Only if the immigrant organizations are consulted can the government hope to know their problems and gain their cooperation in achieving racial harmony'⁵⁰.

Leicester has had its own IWA National Executive Committee member from 1965, Mr A.S Sandhu. He was active in Leicester since 1962 and served as the secretary of the Leicester branch from 1965-1993.⁵¹ Later in 1993, he became President of the Leicester IWA branch and started forging strong links with Trades unions. The IWA strongly encouraged all its members to join and work with the Trade unions while prominent members themselves, played a very active role within the unions.

At the beginning of 1965, A.S Sandhu started work in the T.J Brooks factory, Leicester, where he witnessed the exploitation of the working class. He advised colleagues that a union should form to represent them and give them a voice. Within weeks, workers were convinced of the benefits of a union and were prepared to join. When Sandhu

⁴⁸Sivanandan, A. *A Different Hunger: Writings on Black Resistance*. 1987, p.108.

⁴⁹ Document of the IWA 1970

⁵⁰ Josephides Sasha, *Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association* 1991 p32

approached the local TUC branch for membership forms he was refused by the TUC secretary, who commented that, “Blacks could not form a union”. Later Sandhu introduced himself as the secretary of the IWA and used his IWA influence coupled with threats of legal action against the TUC. Immediately the local secretary issued him with the necessary forms and Sandhu formed a union branch within T.J Brooks. He then demanded and obtained better working conditions and wages for the whole workforce. Sandhu became redundant in 1967 but he left having set up a solid union base and having obtained many improvements for the workers.⁵²

In 1967, the Indian Naxalite movement was fighting for the peasants and working classes of India. The Indian Central and State governments had been suppressing the movement and killing many hundreds of its members in what they described as encounters with the police but were otherwise widely known as state executions.⁵³ The IWA strongly felt that this amounted to a violation of human rights and subsequently supported the movement.

In 1968, the Commonwealth Immigration Act was rushed through Parliament in three days of emergency debate. Britain wanted to restrict the entry into Britain of Kenyan Asians holding British passports. Naturally a special clause had to be included in the Act which gave ex-colonials with white skins the continued right of entry. British politicians could no

⁵¹ *Punjabi Guardian*, 15 June 1993.

⁵² Document of IWA Leicester 1993

⁵³ Judge ,P.S. Insurrection To Agitation 1992 p126-128

longer deny that entry to Britain was based on race. They could no longer use excuses based on economic and social reasons. This sent a clear message, black individuals were not British citizens just because they held a British passport, they had to be white to qualify for all the conferred rights. Prior to the Act becoming effective on 1st March 1968, the IWA which was the most prominent critic of the Bill, brought coach-loads of members from the Midlands and the North, to London on 25th February, to demonstrate against its introduction.⁵⁴ When Prime Minister Harold Wilson visited Birmingham in 1968 the IWA were there to demonstrate against the immigration Acts and two members were arrested on spurious grounds.

According to the Institute of Race Relations, estimates show that in 1968 about 23,000 Indians and 12,500 Pakistanis were living in Britain, including the children born to them in Britain.⁵⁵ On 20th April 1968, Enoch Powell made his famous “Tiber foaming with blood” speech. Thirty-nine immigration officers at London Airport issued a public statement in support of the speech. This was an extraordinary event considering the rule that civil servants could not express political opinion. More extraordinary still, was the reaction of the Home Office, which transferred the leader of the group to another post, while leaving thirty-eight racist officers dealing with immigrants. Jagmohan Joshi, the national secretary of the IWA strongly condemned Powell’s speech, warning of the long-term damage it would do to race relations.

⁵⁴ Hiro, D. Black British White British, 1991, p.142.

A Gallup poll conducted just after the speech showed that 96% of respondents had heard it or heard of it and three quarters of the sample agreed with it. It came as no surprise then that racist attacks seemed to suddenly increase following the speech. Jagmohan Joshi said, "Powell's speech and its aftermath....is just one step in a continuous campaign which was started at the end of the 1950's by the political parties to whip up racial antagonism to make political gains.....There has been no distinction between Conservative and Labour parties".⁵⁶

On 29th April 1968, following the speech came the formation of the first ever Black People's Alliance. This was a coalition of Afro-Asian-Caribbean groups of which Jagmohan Joshi was the convenor. During the 1969 Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference in London, the IWA strongly supported a march of more than 7,000, led by the Black People's Alliance. They demanded that the 1962 and 1968 Immigration Acts be repealed and replaced by a new and effective Race Relations Act.^{57 58} Assessing the organisation a year after its formation, Malcolm Southan characterises it a "potentially the most powerful coloured organisation to emerge in Britain" and states that 55 immigrant organisations, representing 700,000 people are affiliated.⁵⁹ By 1969 the IWA became involved in the "March for Dignity", a protest movement against racism in Rhodesia and Britain receiving major coverage in the British national press.^{60 61}

⁵⁵ Dewitt, J. Indian Workers Associations In Britain, 1969, p.6.

