

Towards a History of
the Indian Workers' Association

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
PART I	9
Formation Centralisation and Factionalism: The Organisations History of the IWA	
Chapter 2: The Formation and Centralisation of the IWA	10
Chapter 3: Organisational Splits	16
PART II	28
Political Analysis and Working Class Action	
Chapter 4: Anti-racist Struggles	29
Chapter 5: IWAs and Employment	41
Chapter 6: Conclusion	50
Footnotes	54
Appendix	56
Bibliography	57

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 1988 the Indian Workers' Association (GB) celebrated its Golden Jubilee. Anniversary meetings here held in many locations including Coventry, the birthplace of the IWA, Southall, the Punjabi stronghold in Britain, and Glasgow, a city not often cited as a centre of Indian residence. At these meetings IWA veterans were presented with framed Jubilee certificates, speakers recalled the long history and past struggles of the IWA, and Indian poets recited Punjabi works.

These celebrations were not insular affairs. The two meetings I attended included speakers from the Labour Party, the trade union movement, Indian and British Communist Parties, international liberation and solidarity committees, and anti-racist campaigning groups. As well as recalling past struggles, IWA leaders and the guest speakers discussed current issues and the way forward for the labour movement.

As one of the oldest, and possibly the most active organisations of immigrants in Britain, the IWA has acquired fame and, from some quarters, notoriety. It has been at the forefront of struggle within trade unions, of campaigns against racism and on civil liberties issues, and it has supported many other groups or peoples involved in, what they see as, just struggle. It is also passionately involved in the politics of India. The IWA banner is ever present on broad left demonstrations and coach loads of IWA members march behind it. 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.

The reputations and actions of IWA leaders have contributed to the fame and even glamour of the association. The now legendary Udham Singh appears to have had IWA leadership status conferred upon him posthumously. Udham Singh was an engineer and active trade unionist who in 1940 shot dead Sir Michael O'Dwyer (the governor of the Punjab at the time of the massacre of unarmed peasants and workers in Amritsar in 1919) and is widely credited with being a founder of the IWA. Whether or not he was will never be known for sure as there is conflicting evidence. (1) However the fact that he has been appropriated in this way by and for the IWA is of ideological significance and points to the connections being made between freedom fighting and the IWA.

In a very different way, Jagmohan Joshi, a leader of the IWA from the early 1960s 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 1960s and 1970s. Sivanandan 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 race/class struggle" (1982:53). The journalist, Malcolm Southan, considered the success of an alliance of black groups to have been largely due to the abilities of Joshi (Sun, 11.1.1969). He was the central figure in the formation of many campaigning groups, an important spokesperson at the time of the 'wild cat' strikes in the Midlands foundries and the mobilisation against anti immigration legislation, and he wrote and spoke in many forums, analysing the forms of racism and other political issues.

Other IWA leaders who achieved wider prominence and whose activities add to the reputation of the IWA, include Avtar Jouhal, an active trade unionist and shop steward in the foundries until the late 1980s when he accepted a post teaching trade union studies, and Vishnu Sharma, an old time campaigner who has been particularly involved on immigration issues and is an important member of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants. Avtar Sadiq and Naranjan Noor are known for their poetry as well as their anti-racist work within local authorities and the Commission for Racial Equality. This is not an exhaustive list of such leaders and nor are all the attributes of each mentioned, but it gives an indication of the areas in which IWA leaders have made contributions.

Another aspect of the work of the IWA is that it has taken on the social/welfare role characteristic of most associations of immigrants. The organisation has spawned good 'social workers' who could deal with the problems of their compatriots, ran film shows and provided other entertainments. Although the IWA has never been the only association in existence in Britain catering to the needs of Indians, it has certainly been the largest and the one to achieve greatest prominence. Particularly strong groups have existed in Southall and the Midlands. De Witt John estimates that in the heyday of the IWA, in certain localities, over half the Punjabi males were members. The IWA attracted Indians from all political, social and geographical backgrounds. However the majority of members have been Punjabi Sikhs with a left wing political orientation.

This study is an attempt to document and analyse the history of the IWA in Britain. The reasons for such an enterprise are twofold. First, an examination of the development of a particular organisation serves to show how movements are built, the bases on which people can organise collectively and the reasons which inhibit such organisation or cause it to break down. Secondly, because of the great contribution made by the IWA to anti-racism and the working class movement, both through its analyses and its campaigns, a record of this work is itself valuable. There is a tendency to look at the analysis of a group one is researching in terms of data. That is, the significance of the IWAs analysis of racism might not be seen as important in understanding the nature of racism but in understanding the IWAs perception of racism. This perception then becomes data for the researcher to analyse. This is not my own approach. I consider the work of the IWA to be important because of its direct contribution to our understanding of racism and because of what it can teach us about fighting racism.

What type of organisation is the IWA? Such associations have been written about in the race relations literature either in terms of their importance in maintaining ethnicity and providing the migrants with an alternative to British lifestyles (eg. Desai 1963, Rex et al 1987) or in terms of their importance in the black struggle in Britain (eg. Sivanandan 1982; Ramdin 1987). These differences in the way of analysing associations are partly related to the differences in the perspective of the writers and partly reflect the fact that they are discussing different associations. However, the Indian Workers Association, has been analysed both as an 'ethnic' association in the sense of the first set of writers and as one of the major associations involved in the black struggle. Once again these two types of analyses owe something to the perspective of the writer but it is also true that the IWA displays both the characteristics of what are thought of as 'ethnic' associations and what are thought of as black political groups.

This can be partly accounted for by the fact that the IWA, like any other organisation, has been through different phases in its history. However still more important is the existence of a number of groups called IWA with very different positions, philosophies and functions. The present situation came about through a series of splits, to be discussed in later sections, which resulted in the existence of four organisations: the IWA Southall and three organisations called the IWA (GB). In fact at the Golden Jubilee celebrations the president of one of the IWA (GB)s asked the question 'whose Golden Jubilee are we celebrating?' The existence of a number of organisations by the same name with different positions has a comical dimension. For example a casual reader of press reports on the views of the IWA on various issues, would be forgiven for thinking 'the IWA' makes a pronouncement one day only to contradict itself the next. However this situation is also very useful for examining the question at hand because not only do the different IWAs display divergent characteristics which makes it possible to fit them into different categories in respect of the 'ethnic association' 'political group' framework, but also

because it is precisely those types of differences which contributed to the splits within the IWA in the first place.

On the question of what type of organisations ethnic associations are John Rex suggested four functions which such groupings have. These are:

1. To overcome individual isolation
2. To affirm a system of cultural beliefs and symbols in terms of which the new world may be interpreted and understood
3. To defend material interests where these conflict with other groups
4. To do pastoral or 'social work'.

John Rex points out that whatever the avowed aims of a particular organisation they all serve these functions though with differing emphasis.

Other researchers have concurred with this analysis (e.g. Anthias 1982). However it has to be stressed that the emphasis can change radically over time and a particular function becomes primary or secondary depending on what else is going on. For example among Cypriot organisations overcoming isolation was an important reason for joining an association in the early days of migration when many men came to Britain on their own. At present this is still an important function of the newly created groups and clubs for old people but it is probably of less significance among most of the other associations.

Although these four functions probably do always have significance in one form or other it is likely that there are always different phases in the development of ethnic associations which correspond to the development of the ethnic group, of politics back home, of immigration policies here and of changing political perspectives; it would therefore be surprising if ethnic associations had the same type of relevance at every stage. For example for many, organisations campaigning for independence in their own country was important when the group was first formed (and in many cases some of the initiators were political exiles in this country), while in later years the organisation would shift its focus to the situation in Britain. Also, there are many organisations whose primary function is as political groups.

It can be argued that given the racism of British society and the power relations between the English and other ethnic groups, all ethnic organisations are necessarily of political importance and the activities of ethnic organisations are always political in the broader sense of the word.

For example the most apolitical cultural association is making a political point and claiming certain types of rights when it arranges a procession or a festival in the streets of London in order to celebrate a religious or cultural event. Equally, advice centres and welfare groups although their primary function is to make sure that people know and get their rights in such areas as housing, social services and citizenship status, they necessarily become involved in political campaigns against the possible erosion of such rights and in struggles which aim to change laws which are seen as harming their clients.

