

Britain: Racist attacks escalate

Paul Stuart**28 September 2001**

Racial attacks in Britain—from verbal abuse and spitting, daubing racist graffiti on mosques to fire-bombings and attempted murder—have escalated since the bombing of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on September 11. Some of the attacks may have been sporadic but evidence is beginning to emerge of far-right political involvement.

Media columnists have helped foster this reactionary atmosphere. In the *Daily Mirror* on September 17, Tony Parsons wrote, “We have been pushed too far... It’s too late in the day for understanding the anti-West feelings of these people.” Two days later, under the headline “Tell the liberals there is nothing shameful in vengeance”, the paper declared that revenge is “an emotion as primal as love and survival.”

On September 15, the *Daily Mail* concluded that the bombings meant, “Negotiation is meaningless, concessions suicide, and understanding impossible.” In the same issue, Simon Heffer demanded the introduction of internment. On September 22, Heffer called for the rounding up of all “illegal immigrants”, claiming they may well include terrorists among their number. As these articles were being published, indiscriminate attacks on Asian people were mounting in the US, Britain and around the world.

On September 19, three men dragged Afghan taxi driver Haniddullah Gharwal out of his vehicle in London, beating him severely and leaving him paralysed from the neck down. He was hit over the head with a bottle, kicked and punched by the three passengers, who shouted about the destruction of the World Trade Centre. Police said that if passers-by had not intervened he would probably have been killed.

His brother-in-law Naser Afzaly described his injuries, “Haniddullah is in a very, very bad condition and is too weak to speak very much... He has lost a lot of blood from his scalp and his back is badly damaged. The doctors think they will have to operate on his

back.” Afzaly added, “We are shocked at what has happened... Haniddullah was a student when he left Kabul seven years ago to escape the civil war... He was not involved in politics he was just an ordinary student trying to get his qualifications. He was studying leisure and tourism.” There are 50,000 Afghans living in England, half of them in London.

In South Shields, thugs set fire to the Al Hazar Mosque three days after it had been daubed with six foot letters “Avenge USA—Kill a Muslim Now.” After a second attack, Ibrahim Hussein, the son of the mosque chairman, said: “I have been worried since all this happened. There was a small fire started last week I thought was kids so I didn’t report it. This seems to be a bit more serious.”

He continued, “They have tried to set fire to the outside of a wooden door. It is a pathetic attempt but still an attempt. We are worried; I would be lying if I said we weren’t. People are shocked. Everyone in this community are integrated and everyone is peaceful with everyone else. Before this happened we were getting BNP [British National Party] cards left outside the house and I think what has happened has added more fuel to the fire.”

Mr Hussein said the majority of the people who regularly visited the mosque were elderly and had left the building around an hour before Saturday’s attack. Also in South Shields, a 20-year-old Bangladeshi man was badly injured after being punched and kicked by a gang. He was found in a pool of blood and rushed to hospital for an emergency operation to rebuild his jaw.

The far-right British National Party has stepped-up its campaign against the Asian population, describing Muslims as “the enemy within”. They have published a leaflet proclaiming, “Islam is all about love and respect” next to a picture of the devastated World Trade Centre. The leaflet uses the atrocities in the US to support their racist campaign to segregate Muslims

into walled-off ghettos.

In Glasgow's Pollokshields district, posters of Osama Bin Laden have appeared with the word "revenge" written on them. Dr Muhammad Shafi Kauser, from the Glasgow Central Mosque, said some Scottish Muslims had had stones thrown at them in the past week. He said, "Other people who have bad designs can take an opportunity, and they are taking an opportunity. They are throwing stones, they are cursing and abusing our children and we are getting into a scary situation."

Haq Ghani, of the UK Islamic Mission, said, "We are very, very worried indeed, especially about our children and our ladies...Our ladies are the most visible symbol of Muslims in our community and we already have had ladies getting scarves pulled off their heads, sworn at and racist, Islamic-phobic remarks being made."

Sikhs are also fearful, after reports that they were being mistaken for Muslims. Members of the Sikh community organised a march to Glasgow's George Square to express sympathy for those who died at the hands of terrorists, and spelling out to the public that they had nothing to do with the terrorist attacks in the US.

Birmingham's *Evening Mail* September 19 reported that two city councillors, who are both Sikhs, were attacked after being mistaken for Muslims. Councillor Chaman Lal and a colleague who did not want to be named said they were attacked in Cape Hill, Smethwick, after a man ran up to them shouting "Are you Muslim, I want to kill all Muslims."

Further attacks include:

* In Oldham, Greater Manchester, the partly built New Jamia mosque has been daubed with racist graffiti and had five windows smashed. It was in Oldham where the BNP was most active in the June general election, winning its highest vote.

* Detectives have confirmed a small explosive device caused minor damage at a mosque in Bolton. The explosion shattered three windows but no one was injured. It is the second mosque to be attacked in as many days. Police said the fire at the Alvia mosque was being treated as malicious.

* In Swindon, a young Asian woman was repeatedly hit over the head with a baseball bat in what is believed to have been an attack that was linked to the events in the US.

* Ten pigs' heads were dumped in a car park outside

the Islamic Centre in Exeter two days after the attack on the World Trade Centre.

* A nursery school with predominantly Muslim children, in Kingston, Surrey, has been forced to close after it was vandalised, daubed with racist graffiti and had a fire escape blocked.

* Abuse was so virulent towards students and parents at the Islamia Primary School in Kilburn, north London, that the school was closed for two days.



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