⁵⁶ Hiro, D. Black British White British, 1991, p.142.

⁵⁷ Hiro, D. Black British White British, 1991, p.143.

⁵⁸ Punjab Times London, 4 October 1970, p.12.

⁵⁹ Josephides Sasha, Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association 1991 p40

⁶⁰ Sun January 11,1969

In 1970 after collapse of the NCCI, the IWA wrote "time has vindicated our stand..... The various committee are powerless to do anything.....(even if they wanted to)....They are a tool of the government. Throughout, the IWA (G.B) did not participate in the Campaign against Racial discrimination (CARD). According to Joshi, " CARD is a political pressure group at the top, without having its feet on the earth. It has not reached the hearts of the people"⁶². The IWA Southall has never had any objection to sitting on state bodies and was also one of the major members of CARD.

They were rewarded with the Immigration Act of 1971, which came into force in January 1973, ending virtually all primary black immigration.⁶³ The only blacks now allowed to enter were those who had an approved work contract, not exceeding 12 months. Furthermore, police and immigration officers were given enormous powers enabling them to arrest and detain suspected illegal immigrants without a warrant. Black communities were abused, harassed and detained without trial. The authorities engaged in raids 'fishing' for illegal immigrants. Under this Act persons suspected of being illegal immigrants could be held indefinitely. The IWA was furious, arranging groups to lobby M.P.'s, but to no avail. However, the most draconian of laws was passed by a Labour government. The Virginty test (1974-79) required young ladies to undergo at their port of entry a vaginal examination to ascertain their virginty. Personal indignity, humiliation and suffering was compounded by

⁶¹ *Daily Telegraph January 13, 1969*

⁶² Josephides Sasha , Towards a History of the Indian Workers' Association 1991 p43

⁶³ *Punjab Times London*, 30 May 1971, p.19.

abusive remarks made by immigration officers. To the Asian culture it was an insult of enormous magnitude and the IWA expressed its disgust at its introduction. It campaigned relentlessly until the test was removed.

In 1974, a notorious strike took place at Imperial Typewriters Leicester, where many members of the local IWA branch worked. The management had been cheating the majority Asian workforce (1100 out of 1650) out of their bonus payments. In addition, management was repeatedly accused of aiming racial comments at the workforce. Moreover, under the union's bureaucratic procedures, Asian workers could not elect their own shop steward, which they desperately wanted and needed. The National Front was also involved, turning the white workers into a violent mob to break the strikes. The Leicester TGWU vice Chairman, Bill Batstone said at the time, "Sooner or later somebody had to stand up and be counted. The Asians cannot come here and make their own rules."⁶⁴ The workers were supported both financially and otherwise by the IWA but the strike, failed.⁶⁵

Leicester was not a unique case. Similar racist problems were prevalent throughout the country. In all the strikes and disputes led by disgruntled black workers the trade unions betrayed them. Many racist elements were against the 100% reinstatement of striking workers. However, the IWA provided overwhelming support and a great deal of pressure for their reinstatement. The IWA also provided much needed support in other strikes based on

⁶⁴ Bains, A. *An Outline Of British Racism*, Indian Workers Association (G.B), p.21.

⁶⁵ *Punjabi Darpan*, 19 May 1989, p.16 & 32.

similar issues where the workforce was exploited, including the Richard Foundry and Delta Moulding Strikes.⁶⁶

In 1975, the IWA publicly opposed the actions of the Indian government's "Emergency" measures, which were imposed by Indira Gandhi. The IWA held many public meetings against these measures and the associated press and union censorship. It strongly condemned the Indian government for violating the human rights of opposition party leaders who were arrested and held in jails while thousands of ordinary people had the right of freedom of expression permanently removed. These "Emergency" measures did not cease until 1977.

In 1979, the IWA organised a "March again against state brutality" in London. The occasion is also remembered today as the march on which Jagmohan Joshi died of a heart attack.