However, many ethnic associations can also be more narrowly defined as political and as having political importance in a number of ways. To begin with, the fact that a number of ethnic organisations are involved with local government means that they are politically significant. Because local government seeks to be representational and it is recognised that ethnic minorities are not adequately represented, ethnic associations are often looked on as being the voice of a particular ethnic group. The idea here is that an ethnic organisation is more likely to be able to speak for the group than any individual and that the larger an ethnic organisation might be the more likely it is to be representative. Some organisations are formed for the specific reason of representing the group and are therefore a direct result of local politics in Britain. Besides local

government such groups often have direct access to a number of other government bodies and have a strong campaigning function. This question is also often looked at in terms of certain organisations having been bought by the state which uses their presence within its structures as a mechanism for claiming that there is some kind of a consensus.

Another sense in which ethnic associations can be narrowly political is in that they have links with particular political parties or groups and hold specific political views as associations. One example of this is the way the Communist Party sets up various associations or 'front' groups, in some cases ethnic associations, in order to create mass movements (eg. Adams, 1971; Mukherjee 1976). These groups might formally have links with the party in question and pay a political levy to the party and follow its directives, or they may be more informally linked in that most of the membership belongs to the party and therefore would introduce items which are important to the party onto the agenda and vote on them in the correct way. A common way of operating is for party members to hold key positions on the executive committee so that they can control the association. Because communists are usually willing to work harder for the association in question as they have a strong political commitment all party members are elected onto the committee so that even a group with a very small communist membership can have a communist majority on its executive. (Given the kind of paranoia that exists in much of the West regarding communism it should be noted here that these attitudes are not universal and that communists are often seen as people committed to liberation, justice for all and the knowledge that an organisation is communist dominated often draws people, even if they themselves are not communists, since they feel that communists are fighting for the interests of ordinary people).

Other political parties also have this kind of link with organisations as do churches and other religious establishments. It may seem inappropriate to categorise religious establishments as political in the same sense as political parties and yet in a number of instances they can be seen in this way, since the division between church and state is not a universal one, there is not always the idea that religious institutions are independent of politics. For example, one of the first Cypriot organisations to be set up in London was set up by Archbishop Makarios who was both the head of the Church and, on independence, the head of state. The organisation in question initially called 'the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood' continued to have links with both the church and Makarios' party and was identified by all Cypriots as the right wing organisation to which they could belong while the only other group at the time, a social group set up by the Communist Party, was identified as the left wing organisation.

Next to be considered is the fact that ethnicity itself gives rise to political positions. The link between ethnicity and nationalism means that some notion of ethnicity can lead to liberation struggles among people whose ethnic group is oppressed and to chauvinism and fascism among people who believe their ethnic group to be superior and who want to maintain the purity of their group. Many ethnic associations have a touch of both these beliefs; on the one hand they feel their ethnicity and culture has been down-trodden both in the colonial context and in present British society and therefore they need to redress the balance, on the other hand many organisations stress the value and superiority of their particular culture and the importance of the ethnic group being maintained (often by opposing marriage to outsiders) because of the intrinsic value of that particular culture.

One final issue is that although I have been arguing that ethnicity is necessarily political and that ethnic associations always have a political function, there is also a potential conflict between the extent to which a particular group stresses its ethnic commitment and its political commitment. This is particularly the case with left wing political organisations as it involves the contradiction of recognising the political importance of classes

and yet organising along ethnic lines. So for example a CP dominated group which is both trying to maintain its links with people of the same ethnic group and the same class can sometimes face serious contradictions.

When we look at the way the IWAs relate to these various issues we find that it is precisely on these questions that they have diverged.

In part 1 of this study I shall examine the history of the IWA and analyse the reasons for the various splits and schisms within the organisation. Part 2 will look in greater detail at two of the areas in which IWAs have made their greatest contributions in Britain : anti-racist work and trade union issues. Because of the existence of different IWAs and because the splits took place at different times, presenting the positions of all the IWAs on each issue is sometimes extremely cumbersome. Also not all the IWAs express a position on each of the issues discussed nor have they all become involved in the same initiatives. In what follows parts of the story of each of the IWAs is given but it is not possible to give precisely the same type of information about each of them.

This study is based on interviews with past and present IWA members, people who have had connections with the IWA, press clippings and IWA documents. Most of the press clippings and the IWA documents were made available to me by the IWAs.

A considerable amount of published literature exists on the IWA. De Witt John has written a full length book on the associations (1969), Desai (1963), Hiro (1971), and Heineman (1972) have devoted substantial space to the IWA while more recently Jacobs (1985) and Ramdin (1987) include chapters on Asian associations in their books in which IWAs receive much attention. Sivanandan has also written on the IWA (1982) and Clark (1975) has produced a short piece on Udhham Singh and the IWA. Rex and Tomlinson also give the IWA a mention and several journalists have written lengthy articles on the IWA both in the national and local press and in Race Today. However although a great deal has been written on the IWA much of this work is not based on original research but on De Witt John's book published in 1969 and based on research carried out in the mid-sixties. Besides covering only the earlier period of the IWA John had not worked with the Birmingham based group which is mentioned only fleetingly towards the end of his book. Some of the people writing since John (eg. Ramdin), have tried to update that material by carrying out some original research and adding it onto De Witt John's analysis. This is not entirely satisfactory as De Witt John has disguised the groups he worked with and there is no way of knowing whether the additional research is with the same groups which were analysed earlier or with entirely different groups. Dilip Hiro's book contains some independently acquired material (although this too is now dated), while Heineman includes some first hand interviews with IWA leaders. His material is confined to the issue of the IWA (GB) position regarding CARD (Campaign Against Racial Discrimination). Sivanandan's paper probably has the broadest sweep but since his concern is with showing trends in black organisations the details on IWA are minimal and incidental. The Race Today Collective (1983) have published a pamphlet on the political role of the IWA, particularly regarding union activities.

The current situation then is that there is a great deal of published material on the IWA but a lot of it derives from the same source and there is no comprehensive account of the more recent history of the IWA. There are also inconsistencies and discrepancies in the published accounts. This is partly because of the reasons given above and partly because the different IWAs have different positions on issues and tell the history of the IWA differently. In what follows I try to piece together as accurate a picture of the IWA as I can, using published sources, documents and my own interviews.

PART I

Formation, Centralisation and Factionalism:

The Organisational History of the IWA

Chapter 2: The Formation and Centralisation of the IWA

According to Desai the IWA was formed in the 1930s by some Sikhs (2) and a few others, mainly from the business, student and professional categories of Indians and was confined in activities and membership to London (Desai, 1963:102-103). Most other accounts and the IWAs themselves consider the first IWA to have been created in Coventry in 1938. Its founder members are said to have included Udham Singh (see above). Hiro, also names Ujjagar Singh and Akbar Ali Khan as co-founders (Hiro, 1971:157). In my own interviews I was given the names of Babook Chima, Kartar Singh Nagra and Anant Ram among those of the founders.

Other IWAs were also formed at around 1938. According to some published sources (John, 1964:45) the bulk of the membership of these early organisations was pedlars, (3) but there is also a mention of a business, a student and a professional membership (Desai, 1963:102-103). Some informants say most of the early settlers were not workers so the early association could not have been composed of workers.

Most sources consider these early IWAs to have been largely concerned with the independence of India though there are different degrees of emphasis as to the extent of this concern and regarding the differences between the IWAs and other Indian associations (compare Desai, 1963:103 with Hiro, 1971:157). After 1947, with the independence of India, the IWAs went into decline (4) and were then reactivated in the early 1950s. At this time the Punjabi population had grown in numbers and was continuing to grow. These new IWAs were still concerned with the situation in India because those involved in reactivating them felt the independence was a compromise between the colonisers and the feudal lords (interview), but they also had a role to play in improving the living conditions of Indians in the UK. For example the IWA South Staffordshire was formed by some socially active Indians in order to provide a voluntary service to the community (Hiro, 1971:156) while the IWA Birmingham initially concerned itself with the problem of Indians with forged passports (Desai, 1963:105; Aurora, 1967:45).