In 1981, after a white man was witnessed making a throwing motion in front of a house, 13 black teenagers died in a fire in South London. No one was charged.⁶⁷ The year witnessed rioting all across England as young black people rebelled against racial hostility. Lord Scarman was appointed to inquire into the disturbances. He concluded, "Racial disadvantage was a fact of current British life. It was a significant factor in the causation of

⁶⁶ Indian Workers Association (Great Britain), Struggle Of Black Workers At Birmid Qualcast: Paper Presented At The National Conference Of Trade Unions Against Racialism, 1972.

⁶⁷ Small, S. Racialised Barriers: The Black Experience in the United Sates and England in the 1980's, 1994.

the Brixton disorders. Urgent action was needed if it was not to become an ineradicable disease threatening the very survival of our society. The riots were a protest against our society by people deeply frustrated and deprived.”⁶⁸

Thatcher acted without hesitation to neutralize and break the cohesive ethnic unity, which was developing. Minority activists were quickly baited into government control by being placed in prominent positions in the race industry. Hundreds of advice centres, law centres, community projects, youth advice centres, youth clubs, police monitoring groups, sprang up almost overnight. Many of the ethnic minority groups had been temporarily pacified, through government spending. During this time many prominent IWA leaders were offered high profile posts but unlike many other ethnic minority leaders or groups, the IWA continued to remain independent and critical of government actions.

The IWA (G.B) was involved in setting up a Campaign against Racism and Fascism (CARF) and Campaign Against Racist Law (CARL). IWA (G.B) Prem Singh did participate in the CARF and CARL but they were more concerned with forming a group with an Indian orientation such as the Committee for Civil Liberties in India.

On 15th February 1981, the IWA Leicester branch set up the Campaign against Racist Laws (CARL) with 15 member organisations.⁶⁹ Its objectives were to prevent the introduction of further racist legislation. However, later that year the Tories introduced the

⁶⁸ Scarman, Lord, The Scarman Report: The Brixton Disorders: 10-12 April, 1981, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1982.

Nationality Act, which consisted of Labour government proposals from a 1977 Green Paper. The Act came into force in 1983. Primary immigration had already been almost stopped by previous Acts; the attention was now turned to entry of dependents. Restrictions were introduced and arguments to deter further dependents entering Britain were put forward. This Act marked the end of an era of immigration regulation and the start of a crackdown on settled ethnic minority immigrants. The formation of CARL proved not to be premature. It was necessary and its work through conferences and demonstrations proved absolutely vital in the years to come.⁷⁰

In 1984, the IWA again played a supportive role during the famous coal miners strike and helped raise money for striking miners. Many public meetings in support of their cause were organised with the aim of informing public opinion.

Racial attacks increased during the course of 1992, due to the rise of Nazi groups and racism in Europe and also the publicity over the forthcoming Asylum and Immigration Appeals Bill - the next racist step the British State would embark upon. According to the Home Office there were 7,793 racial incidents in 1992. However, the Commission for Racial Equality estimated that racist attacks were underreported by a factor of 10, which meant that there were up to 70,000 such incidents a year. During the period January 1992 to June 1993, at least 11 people were murdered in racist attacks in Britain.⁷¹

⁶⁹ *Punjabi Darpan*, 18th March 1988, p.30.

⁷⁰ *Leicester Mercury*, 16 March 1981, p.14.

⁷¹ Report on the Anti-Racist Alliance National Conference in Greenwich, Outlaw Racial Harassment, June 1993.

Between February 1991 and April 1993, four young black people were murdered in the Welling-Greenwich area alone. This was the area where the racist, British National Party (BNP) had established its national headquarters, since 1989.⁷² Despite intense local campaigning, widespread campaigning by the IWA and lobbying work by MP's in parliament, the local council and the government seemed powerless to take action. In response, the IWA gave support to an initiative setting up the national organisation, the Anti-racist Alliance. The initiative was supported by all trade unions and their affiliated organisations and more than 90 MPs and MEPs. In June 1993, IWA branches from all over the country came together for a national demonstration in Croydon, South London against the rise in racism & racist political murders taking place in the United Kingdom & Europe.⁷³ The march was sponsored by many organisations including the TUC.^{74 75}

When, in July 1993, an Asian shopkeeper in Leicester was assaulted in his shop by a gang of youths his wife made five calls to the police for help. They arrived 90 minutes after the first call was made, no statements were taken from key witnesses and after several weeks, the family received no explanation either for the delay or lack of interest in the case. The IWA Leicester branch intervened and organised a special meeting which was attended by MPs, Councillors and the police, who embarrassed by their inaction were forced to immediately forward an apology to the family and give an assurance that such a delay would

⁷² *Leicester Mercury*, 11 May 1993, p.1A & 3A.