IWAs were reactivated or newly formed in all locations with Punjabi concentrations. The IWA Coventry, reactivated in 1953 (Hiro, 1971:156, but see note 4) was probably the first. Other local associations mentioned in the literature include the two referred to above; the IWA South Staffordshire (now Wolverhampton) formed in 1956 (Hiro, *ibid*) and the IWA Birmingham formed in 1959 (Desai, 1963:105). In my own interviews I was also told of the following branches formed in the 1950s: London, Nottingham, Leamington, Nuneaton, Bradford, Gravesend, Leeds and Huddersfield. In 1956 or 1958 the IWA Southall was formed.

The local IWAs were co-ordinated but independent until 1958 when they were centralised to form the IWA (GB). According to most published sources centralisation was advised by Nehru when he visited Britain in 1957.

However IWA members see it much more in terms of how they themselves felt the association should develop. A leading member of the Communist Party who was involved in the Coventry IWA in the 1950s gave me the following account of the history of that period:

In the 1950s we (the IWA Coventry) became larger and larger and had to contact people outside Coventry. We sent people from Coventry to different centres to form a political nucleus. They organised politically in small groups. This went on for four to five years and then it became essential to form IWAs. First a branch was formed in central London, then in Nottingham, then Southall branch was formed and so on. In 1959 the IWA was centralised.

With centralisation the local associations became branches of the national association and the office-holders of the branches made up the General Council. The national office-holders and Central Executive Committee were elected from this General Council. Policies were decided on from the Centre and a third of the income of each branch went to the Centre.

This picture of a very rigid structure is not shared by everyone and indeed some of the branches appear to see themselves as having had more autonomy than the view from the Centre would suggest. This perspective is supported by De Witt John who describes the unified IWA (IWA GB) as a 'loose federation of the local association' (John, 1969:45).

The IWAs became the most important Punjabi association in Britain and involved mass participation. John estimates that in some cases more than half the adult male Punjabis may have joined the local IWA (John, 1969:47). In the 1950s there was a broader spectrum of Indians in this country and the IWA membership reflected this except that it continued to be a male organisation. It encompassed a range of political affiliations, including Akalis, Communists, Congress party members, and members of the British Labour Party.

Of the different political affiliations operating within the IWA special mention has to be made of the communists as they were the most organised group and able to exert more influence than their numerical strength would suggest. Indian communists in Britain belonged to the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) until 1965 when the majority formed their own association (see below). However even when CPGB members, they had their own separate Indian branches and their own officers and could conduct meetings in Punjabi and concentrate on issues and activities of interest to Punjabis (John 1969:67).

One of their concerns was the development of the IWA and as might be apparent from the Communist leader's account of the proliferation of local groups and its centralisation, they saw the IWA as the mass organisation and were therefore committed to working within existing IWAs and creating new ones where a branch did not exist. Because of the paranoia regarding communism in Britain at the time and the tendency to use the charge of communism as a slur in order to dismiss IWA demands and ridicule their positions, (5) 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 put it, "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". However the communist members are over-represented on the executive committee of the IWA, partly because, through their commitment "they take the headache" (interview quote) and partly because they have the support of non-communists also. According to one leader "the reason why their influence is so great is because their cause is the cause of all poor people; they are known as the fighters". The communists in the IWA did not expect other members to join the party and recognised that the IWA, as a broader organisation, would not have the same political consciousness as the party. This was acceptable so long as the IWA did not move in such a direction that the communists considered it was compromising on politics as an organisation. In that case, according to one of the communist leaders, they would have to let the association go as it could not be the mass movement.

The existence of a range of people with different views within the IWA meant that there were always different opinions on the role of the IWA, even before centralisation. The most marked tension was that between those who wanted the association to be a welfare/social group and those who wanted to emphasise its political work, of which more will be said below. These tensions came to a head at the time of IWA elections which were hotly contested, particularly in the sixties. John gives a description of two 'alliances' being formed at times of elections: the 'communist' group which consisted of communists and sympathisers, and a second alliance known by the name of its presidential candidate which came

together temporarily to contest the elections; thus two slates of candidates would contest each election (John, 1969:70-71): The group that lost the election "formed an 'Action Committee' to protest against irregularities in the elections. Occasionally the losers went further and formed their own association" (ibid:73).

John, writing of the Southall elections of 1965 states that "For months before the election, rival groups manoeuvred and tried to negotiate alliances.....Perhaps a hundred men took time off from work to visit Indian homes and drum up support. 3.000 Indians voted in the election - 75 per cent of the IWA members and perhaps half of the adult Indian males in Southall and surrounding towns" (ibid:48). Cyril Dunn (Observer, 21.4.1968) writing of the 1968 elections under the headline "Little India goes to the polls" talks of five parties contesting the 21 executive committee posts. The elections were conducted on the local council election model with polling booths being set up in two local schools and symbols were used to identify the different parties. This system has persisted and the slates have been institutionalised to such a degree that only team nominations consisting of 21 candidates are now accepted for IWA elections (Des Pardes, 25.10.1985).

It is doubtful that electioneering on such a scale ever took place in the IWAs in other parts of the country and some IWA leaders say that if the kinds of 'slates' described by John ever existed they do not at the present time. However accounts given by several people of the Coventry elections in the fifties and sixties certainly fit in with John's two alliance model.

Besides the work involved in maintaining the organization the IWAs had full programmes and became involved in a number of initiatives. The most pressing issue to absorb the IWAs in the fifties, and, indeed, the main reason why some IWA leaders went to see Nehru when he visited Britain in 1957, was the question of the forged passports mentioned above. In the mid 1950s it was extremely difficult for Indians to be issued with passports to enter Britain as India was trying to curb emigration. Because of this some people asked for passports to go to other countries and then came to Britain while others fell into the hands of racketeers in India and paid for forged passports. This led to Indians living in Britain not having valid passports which meant they could not have their passports renewed or visit India. The IWAs worked both to help individuals facing this problem and to lobby the Indian High Commission so that each Indian in Britain with a forged passport could be issued with a valid one. This was one of the first campaigns which eventually succeeded and brought prestige to the IWAs (Desai, 1963:105; Aurora, 1967:45).

IWAs also fulfilled what has become known as a 'social work' role, with leading members filling out forms for fellow Indians, helping them in their dealings with bureaucracy and generally giving help and advice where it was needed. The social work role of the IWAs has persisted to the present day although it has changed in form.

Another IWA activity which had both political and social importance was the arranging of public meetings. These meetings usually took place in a Town Hall and involved speakers, sometimes from India to talk about the situation back home, sometimes from Britain to speak on subjects such as trade unionism and British immigration law. Such meetings often included a cultural entertainment. IWAs were also involved in the hiring of cinemas to show Indian films. This has always been a method used by immigrant associations to raise funds but became of less and less importance and in the present day hardly exists at all.

The aspect of the work of the IWA which distinguishes it from the majority of other ethnic associations is its commitment to trade unionism and its political agenda. The disagreements among IWA activists regarding the kinds of political work they should be involved in and the alliances they should be making will

become apparent in the discussion of the splits as indeed some of these differences were factors in creating splits. For the time being suffice it to say that IWAs became involved in all trade union activity and anti-racist and anti-immigration legislation work and some IWAs were instrumental in forming multi-racial anti-racist groups which were outside the state system, notably the Co-ordination Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CCARD) formed in 1960/61 and the Black Peoples Alliance (BPA) formed in 1968, while others became involved with state bodies such as the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and its precursors, and the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination.(6)

The history of the IWA, therefore, is of a number of local associations, some formed independently of one another because of particular needs (eg. the account from Hiro regarding South Staffordshire above), others formed by a core of people within an overall design (ie the communist formulation), coming together and forming a centralised body. Even before the IWA was centralised there were many differences within local associations and also from association to association which led to minor fissions and takeovers. However after centralisation because the call for unity and political consensus was so much stronger, so was the potential for the organization to break up into its political constituents. The splits described in the next section have been explained in terms of personality conflicts, fights for resources such as cinemas, power seeking of individual leaders who could only be satisfied if they headed their own organization and so on. There can be no doubt that all these explanations are valid or that those individuals who felt they had to leave a group for those sorts of reasons have a correct memory of their experiences. At the same time it cannot be a coincidence that the splits resulted in groups with different political ideologies and that although there has been some exchange in personnel between the groups the actual groupings have survived.

Chapter 3: Organizational Splits

The factionalism which beset the IWA in the 1960s is well known and is sometimes cited as a weakness in the IWA by IWA members, IWA ex-members, and outside commentators alike. Such critics pick on the petty, the ridiculous and the corrupt reasons for schisms. Fights over Bhangra outfits, a particular leaders tendency to make foolish comments to the press to gain cheap personal publicity, and various forms of fraud, have been given to me as explanations of factionalism. It is felt that if only IWA members were less self-seeking and more committed, the Association could remain united. Other IWA members and all but one of the IWA leaders who gave reasons for factionalism have stressed the ideological reasons. They, too, consider unity important but they do not feel it should be at the cost of political principle.

There have been many minor splits in the IWA, some of them apparently over the kinds of issues mentioned above and at the end of the last chapter. Also, the kind of pattern described by John (p.4 above) and independently verified meant that each election could potentially create a splinter group. Another way of explaining factionalism exemplified by the work of Bailey (1969) and Maher (1966) and applied to the IWA by Desai (1963) and John (1969), is by looking at the kin groups and networks of particular leaders. In this kind of analysis political differences are seen as emanating from competition and rivalry between individuals and their followings. This kind of analysis might explain some of the splits within the IWA. However, with hindsight, we can see that at least three of those splits were of a different order and require a different kind of explanation.

Moderates and radicals: The 1960/62 split

According to the IWA Southall the association never became a part of the centralised association which was set up in 1958. The IWA (GB) say Southall affiliated and then withdrew. One IWA (GB) leader gives 1962 as the date when Southall withdrew and cites the names of two IWA Southall office-holders who were also on the IWA (GB) central committee as evidence that Southall had indeed affiliated. Another IWA (GB) leader gives 1960 as the year of Southall's withdrawal. However, whatever the actual details there is agreement that Southall and the IWA (GB) went their separate ways and there is some agreement regarding why this happened. Vishnu Sharma, a leader of the Southall IWA at the time, considered the centralised group which had been formed to have been initiated by and dominated by the Communist Party. He wanted his group to remain non-sectarian and become a mass movement bringing together Indians of all political persuasions. Although he himself is a communist he did not want to be part of an organisation which was CP controlled. The other IWA leaders from that period agree that this was a reason why Vishnu Sharma wanted to separate Southall but at least one of the people from the IWA (GB) considers this to have been a class split and sees the IWA Southall as a bourgeois association.

It is also said by some commentators that the split was a reflection on the split within the Communist Party of India (CPI). To consider this point an aside is necessary on what was happening within the CPI at this period. It is generally agreed that the CPI split was directly attributable to the breakdown of ideological unity within the international Communist movement arising out of the Sino-Soviet dispute, (Retzlaff, 1969:330). However factionalism within the Party in India was also connected to a number of internal issues. The CPI analyses of the nature of the ruling Indian Congress Party, attitudes towards the INC's foreign and internal policies, (ibid:340-1) organisational issues and, decisively, the border dispute with China, were all matters which deepened the rift between left and right. These differences eventually led to a split in the CPI which was formalised in 1965 from which time there were two Indian communist parties; the rightist CPI and the leftist Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M). The communists in Southall IWA supported the CPI while most of the

communists in the IWA (GB) aligned themselves with the new party, the CPI-M. However the CPGB only recognized the CPI so those Indians who sympathised with the CPI-M could not work within the CPGB. They therefore left the CPGB and formed their own Association of Indian Communists in Great Britain in 1965. By 1966 the Indian branches of the CPGB had dissolved.

To return to the question at hand, although the communists in IWA Southall stayed in the CPI whereas the IWA (GB) communists aligned themselves with the CPI-M, this did not happen until after 1964 when the party split in India, whereas the IWA Southall/IWA (GB) split took place at least two years before that. It is possible that just as the factions which led to the split existed among Indian communists in India long before the Party was formally divided, they also existed among Indian communists here. Nevertheless the IWA split cannot be seen as a result of the Indian split since it predates it.

Furthermore, it is also said that IWA Southall is dominated by Congress Party, and certainly on the basis of the party affiliation of the leadership there is justification for pointing to both CPI and Congress influence. The Executive of the IWA Southall has often included members of the Overseas Congress Party. A General Secretary of the IWA Southall, Tarsem Singh Toor, who was assassinated in 1986, was at the same time the Secretary of the Indian Overseas Congress (Asian Times, 14th Feb 1986, No. 157). Another piece of evidence informants give for linking IWA Southall with the Congress Party is that Indira Gandhi was invited to speak in Southall in 1979 (she was prevented from doing so by the Midlands IWAs). From reports of past Southall elections it appears that CPI and Congress people have sometimes put up separate slates and sometimes coalitions. Other Indian Parties, such as Janata, also regularly put up candidates. It should also be stressed that to the present time, whatever the political sympathies of individual members, the organisation as a whole does not have any formal alignments with parties in either India or Britain.

Given the plethora of parties that try to control Southall it is not possible to sustain the argument that the separation of IWA Southall and its continuing independence from the IWA (GB) is due to a specific party split in India. Rather, the wider issue, reflected both in the IWA (GB)s general comment that the split with Southall was a class split and with the IWA Southall's position that they did not want to be aligned with the Communist Party but unite all Indians, is a more useful way of looking at the differences in the positions of the two groups. It also indicates the importance of the class versus ethnicity issue. While the IWA Southall wanted to unite all Indians, considering all Indians 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 interests of that specific group. This has sometimes meant that the IWA (GB) has supported one group of Indians against another, for example in strike action where the workforce and the employer have all been Indian (see Chapter 5). So where there is conflict of interests the IWA (GB) would not strive for the unity of the ethnic group but would support one class.

Other major conflicts between IWA Southall and IWA (GB) which were relevant in 1962 and continue to be important are related to the role each grouping saw the IWA fulfilling and the way they perceived race relations in Britain.

To start with the first issue, the IWA Southall was committed to welfare and social work and to providing entertainment. This last activity meant they were able to make money through showing Indian films at the Dominion cinema. IWA Southall's welfare role involved carrying out a great deal of case work. In 1962 they opened an Advisory Centre on a part time basis and in 1965 they bought the building they were using and were able to offer the service full time. In 1967 they bought the Dominion cinema in Southall thus combining all their activities under one roof and acquiring valuable assets. The cinema was later

taken over by the Department of the Environment, renovated and reopened as a community centre housing a number of projects.

None of these activities in themselves created conflicts but the issue of the Dominion Cinema was always a contentious one since it meant that Southall became by far the richest branch as well as being the largest. This led to Southall feeling it had more to give than to receive from the centralised organisation and therefore refusing to accept the same conditions as the other branches or Central Committee directives. Also the Central Committee did not want Southall to become nothing but a case work organisation and according to one person from the IWA (GB) nor were Southall's money making activities acceptable. The IWA (GB) felt the organisation should rely on donations from the membership and not set out to earn money. The issue of the Dominion Cinema comes up again and again in interviews, with ex-IWA members saying it was the real reason for the split and present IWA leaders placing its significance in the context of other differences in outlook.

The second issue is the different perspectives on race relations held by IWA Southall and IWA (GB). These hinged on how they saw immigrants in this country and the way they related to race relations bodies. The impression given by press reports (eg. Colin McGlashen, Observer 9.1.1965), De Witt John (1969) and IWA (GB) leaders, is that IWA Southall had an assimilationist philosophy and saw their role as being to educate Indians to make themselves acceptable to the British. The IWA (GB) on the other hand considered the problem to be racism and therefore saw the role of the IWA as one of fighting racism and not of changing Indians.

These differences became more pronounced after the split and after the race relations legislation of the mid-sixties which brought government race relations machinery into existence. IWA Southall worked with these bodies and also joined CARD.(7) All this was unacceptable to the IWA (GB) as their analysis of state racism was such that they refused to become involved with government bodies or with CARD which they saw as a front organisation for the Labour party. One IWA Southall principle which was shared with the IWA (GB) was that they should not accept state funding. However when Vishnu Sharma lost his leadership position this principle was reversed.