⁷³ *Leicester Mercury*, 15 June 1993, p.1A.

⁷⁴ *The Leicester Mail*, 29 July 1993, p.5

never again take place in Leicester.⁷⁶ The case is one of many hundreds, highlighting police inaction where ethnic minority victims are concerned.^{77 78 79}

In October 1993, the Bombay district of India, witnessed a devastating loss of up to 25,000 lives, with as many injured or still trapped under rubble resulting from an Earthquake. Many village communities were wiped out in an instant. The IWA in Leicester immediately launched an appeal in support of the survivors of the disaster. Also in October 1993, the IWA, along with many other organisations, took part in a large demonstration in London, to highlight concern at the intolerable rise in racism. This was following the by-election victory by the British National Party, motivated to breeding violence in the East London area of Tower Hamlets. While the Prime Minister expressed great surprise regarding this victory, the IWA had been warning about the rise in fascist party activity for a considerable period of time. Following the victory the IWA again demanded that all parties & politicians who incited racial hatred & bred violence should be immediately banned and that a specific crime against racial harassment be introduced.^{80 81 82 83}

In February 1994, the IWA organised a meeting in Leicester to bring together all black and white people opposing racism. More than 28 organisation representatives

⁷⁵ *These Days*, 20 June 1993, p.13.

⁷⁶ *Leicester Mercury*, 30 July 1993, p.1A.

⁷⁷ *These Days*, 22 August 1993, p.1.

⁷⁸ *These Days*, 28 August 1994, p.6.

⁷⁹ *Today Tomorrow*, 9 August 1993, p.1.

⁸⁰ *Leicester Herald & Post*, 20 October 1993, p.2.

⁸¹ *Leicester Mercury*, 2 August 1993, p.1A, 3A & 7.

⁸² *Leicester Mercury*, 28 September 1993, p.1 & 3.

⁸³ *Leicester Mercury*, 7 February 1994, p.1A & 3.

attended, along with hundreds of individuals. A Leicester branch of the Anti-Racist Alliance (ARA) was formed at the meeting.^{84 85 86 87}

On 16th March 1994, the IWA presented a memorandum to the Indian Prime Minister at the time, Narasimha Rao. The memorandum asked for several issues to be addressed including the application of pressure to encourage John Major to introduce and support legislation which would specifically define racism in the U.K as a crime. The IWA also asked for a cessation of Human Rights abuses & violations, which were taking place throughout India, particularly in the northern state of Punjab with many sources indicating that the source of the problem was within Government.

On 19th March 1994, the IWA supported a national anti-racist demonstration which was a huge success, with at least 60,000 people marching through the streets of East London. The message was clear, ban the BNP & other racists, make the Government introduce legislation to make racism a crime & ensure that the Government introduces more effective policies to tackle the economic & social conditions under which racism seeks to flourish. This was the largest anti-racist demonstration ever to take place in the U.K.^{88 89}

In December 1994, the IWA sent an official complaint to the Chief Constable of Leicestershire constabulary. This was following years of complaints that Asians attending

⁸⁴ *Leicester Herald & Post*, 2 February 1994, p.1.

⁸⁵ *Leicester Herald & Post*, 9 February 1994, p.6.

⁸⁶ *Leicester Mercury*, 31 January 1994, p.1.

⁸⁷ *Leicester Mercury*, 1 February 1994, p.1A & 19.

⁸⁸ *Haryawal Dasta (Punjabi paper)*, July 1994, p.24 & 26.

⁸⁹ *Haryawal Dasta (Punjabi paper)*, October 1994, p.24 & 25.

Bhangra shows and other concerts in Leicester were being repeatedly targeted by the police. The police were accused of unnecessarily issuing dozens of parking tickets to vehicles outside such shows. This did not happen during other non-ethnic functions. Over years the IWA gathered evidence which revealed that the police were guilty of targeted discrimination. The IWA demanded that these racial overtones be immediately investigated and that those responsible should be punished for their actions. Following an enquiry, the police concluded that there was insufficient evidence for them to take any disciplinary action. Such ticket issuing did however, subsequently cease.

In March 1995, a race-hate, threatening letter was sent to myself as the IWA Secretary of the Leicester branch, by the extreme right group Combat 18.⁹⁰ This was during a period where letters spiked with razor blades were sent through the post to many local people.⁹¹ The letter was used as evidence by Greville Janner, MP for Leicester south at the time. Mr Janner raised the matter in the Houses of Parliament where John Major commented that the racists believed to have sent the letter were “repellent”.⁹² The Prime Minister went on to say that, “We are all in agreement that Combat 18 are a repellent organisation and that their racist literature is utterly disgusting. There is no place for their type of politics in the United Kingdom”.⁹³ The Prime Minister highlighted the powers of the Criminal Justice Act 1994, which made the distribution of racist literature an arrestable and imprisonable

⁹⁰ *Haryawal Dasta (Punjabi paper)*, May 1995, p.14.

⁹¹ *Leicester Mercury*, 25 March 1995, p.1.

⁹² *Leicester Mercury*, 28 March 1995, p.9.

⁹³ *Leicester Mercury*, 31 March 1995, p.9.

offence.⁹⁴ The government still took no action to directly deal with racist groups such as Combat 18.⁹⁵

In April 1995, Steven Norris the Minister for Local Transport and Road Safety indicated that he intended to introduce English language tests to ensure that taxi and minicab drivers could speak English to an adequate standard.⁹⁶ The government admitted that one of its intentions was to flush out illegal immigrants. A large proportion of the taxi trade in Britain consists of ethnic minority drivers, many of them middle aged and in some cases, too old to master a language to the level that the government was intending to apply. These were in fact the legitimate individuals who were being targeted. It is believed that as many as two thirds of minicab drivers in London alone, some 50,000 would have been affected.⁹⁷ The trade was predominantly led by white workers and thus ignored the prospect of the tests. The large Asian constituent was largely unaware of the full implications.

The rationale for the tests on the surface seemed logical, but it was without doubt a racist move. It was clear that the tests would encompass more than simple English would. Drivers, especially in the provinces already had to undergo Local Authority knowledge tests before being given a license. Such tests could not be passed without a working understanding of English, more than sufficient for use in the taxi trade. Even taxi Licensing Departments of Local Authorities expressed great surprise regarding the tests. The IWA Leicester branch

⁹⁴ *The Leicester Mercury*, 31 March 1995, p.9.

⁹⁵ *The Leicester Mail*, 30 March 1995, p.1.

⁹⁶ *The Sunday Telegraph*, 23 April 1995, p.17.

⁹⁷ *Eastern Eye*, 9 May 1995, p.4 & 5.

immediately initiated a high profile media campaign and issued the following media statement:

Years ago, Britain advertised abroad to meet its expanding need for a workforce. Many individuals came from the ethnic minorities, leaving behind close families, homes, and a way of life that would change forever. They came to Britain uncertain of what it would offer. Through such individual sacrifices they helped build post war Britain into a booming economy. They were invited to Britain at a time when they were desperately needed. It is only fair that they should have been informed then, that years later, they would be subjected to English language tests which could permanently remove them from whatever employment they would be engaged in. With no breadwinner, such a course of action if pursued, would inevitably undermine the whole family unit.

The IWA Leicester branch lobbied government, organised taxi groups throughout the country and threatened a national protest to successfully prevent the introduction of the proposed tests, which were subsequently abandoned.

In July 1995, Dr Sujjan Singh, a hospital consultant at a Leicester hospital found two youth's stealing apples from his garden as he returned home from an outing. One escaped, while the other, aged 15, was apprehended, attempting to climb over the fence. Not only did the police fail to prosecute the youth for trespass, theft and criminal damage but they decided

instead to charge the doctor with assault. This injustice was taken further by Leicester magistrates who convicted Dr Singh giving him a six-month conditional discharge and ordering him to pay £125 costs.