At the present time the IWA Southall is an autonomous organisation and has no branches. It has a committee of 26 (all men) of which 10 are office-holders. (Report of the General Secretary, IWA Southall 1985) The composition of the IWA Southall is said by other IWAs to be mostly businessmen and certainly the leadership appears to be mostly middle class.

In 1986, the president, Piarra Khabra, estimated that some 500 members attended the last general meeting. He says IWA Southall is more progressive than any other black organisation as it is the most democratic with all decisions being taken through voting. IWA Southall has changed its constitution several times and P Khabra believes it is time to change it again. He considers it an important attribute of the organisation that it is able to change to meet the needs of society.

In 1986 the IWA Southall was located at Southall Town hall from where it ran three MSC funded projects: a welfare advice service, Southall community Support service and IWA environmental project. 36 people were working for these projects including three supervisors and three full time workers (Ibid.). The association continues its campaigning and representational role and has recently been involved in the campaigns against the nationality laws, racist attacks and many other issues and is consulted by the press the police and other groups when these bodies want to tap the feeling in Southall. They also have links with a number of other agencies and one press release describes them as an umbrella organisation of Asians in the area (Ibid:4). Their wider political involvement

has included backing the miners strike, opposing the abolition of the GLC and taking part in CND marches.

As this account indicates, whether the IWA Southall is seen as a 'bourgeois' association or not it certainly took a moderate road on most issues when compared with the IWA (GB) and fits into the pattern of many ethnic associations which are part state funded, run welfare and social centres and become involved with CRCs, Race Relations committees and so on. The IWA (GB) on the other hand, remained independent of the state and involved itself with trade union issues and black politics. However neither the parting of the ways of the two IWAs nor the apparent differences between them are absolute. For example at election time it is always possible for the IWA (GB) to win support in Southall and they always try by putting up their own slate. On the trade union front, one of the first important Asian strikes, the dispute at Woolf's over management's attempts to break the union, was led by N S Hundal of the IWA Southall. Nevertheless it is true to say that IWA Southall was the more moderate of the two associations at the time of the split and continues to be so.

Militants and Communists: the 1967 split

Although the IWA (GB) eventually had branches in Southall and the rest of the Country, it was concentrated in the West Midlands. One ex-IWA member talked of a 'dual system' with IWA Southall under the leadership of Vishnu Sharma in the South, and IWA (GB) under the leadership of Jagmohan Joshi in the Midlands. However this 'dual system' broke down when a further split took place within the IWA (GB) in 1967.

This split was more clearly related to Indian politics. As already outlined above the communists within the IWA (GB) aligned themselves with the CPI-M and worked together with the Association of Indian Communists in GB. There were a number of differences both within this association and within the IWA on a variety of issues regarding Britain, India and the international scene. These differences were brought to a head by the Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal.

The Naxalbari uprising was not supported by the CPI-M. A CPI-M supporter in the UK explained this by saying the CPI-M did not consider the uprising to be revolutionary since the peasants had not seized land from the landlords but from some tea planters who had been given their own land. They were not owners but tillers. It was also considered too small to be significant. However in China it was hailed as a small fire which could spread across India. Those Indian communists who were involved in the uprising or sympathetic to it later broke off from the CPI-M to form the CPI-ML.

The sequence of events in Britain was complicated and involved a number of meetings both of the Association of Indian Communists in GB and of the IWA (GB) and the participation of two members of the politburo of the CPI-M. There are different perspectives regarding what happened at these meetings but the outcome was a split between Jagmohan Joshi and his group who backed the uprising, and those who were behind the CPI-M.

Although the Naxalbari uprising brought about an open rift there were many other issues of conflict. The question of whether the IWA should follow the CPI-M line was a major one both in the sense of whether they agreed with their politics and also from an organisational point of view as some people wanted to develop their own organisation and not to have to take orders from Calcutta. Other differences included the analysis of the global situation and international politics. Also Joshi's group was linked with China because there were many Marxist Leninists within the group and the analysis of the leadership on many issues could be seen as a Marxist Leninist analysis. Still more important were a number of issues to do with Britain.

The analysis of Joshi's supporters regarding racism was that black workers, through their struggle against imperialism in their own countries and their double exploitation in this country have become more aware. Black workers were therefore the group destined to lead the struggle and that once they were involved in struggle white workers would join with them. The position of the other side was that black workers did not have a special role and the initiative for the struggle had to come from the whole of the working class. An additional difference arising out of this one was that Joshi's group, because they saw black workers as having a special role, believed in forming alliances with other black groups; the other side were against this kind of alliance as they considered it to be 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 one group becoming concerned with black power issues while the other was committed to a more traditional class analysis. The black power dimension is a fairly controversial one and the IWA had to tread carefully in defining what it meant by it in order not to lose Indian members. Some success was gained since it was possible for this IWA to forge links with black groups, culminating in the formation of the Black Peoples Alliance, and later there were limited links with the Black Panthers. All these issues are discussed at greater length in the following chapter.

Joshi's group also believed in defence committees (which the other group thought were suicidal) and they had a strong position against affiliating with CRCs or other government bodies or accepting state funding. The other group were more ambivalent on this issue.

From 1967 there was no longer one IWA (GB) but two. However both are called IWA (GB). In order to avoid confusion I shall call one IWA (GB) A Jouhal and the other IWA (GB) P Singh. This refers to the group which supported Joshi and the group which supported the CPI-M respectively. Because this split was of the centralised body it affected all the branches and resulted in two local IWAs existing in most areas.

The two IWAs continued to do similar work and in some cases even worked together; for example on bodies such as CARL and CARF and in some trade union activities. However the two groups were definitely rivals competing for members and for recognition as the 'real' IWA both in the eyes of the community and in the eyes of the press. As outlined above political differences between them were various but for many people their relationship to the Naxalites was the defining characteristic and to the present time one group is called Naxalites and the other communists. In fact the notion of Naxalite no longer refers to the uprising in West Bengal but simply means militant. The idea that one IWA was more militant than the other certainly reflects the difference between the two and is even reflected in their constitutions. (see appendix 2)

Also the IWA (GB) A Jouhal involved many non-Punjabis, both in its membership and through its alliances and was oriented towards Britain and the international scene. The IWA (GB) P Singh was oriented more towards India. This orientation appears to be partly reflected in the languages used by the two associations. For example the IWA (GB) A Jouhal has published many pamphlets in English while the IWA (GB) P Singh has published extensively in the Punjabi newspaper Des Pardes. (8)

The situation in the 1980s is that both IWA (GB)s are active although not to their previous capacity and most of the local branches are still in existence though some are not very active. Youth and womens groups have been set up by both IWAs. Both groups continue with their representational, campaigning and trade union roles. The IWA (GB) A Jouhal supports an Advice Centre in the IWAs building on the Soho Road in Birmingham which is also the headquarters of the

association. The IWA (GB) P Singh does not appear to have much of a case work role.

The members of both groups have a number of party affiliations but the leadership continues to be predominantly communist. The IWA (GB) P Singh has clear links with the CPI-ML through the Association of Indian Communists in GB and provides a platform to visiting CPI-ML politicians. The IWA (GB) A Jouhal does not have such links with any party in India. As an organisation neither group supports any British parties but individual members belong to the Labour Party and a member of each of the IWA (GB)s has recently become a Labour Party councillor.

The overall position regarding the Labour Party of the IWA (GB) P Singh is that they are no different from the conservatives since they are both bourgeois parties and neither challenges capitalism. Both IWAs have also put up independent candidates for a number of local elections.

Most of the other positions of the two IWAs continue as outlined above but the organisations are rethinking some of their strategies. They are also facing a new issue; the question of Khalistan and the rise of Sikh fundamentalism. All IWAs oppose Khalistan and all have been attacked by Khalistanis both physically and verbally, and the newspaper of the IWA (GB) A Jouhal has been publicly burned outside the Gurdwara in Birmingham. Both IWA (GB)s admit to having lost membership through their anti-Khalistan stand but say they are building up again.

Sikhism: The split of 1983

Another split took place within the IWA (GB) P Singh in the early 1980s and resulted in Naranjan Noor, the president at the time, creating his own organization. The technical issue which created this split was about party discipline; the substantive matter was the IWAs position regarding Sikh culture. According to the leadership of the IWA (GB) P Singh, Mr Noor was checked by the organisation over a number of issues, the main one being the turban case which resulted in Sikhism being accepted as an ethnicity, or even a nationality, in Britain.

The background to this case is that Mr Noor, a teacher in Wolverhampton at the time, issued a statement calling the Wolverhampton headmaster who refused to allow children to wear turbans to school, a racist. Two weeks later the IWA called a meeting and his own branch members criticised him; they felt he should have made a different type of statement. He then championed the turban case. On this point I was told by his critics that the IWA is for religious freedom but it cannot be used to save the symbols of religion. He was therefore criticised since championing the turban case was considered to be the duty of religious people and it was thought that the IWA, as a secular organization, should not take it on. Officially the IWA did not support him though as individuals some did. Mr Noor next organised a meeting in Leicester for the Gurdwaras under the name of the IWA. He was criticised for this.

Because of all this conflict when the IWA elections came up he was directed not to contest any of them. However he still stood (and was elected). He was therefore expelled from the Association of Indian Communists in GB. After the expulsion, according to the other side, his support in the IWA diminished. He carried some people with him and organised a new IWA. I shall call this IWA the IWA (GB) N Noor.

Mr Noor's presentation of the split between himself and his old IWA is that they were taking an 'anti Indian culture stance' and he does not see it as a split or as himself being expelled (and he was not expelled from the IWA but from the Association of Indian Communists) but of himself and his faction ousting the

then leadership. There is also dissent regarding which IWA has the ownership of the IWA building which appears difficult to establish in law.

This IWA is small and it is not possible to say whether it will survive in the long term. However the split is significant because it concerns the issue of Sikh ethnicity and Sikh nationalism.

The positions of the IWA (GB) N Noor on most issues are similar to those of the IWA (GB) P Singh and they also have a similar relationship to the CPI-M in India (although according to the IWA P Singh they are not recognized by the CPI-M). The formal position on India is also the same as Khalistan is opposed. However because the blame for recent events at Amritsar is attributed to the congress party (they consider congress to have planted Bhindriwala in the Akali party and in the Temple in order to create problems for Akalis) they do not blame the Akali party for those events. In the Biennial Report Mr Noor's IWA calls on the Indian Government to accept the ten demands of Akali in order to solve the Punjab problem. Also Mr Noor went to talk to Bhindriwalla in the Temple and to consult him on the turban case and is therefore linked to him unfavourably in the eyes of other IWAs.

The main way in which Mr Noor's position differs from that of the other IWAs is in his analysis of culture and the importance he has attached to the symbols of Sikhism. The IWA (GB) P Singh do not consider Sikhism to be a nation or an ethnicity, but a religion. They consider the Punjab to be a distinct culture area and therefore want to promote Punjab culture but say this culture group includes Hindus and Moslems, not just Sikhs.

Conclusion

The IWA started off as one organisation with specific aims. Now there are four organisations by that name and they display a range of strategies and political views.⁽⁹⁾ The greatest difference is probably between the IWA Southall and the others. However there are also some important shifts in the other three. The kinds of issues the IWAs have split over have been numerous.

A major issue has always been allegiances to particular parties in India and politics in India. However it is important not to think that what happens in Britain simply mirrors what happens in India. Analyses which assume a causal relationship between Indian politics and events in the IWAs in Britain are strongly resisted by many members of the IWAs and they point to the various issues in Britain that have concerned them.

The question of the relationship of the IWAs to the British State come up again and again for all the IWAs and there are many dilemmas facing them, particularly on the issue of whether they should accept financial help and whether they should sit on government bodies. So far Southall is the only one that has gone fully that way.

Another issue has been whether IWAs should unite on the basis of ethnicity or class. One of the unusual aspects of the IWA GBs has been the fact that they appear to have remained true to their working class members. This contrasts sharply with, for example, Cypriot communists in the UK where the unity of the ethnic group is considered more important than defending people being exploited by Cypriot entrepreneurs. Southall, on the other hand, has developed as an ethnic association and it is doubtful that it can still be referred to as a workers association.

Another issue has been whether racism could be fought using traditional class analysis and traditional class struggle. This is a matter on which the two IWA (GB)s formed different positions which led them to looking for different types of alliance.

The most recent issue to confront the IWAs has been the demand for a separate state of Khalistan and the idea that Sikhism is a separate ethnicity and culture. In the 1980s these questions have been central in the relationship of the IWAs with other Sikhs and also in the split with Mr Nour. In this chapter I have been arguing that it is political differences and not individual rivalries which created major splits in the IWA. Furthermore these differences have brought into being different kinds of associations. The implications of this for a typology of different forms of association will be further discussed in the overall conclusion.

PART II

Political Analysis and Working Class Action

Chapter 4: Anti Racist Struggles

As organisations of immigrants the IWAs were all concerned with the problems facing their membership and their communities and so inevitably, in one way or another, all their work has been and continues to be, concerned with racism. The subject matter of this chapter is the specific analysis of the various IWAs of racism, the kinds of alliances they formed, and their anti racist struggles and tactics.

Analysis of Racism

Unlike the IWA Southall which states on its headed notepaper and literature that it was founded in 1958, the IWA (GB) firmly recognises the earlier organisation of the same name by claiming the year of its own foundation as 1938. There are probably a number of reasons for this but the implied continuity between the Indian independence movement and the struggle against imperialism and racism in this country certainly fits in with the IWA (GB) analysis of racism.

Although after 1967 there were two IWA (GB)s and they differed on a number of issues they also share a lot of common ground and common history. In what follows I outline the position which stems from Joshi and is continued in the IWA (GB) Avtar Jouhal. I shall indicate the areas where there are differences with the IWA Prem Singh in context.

In one of their pamphlets the IWA set out the following position on imperialism and racism which relies on Marxist and Marxist Leninist analysis. This is a precis of the relevant parts: because of the system of imperialism it was possible for the bourgeoisie of certain Western countries through the super-exploitation of the colonised peoples to make super-profits. A part of these profits they used to 'bribe their own workers' in order 'to create something like an alliance ... between the workers of the given nation and their capitalists against the other countries'. With the crisis in imperialism, and the attendant need to reduce the wage bill through wage cuts and redundancies in order to remain competitive, its necessary to convince the working class that it is the black immigrants who are bringing about the deterioration in their living conditions. The task of doing this belongs to the fascists and it is 'relatively easy for them to spread racialism because over the centuries racist propaganda has been implanted in the minds of the working class by the colonialists and the imperialists in order to maintain the super-exploitation and plunder of the peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The anti-black propaganda of the fascists is not an end in itself but a means to an end; the end is, through creating divisions, to smash the working class movement and its organisations with a view to serving the interests of state-monopoly capital. ('Smash Racialism and Fascism' July 1976).

The IWA (GB) therefore consider the task of fighting racism to be inseparable from the creation of a strong united working class movement. Because of this, as well as organising around specific campaigns to do with racial discrimination of every kind, the IWA has put much of its effort into organising within the labour movement.

Although the IWA consider the labour movement to be central to fighting racism since they see racism in class terms, at the same time they recognise that many working class white people are racists and consider this to obscure the class nature of racism. Because many white workers have been corrupted and brainwashed as described above and because black workers, through their struggle against imperialism in their own countries and their double exploitation in this country have become more aware, black workers must take up the initiative of fighting the enemy, the capitalist class, not only for themselves but also for white workers. Many white workers would join them in this struggle. 'We feel unity will develop in struggle. This does not in any sense deny the need for

black workers to have their own caucuses in every factory and place of work. We do not advocate separate black unions; that would be to play the capitalists game of dividing the working class' (pp.21-22 Report of the General Secretary 1970). The IWA also recognize that black people who are not workers are nevertheless the victims of racism and must not be excluded from the struggle but consider the black workers to be central (ibid). So, for the IWA, black workers, because of their particular history and class position, are the group destined to lead the fight against racism and therefore black workers have to be organised and united. They also believe that this has to take place within the context of the labour movement because although the initiative for the struggle rests with black workers, success depends on white workers uniting with them. They are therefore strong trade unionists and also welcome alliances with all other multi-racial, progressive groups.