The Indian Workers Association (G.B) Leicester branch took on Dr Singh's case which was widely covered by the national media. The IWA wrote directly to the Prime Minister asking for a full explanation while organizing a petition and demonstration. The Home Secretary replied stating that he fully sympathized with Dr Singh's case, expressing that he hoped that an appeal to the Crown court would be successful. In February 1996 the Crown court judge did indeed rule against the earlier decision of the Magistrates and Dr Singh was vindicated.⁹⁸ Following the case, the IWA was invited to meet with the Chief Constable of Leicestershire to discuss the case.⁹⁹ The police had clearly and justifiably received a great deal of bad publicity at a national level, over the issue.^{100 101} Without support of the IWA, it is believed that many individuals like Dr Singh often fail to pursue such cases to a satisfactory conclusion, accepting decisions of the judicial system or police as completely binding and unquestionable.¹⁰²

In January 1996, after repeated pressure from the IWA and also the local community in the Highfields area of Leicester, the police introduced a decoy system to eradicate the long established problem of prostitution. This was following complaints by many Asian women

⁹⁸ *Leicester Mercury*, 8 February 1996, p.1 & 3.

⁹⁹ *Leicester Mercury*, 9 February 1996, p.3.

¹⁰⁰ *Leicester Mercury*, 14 February 1996, p.3.

¹⁰¹ *Leicester Mercury*, 28 March 1996, p.4.

in the area who had been approached by kerb crawlers. Following the initiative the problem diminished greatly and continued pressure from the IWA ensures that the decoy system continues to operate.¹⁰³

On the 24th February 1996, the IWA supported a national demonstration against the Asylum and Immigration Bill, which took place in London. The legislation severely restricted asylum rights in this country, preventing asylum seekers from being housed by local authorities and other associated measures. By making it a criminal liability on employers to check the immigration status of their employees it led to greater discrimination in employment and deterioration in race relations. The IWA continued to be at the forefront of protests against the Bill.¹⁰⁴

On 23rd March 1996, the IWA was again marching in London against racism. It was the United Nations' International Day against Racism commemorating the Sharpsville massacre in South Africa.¹⁰⁵ The march also highlighted objections against the forthcoming Asylum and Immigration Bill that would effectively close the door to many individuals who legitimately sought political asylum from oppressive and cruel regimes abroad.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² *Punjab Times International*, 21 February 1996, p.6.

¹⁰³ *Leicester Mercury*, 26 January 1996, p.13.

¹⁰⁴ *Leicester Mercury*, 3 January 1996, p.5.

¹⁰⁵ *Leicester Herald & Post*, 20 March 1996, p.23.

¹⁰⁶ *Leicester Mercury*, 21 March 1996, p.21.

In July 1996, the IWA Leicester branch met again with the Indian High Commissioner. The previous demands were once again brought to his attention.¹⁰⁷ First the provision of dual nationality to all those from the Indian sub-continent and their descendants. A personal meeting over this issue also took place with the Indian Home Minister, Inderjit Gupta. Second was the request that the Indian High Commission should open a Passport Enquiry/Issue office in Leicester. Although an office has not yet been approved, the Indian High Commission now sends delegates to Leicester several times a year to issue visa's on the spot.

In March 1997, the Head of the appropriate Unit in the European Commission, confirmed that Leicester City Council was acting in breach of European Law.^{108 109} This was following a detailed enquiry in co-operation with the U.K authorities. The background to this enquiry originated from a complaint lodged by the IWA in Leicester in association with various taxi organisations throughout Britain. In 1990, Leicester City Council had passed a resolution forcing all existing saloon car Hackney Carriage taxis to be replaced by £25,000 London style Black cabs by 1995. Many individual taxi proprietors objected to the new policy, but by its very nature the taxi trade was extremely fragmented and the challenges to the policy were swiftly dismissed by the Council. Drivers turned to the IWA in Leicester, in light of hundreds facing the immediate prospect of unemployment. Meetings were

¹⁰⁷ *Leicester Mercury*, 16 July 1993, p.1A.

¹⁰⁸ *Leicester Mercury*, 15 April 1997, p.9.

¹⁰⁹ *The Leicester Mail*, 17 April 1997, p.1.

immediately arranged at the very highest level involving Councillors and MPs but the Council was adamant in pursuing the policy.¹¹⁰

The IWA organised the fragmented taxi trade and formed the Association of Leicester Hackney Carriage Drivers. At the outset of the policy in 1990 the Council claimed that the public fully supported its decisions. By 1995, when the policy was due to come into full effect the IWA through concerted efforts had ensured by using a high level of publicity that public opinion was now very much in favour of drivers. Such publicity included involving MPs, a hunger strike outside the Council buildings, several demonstrations bringing Leicester to a complete standstill as well as other forms of protest.^{111 112 113 114}

With the help of the IWA, in 1995 the Association of Leicester Hackney Carriage Drivers made a complaint to the European Commission that Leicester City Council was acting in breach of European Law as it was preventing taxi operators from freely choosing for their economic activity, vehicles produced within the European Union, and authorised, for the same economic activity, in other Member States. Further, that this administrative practice had created a situation whereby one car manufacturer held a monopoly on the production of vehicles authorised for the use as taxi.¹¹⁵ The European Commission decision

¹¹⁰ *Leicester Mercury*, 13 August 1994, p.3 & 15.