This is one of the areas where the two IWAs have a different position. The IWA Prem Singh does not attribute a special role to black workers and considers that the initiative for the struggle has to come from the working class as a whole.

The IWA Avtar Jouhal, too, has had to tread carefully on the question of the role of black workers and particularly on how black power should be understood. In the 1970 general secretary's report, Joshi is careful to state that 'there can be no question of black power outside of the class struggle' (p.19) and above 'Led by black workers we shall try to find who our friends and who our enemies are. We shall try to unite with the former and fight the latter irrespective of their ethnic origins...for us black power is the establishment of a socialist state in which the workers of our country will take the lead in everything.' (ibid).

The IWA Southall, because of its aim to be a democratic united front, does not voice any particular analyses of racism and certainly does not share the analyses of the IWA (GB). In the 1960s it was also said of Southall that it did not recognise racism as the problem but saw immigrants themselves as a problem (p.16 above). In 1965 Colin McGlashan wrote in the Observer that 'Southall's paternalistic Indian Workers' Association has spent nine years lecturing, cajoling and bullying its members into trying to be more British than the locals...Southall's problems don't stem from insular Asians refusing to change their habits and traditions ...the real trouble is that it takes two to integrate and one side hasn't yet started trying. Fortunately, the newcomers are prepared to wait.'

It is unlikely that IWA Southall would be seen in quite this light in the 1980s. However, IWA Southall's policy of passively resisting racism as exemplified in the events of 1979 (NCCL 1980) created great conflicts with Southall youth who wanted neither to integrate nor to wait.

Relationship with Labour Party

It might appear that the Labour Party would be a natural ally of the IWA but although some IWA members belong to the Labour Party and recently two IWA members have become Labour Party councillors, the IWA has not been able to give unqualified support to the Labour Party since it came to power in 1965 for two main reasons: its racist legislation and the racist remarks of certain Labour MPs.

The 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act was seen by many, including sections of the Labour Party, as racist. However in 1965 Wilson's administration, far from repealing the 1962 Act produced the White paper which confirmed the Act and further restricted Commonwealth immigration by limiting the numbers of migrants who could come to Britain and by doing away with 'C' vouchers thus preventing unskilled migrants from entering the country. At the same time they introduced the Race Relations Act of 1965. This Act brought the Race Relations Board into

being and introduced limited legislation on racial discrimination (thereby allowing Michael X to be prosecuted on the charge of incitement to racial hatred). The white paper also provided for the setting up of the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants under the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The logic behind this package was that the NCCI through its voluntary liaison committees would provide some form of integration and racial harmony while the race relations board would deal with complaints through its conciliation committees. However there are more sinister interpretation which can be put on it. For example, Ramdin writes 'The thinking behind these bodies was to weaken the rising militancy in the black community by integrating the leading lights (in CARD) within the states designs' (1987:496-7). The IWA has also voiced these views. However, their main objection at the time was that the NCCI was a product of the White paper. In one of their pamphlets they write: 'The National Committee cannot succeed. Because it is the product of a racialist document it has not the trust of the immigrant communities in Britain'.

The IWA had more cause for dismay when Oscar Hahn was appointed Chairman of the West Midland Conciliation Committee and immediately after his appointment left Birmingham on a trade mission by Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry to South Africa. The IWA stated: 'Mr. Hahn's visit to South Africa is objectionable because it implies double standards. On the one hand he is concerned with racial integration here, on the other trade with a segregationist state...A chairman who acts like this cannot have the confidence of the immigrants'.(10)

Subsequent legislation, each time introducing more immigration controls and at the same time palliatives in the form of race relations acts and race relations bodies made the IWA further disillusioned with the Labour Party.

Although the IWA has campaigned for some Labour candidates and has been instrumental in some Labour victories, it does not give blanket support to the Labour Party or endorse all of their candidates. In fact during the 1965 election campaign the IWA with other immigrant organisations drew up a statement urging all the voters in two constituencies where both Tory and Labour candidates had either made racialist statements or broken promises, to abstain from voting. They 'felt it was time to expose 'the lesser of two evils theory which meant that the Labour Party, with a policy on the race question indistinguishable from that of the Conservatives, was getting immigrant votes' (General Secretary's Report 1967; see also Duff Hart-Davis and Paul Foot, 'Colour crosses the party lines', Sunday Telegraph, 20 March 1966).

On the other hand, if IWA (GB) members do participate in Labour Party politics they do not believe in separate organisations for black members. At the last Labour party conference, Bhagat Singh, a Labour councillor and IWA member, spoke against black sections saying they are not the real answer to peoples problems and that certain individuals made it an issue and use it for their own purposes. He links the movement for black sections to the attempt to form a black trade union in the past and recalls the position of the IWA at that time which was that separate organisation can lead to apartheid. (Interview with Bhagat Singh)

Other IWA members, while sharing the position regarding the divisiveness of separate organisation, do not in any case see the point of the effort to get more black people into parliament as Labour MPs. One person I spoke to said 'why elect a black Roy Hattersley? what's the point of pushing for black MPs to get into Parliament in order to carry out Labour Party policies?' People who are involved in Labour Party politics argue that there is a struggle there too and they should be involved in that process. They also argue that there are no alternatives such as a revolutionary party so black people must play their part in the Labour Party.

Co-options and Alliances

The early disillusionment of the IWA (GB) with government policies on race (including the policies of Labour governments) led to the organisation taking a number of specific positions on certain issues from 1961 onwards.

The first of these issues was the question of state funding. The dilemma here is a familiar one: how can an organization remain autonomous of the state when, at the same time, it is being funded by the state? When the group in question perceives itself as fighting the state the contradictions in accepting state funding become still sharper. On the other hand, it is argued, the public purse should be open to everyone and IWAs or any other organizations should receive their share. Also, associations need the money in order to carry out their work, particularly where case work is involved otherwise people would have to pay for services which they should be able to receive for nothing, or alternatively, funds have to be found in some other way.

This is one of the issues which can never be satisfactorily resolved. The IWA (GB) policy has always been not to accept state funding. However, there have been a number of occasions when this policy was almost changed. For example, in 1980 or 1981, they were persuaded by an officer from Birmingham City Council to put in a bid for Sandwell Advisory Centre which was to deal with Asian women and welfare right work. The application was going through until two or three days before the Council meeting when the bid was withdrawn (interview with officer in question). In 1982 or 1983 after some negotiating the same council sent the IWA (GB) Avtar Jouhal a grant of £1,700. They sent the cheque back. Avtar Jouhal's comment to me was that the IWA Conference at the time decided the IWA should remain independent.

On the question of state funding the IWA Southall shared the position of the IWA (GB). Vishnu Sharma considered the acceptance of state funding to be synonymous with loss of autonomy and, in discussion, pointed out that the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants has always managed without state funding so the IWA should also manage. However when the leadership in Southall changed this position was reversed.

Another major issue was to do with co-option. IWA (GB) members would not serve on state sponsored race relations bodies unless certain conditions were met. Their position was summarised as follows:

1. A principled stand not to be involved in anything that looks like a whitewash,
2. The belief that if these bodies are to exist the impetus for creating them should come from the immigrants themselves,

3. An objection to immigrants being invited as individuals; the IWA would only participate as representatives of their organisations.
(from interview with Avtar Jouhal)

This position was first formulated when the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants was set up and reflects the IWAs 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 positions on such bodies has led the IWA to the stance of refusing to sit on committees in their individual capacity.