¹¹¹ *Leicester Mercury*, 24 November 1994, p.1.

¹¹² *Leicester Mercury*, 16 December 1994, p.1.

¹¹³ *Leicester Mercury*, 3 January 1995.

¹¹⁴ *Leicester Mercury*, 11 August 1995.

¹¹⁵ *Leicester Mercury*, 12 January 1996, p.1.

superseded decisions of all U.K courts to date. It was essentially a victory of a scale never previously known in the taxi trade.

In April 1997, after some five years of active campaigning, the police finally bowed to pressure and announced that they were going to set up a new crime initiative in the Northfields area of Leicester, to combat racist and criminal elements. For many years the Northfields residential community suffered from almost every type of crime imaginable.¹¹⁶ The more serious of these crimes included racist arson and airgun attacks, physical assaults and the posting of excrement through the letterboxes of black people.^{117 118 119 120 121 122 123 124}

These actions should be intolerable in any community but even more so in a multicultural city such as Leicester. Over a long period of time many residents suffered irreversible abuse both physical and mental, and many others gave up their homes and businesses and fled to other areas of Leicester.¹²⁵ The police who were responsible for dealing with the problems allowed them to escalate to levels which later became difficult to control.^{126 127 128} In this escalation of crime, Leicester City Council had no small part to play. The Council took no action against tenants guilty of making other residents lives, a misery.

¹¹⁶ *Leicester Mercury*, 1 July 1996, p.18 & 23.

¹¹⁷ *Dainik Jagran – New Delhi*, 10 December 1995.

¹¹⁸ *Haryawal Dasta (Punjabi paper)*, January 1995, p.26.

¹¹⁹ *India Abroad London Edition*, 22 December 1995, p.25.

¹²⁰ *Leicester Mercury*, 30 November 1995, p.1A & 9.

¹²¹ *Leicester Mercury*, 6 January 1996, p.11.

¹²² *Punjab Kesari – New Delhi*, 11 December 1995.

¹²³ *The Economic Times*, 10 December 1995.

¹²⁴ *The Statesman*, 11 December 1995.

¹²⁵ *Leicester Mercury*, 2 July 1996, p.18 & 23.

¹²⁶ *Leicester Herald & Post*, 25 October 1995, p.2.

¹²⁷ *Leicester Mercury*, 27 September 1994, p.4.

¹²⁸ *Leicester Mercury*, 6 February 1996, p.5.

The IWA showed how local Councilors elected to represent the community, did anything but that. Following racist arson attacks and airgun attacks which resulted in Asian families fleeing their homes, one white Councilor for the ward commented about the misery of living in Northfields simply as,

“People often perceive abuse as racism when it might be something else, just bad neighbourliness.”^{129 130 131 132 133 134}

Through its efforts the IWA helped seriously troubled families obtain panic alarms, connected to the local police station.¹³⁵ Negative attitudes of local Councilors did not deter the IWA from calling many public meetings to address the Northfields problem and a special meeting with the Chief Constable was arranged to demand that black residents be given the level of protection that they deserved.

The IWA asked why a large residential area was allowed to become so run down that it had no local pubs, shops which had closed down permanently, no recreational or leisure facilities for youngsters to constructively use their free time, no local library and a mailing box which had been sealed to prevent posting of mail. Even street names had been vandalized beyond recognition. Years earlier, the IWA identified that a multi-agency approach was required to bring about the necessary reduction in crime.^{136 137 138} The new

¹²⁹ *The Leicester Mercury*, 2 July 1995, p.19.

¹³⁰ *Leicester Mercury*, 17 October 1995, p.3

¹³¹ *Leicester Mercury*, 17 February 1996, p.9.

¹³² *Leicester Mercury*, 27 November 1996, p.12.

¹³³ *Punjab Times International*, 30 April 1997, p.6.

¹³⁴ *The Pioneer – New Delhi*, 11 December 1995.

¹³⁵ *Leicester Mercury*, 10 November 1994, p.9.

¹³⁶ *Eastern Eye*, 12 January 1996, p.1, 4, 5 & 6.

¹³⁷ *Leicester Mercury*, 29 November 1995, p.4.

¹³⁸ *Leicester Mercury*, 19 January 1996, p.10.

initiative incorporated just such an approach. It is evident that it would never have been launched if the residents of Northfields did not have a voice to represent them and a medium through which that voice would be heard by the rest of Leicester. The IWA gave them the voice and through the media brought changes to the estate which residents in other parts of Leicester enjoyed as basic living requirements.

The local press, local radio, local T.V, national Asian press and even national newspapers in India covered the story of Northfields, before positive action was finally announced. The IWA campaigned for basic rights and conditions that every resident was entitled to and yet the Local Authority responsible to local taxpayers for providing those conditions, failed and neglected the estate for years.

Following the initiative, Northfields has started to witness the re-opening of shops, the first ever regular mobile library bus and a Council estate which has five resident police officers along with CCTV security cameras. For the first time in years, elderly people now have the confidence to come out during the day and even go shopping by themselves. Local Authority services have greatly improved and the quality of policing has also witnessed a significant improvement.¹³⁹ ¹⁴⁰ ¹⁴¹ The efforts of the IWA's campaign were applauded by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw on his visit to the area in connection with the Government's zero tolerance campaign at the end of 1997

¹³⁹ *Leicester Mercury*, 14 April 1997, P.22 & 27.

¹⁴⁰ *Leicester Mercury*, 16 April 1997, p.4.

¹⁴¹ *The Leicester Mail*, 17 April 1997, p.10.

5.0 Conclusion

The IWA is a voluntary organisation relying to a huge degree on individuals who offer their skills and time without financial recompense. It plays a vital role in constructively bringing about change for the benefit not only of Asian people but the community as a whole. The organisation offers advice on a wide range of matters including immigration, social services, housing, benefits, language, policing and crime problems etc.^{142 143 144 145 146 147} The organisation also continues to highlight and constructively deal with the enormous rise in racism, particularly in the Leicestershire area where, according to Home Office figures, the number of racial incidents is thought to be the 6th highest in England & Wales.^{148 149 150 151}

Public meetings are held on a regular basis and the topics debated have ranged from local issues to international issues such as the exploitation of Child Labour and the violation of Human Rights worldwide. MPs, MEPs, Trade Union Leaders and local Councillors have been amongst many whom have attended in the past. Cultural programmes have also been arranged regularly with some prominent artists attending on occasion, from as far away as India.^{152 153}

¹⁴² *Leicester Herald & Post*, 19 June 1996, p.1.

¹⁴³ *Leicester Mercury*, 1 February 1994, p.5A.

¹⁴⁴ *Leicester Mercury*, 12 June 1996, p.1A & 9.

¹⁴⁵ *Leicester Mercury*, 8 July 1996, p.2.

¹⁴⁶ *Leicester Mercury*, 30 November 1996, p.5.

¹⁴⁷ *Punjab Times International*, 26 June 1996, p.6.

¹⁴⁸ *Des Pardes*, 21 October 1994, p.Ext.1.

¹⁴⁹ *Leicester Mercury*, 6 October 1994, p.1.

¹⁵⁰ *Leicester Mercury*, 7 October 1994, p.3.

¹⁵¹ *Punjab Times International*, 19 October 1994, p.42.

¹⁵² *Sorkh Rekha India*, July 1993, p.19.

¹⁵³ *These Days*, 25 April 1993, p.4.

During the author's meeting with Prime Minister, Tony Blair, at an anti-racist demonstration in east London in March 1994, he gave an assurance that he would introduce a specific crime of racial harassment and violence, if the Labour Party came to power. As secretary of the IWA Leicester branch I was overjoyed, that after more than 50 years of campaigning against racism, the new government finally introduced such a Bill, probably the greatest measure introduced to date in the U.K, in the long struggle against racism.

The IWA is a diverse, independent organisation that has a strong history and association with the Labour movement. It continues to grow and operate in a dynamic society with many internal and external pressures. It has always progressed however, by continually re-examining its role. Over time it has secured many hundreds of achievements, many for those who have not been able to speak out for themselves or whose voice has been deliberately stifled by the State. Despite differences between the different IWA (GB) organizations, they still play a very important and effective role in British society because their fundamental aims are to benefit the whole working class and the oppressed people of the whole world.