In a 1970 document the general secretary of the IWA reported their (refusal) 'to collaborate with the governments racialism by co-operating or participating in the various white washing committees that were being set up, in particular the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants' (Report of the General Secretary, IWA (GB) A.J. 1970:10). They also suggest that 'The National Committee should be dissolved and a Conference of all immigrant and inter-racial organisations 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 organisations are consulted can the government hope to know their problems and gain their cooperation in achieving racial harmony.' (The Victims Speak) When Avtar Jouhal of the IWA was called upon to sit on the Employment panel of the NCCI he refused saying he could not accept an invitation in his individual capacity. (newspaper clipping). On another occasion the IWA and three other immigrant organisations boycotted a meeting of the NCCI saying it was a 'smoke-screen concocted very shrewdly by the Labour Government to cover state sponsored racialism'. (11)

The NCCI in any case collapsed a few years later when all 22 committee members gave their letters of resignation to the Archbishop of Canterbury as a protest against the introduction of the 1968 Immigration Bill (The Kenyan Asian bill) A newspaper story reporting the resignations adds: 'The NCCI has been disheartened and outraged by the Commonwealth Immigrants Act'. (12)

However there was no possibility of revising the position regarding the NCCI when other bodies were set up to replace it since the same objections applied to those also. The fact that some of these were set up by conservative governments with even more openly racist policies than Labour and to accompany stiffer immigration legislation, was not likely to increase the IWAs confidence in them. In 1970, after the collapse of the NCCI, The IWA wrote 'time has vindicated our stand...The various committees are powerless to do anything ...(even if they wanted to)...They are a tool of the government..' the report then continues to say that through its immigration legislation and failure to curb racist views and organisations, the government has created an atmosphere in which racism can flourish (Report of the General Secretary 1970:10). In a similar vein the IWA Prem Singh notes the increase of racism and the ineffectuality of conciliation '...racialism must be declared a criminal offence. The Community Relations Commission must be dissolved. We do not need any agent for conciliation and should have the power to take a racist and discriminatory person to the court.' (Conference Review, 1975:1).

Slightly more complicated was the IWA (GB)s refusal to participate in CARD (Campaign Against Racial Discrimination). CARD was formed at the end of 1964 with a grand vision of both uniting immigrant organisations and of representing immigrants to policy makers. Heineman writes 'C.A.R.D. would thus have two broad sets of relationships: with those in the immigrant communities and within the immigrant organizations that it wanted to mobilize, and with those who had the power necessary for the alteration of public policy' (Heineman 1972:2). However for a variety of reasons a number of those organizations that CARD wanted to unite and represent either would not affiliate or affiliated and then withdrew. Of the organisations that would not affiliate Heineman considers the

decision of the IWA (GB) to be the most clearly based on sharp ideological reasons (ibid:96). From interviews with Joshi, Heineman writes that the IWA (GB) characterised CARD as a front organization for the Labour Party, a platform for careerists, and as dominated by the middle class (ibid:96). Heineman quotes Joshi as saying 'We knew from the United States that such a movement could only pacify people. We must do all that we can to make sure that the resentment among our people is not repressed. We must channel it into the proper forms of commitment' (ibid fn.103, p.110). Another objection was that CARD did not have the participation of the grass roots: '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' (Joshi quoted in Heineman, 1972 fn.105, p.110)

IWA Southall has never had objections to sitting on state bodies and was also one of the major members of CARD. Once again the dilemmas involved are familiar, particularly as regards state bodies. On the one hand it is argued that people cannot change structures which are oppressive to them by participating on bodies generated by those structures, on the other hand, for pragmatic reasons, it can be useful to sit on those bodies. The IWA (GB) and the IWA Southall have taken different routes on this question but for both associations the issue of participation is constantly renegotiated.

The IWA (GB)'s distrust of government bodies and its unwillingness to collaborate with CARD were not due to any reluctance to form alliance with groups which could be seen as real allies. On the contrary, because of their analysis of racism the IWA always believed it important to form alliances, particularly with other black groups and with radical white groups. They were involved in creating the Co-ordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination in 1960/61 in which they worked with the Standing Conference of West Indian Associations, and several other immigrant groups. The IWA has also worked with the Afro-Asian Caribbean Conference, helping them organize a lobby in 1962, and have published with other organizations, in 1961 producing Immigration with the Pakistani Workers Association and the West Indian Workers Association.

Since the 1967 split the two IWA (GB) have formed different types of alliances reflecting their differing political analysis outlined in chapter 2, and the greater orientation towards India of the IWA Prem Singh. The IWA Avtar Jouhal has become involved in many more alliances with other black groups. The most well known of these was The Black People's Alliance, formed in 1968, in the wake of Enoch Powell's speeches. Assessing the organization a year after its formation, Malcolm Southan characterises it as 'potentially the most powerful coloured organisation to emerge in Britain' and states that 55 immigrant organisations, representing 700,000 people are affiliated. He considers the great potential of the group to be due to its having united the 'wild men of the Marxist left', among whom he mentions Roy Sawh and Obi Egbuna, and moderates such as Jeff Crawford. He attributes much of the success of the organisation to Jagmohan Joshi, the convenor, who, he says, is well known to be a superb administrator and 'almost unique because he is not only a committed Marxist Leninist revolutionary with a sophisticated grasp of political theory, but also has a huge and loyal power base in Birmingham' (Sun 11.1.1969: pp.1-2).

Other groups with which the IWA has been involved were formed to organize particular campaigns or as defence committees. For example in 1971 the IWA co-organised a march against racialism with the Action Committee Against Racialism; in 1979 they worked alongside AWAZ and other black womens' groups within the Black Peoples' Committee Against State Brutality.

The IWA Prem Singh also works within multiracial alliances but not ones which are self consciously black and, alongside the other IWA (GB) are involved with trade union groups and with pressure groups such as the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (CARF) and the Campaign Against Racist Laws (CARL). In addition,

they are instrumental in forming groups with an Indian orientation such as the Committee for Civil Liberties in India.

Anti-racist Campaigns

The anti racist campaigns the IWA have been involved in have been extensive and cover many more areas than those outlined above. A particularly important campaigning area has always been on racist legislation and racist politicians. The IWAs have produced a great deal of literature and have also organised marches, demonstrations, pickets and meetings. For example when Harold Wilson, the then Prime Minister, visited Birmingham in 1968, the IWA were there demonstrating against the Immigration Acts (and two of them were arrested on flimsy grounds (Birmingham Post, 17,18 & 19.6.1968). They have participated in, and often led, every major demonstration on immigration, racism and apartheid that has taken place in London in the last 25 years. Some of the better documented among these have been the 'March for Dignity' in 1969 which was a protest against racism in both Rhodesia and Britain, and was covered by all the national press (eg. Sun, 11.1.1969; Daily Telegraph 13.1.1969), the 1971 anti immigration bill demonstration, and the 1979 march against state brutality. The latter is also remembered because it was on this march that Jagmohan Joshi died of a heart attack.

The IWAs have also organised protests against Enoch Powell and the National Front both nationally and locally and have campaigned against racist MPs and councillors. In Birmingham the IWA and CCARD also campaigned against Peter Griffiths MP and Councillor Donald Finney's anti-immigrant pronouncements. CCARD published a pamphlet questioning most of the facts and figures on racial problems and accusing them of fanning racial tension. (13) In 1979, in Southall, the IWA Southall was active in co-ordinating the opposition to the National Front meeting in the Town Hall.

Although sceptical of the legislation which was introduced in 1965 and subsequently, they have used it to the full extent they could to fight racism. Calling for Enoch Powell to be prosecuted under the charge of incitement to racial hatred was one of the less successful attempts to use the available legislation.

The IWA also campaigned on more specific and more local issues. One campaign which was widely reported in the press was the testing of the 1965 race relations act through immigrants acting as 'guinea pigs'. This particular campaign was co-ordinated by CCARD and involved groups of immigrants going into establishments in the Midlands known to operate a colour bar. If they were not served the establishment would be reported to the Race Relations Board. Public houses, hotels, restaurants, hairdressers and places of entertainment were the kinds of establishments visited. (see National Press, 9.4.65)

Other areas where the IWA have agitated have been on the problem of racism in education and housing. In education they called for the teaching of Asian languages in schools and have campaigned against the bussing of Asian schoolchildren in the 1960s (IWA documents). In the 1970s Naranjan Noor, an IWA leader and Wolverhampton school teacher, has headed campaigns against the racial discrimination faced by both pupils and teachers in the education system, and on the turban issue (IWA documents). Campaigns on housing issues have included questioning rules which discriminated against immigrants acquiring council accommodation (Smethwick Telephone & Warley Courier, 6.12.1963) and countering attempts to stop immigrants from living in certain areas (Evening Mail and Despatch, and Daily Mail, 14.1.1965). These housing issues brought the IWA into conflict with Griffiths and Finney.

Another area of activity has been on the issue of 'illegal immigrants' which the IWA has worked on both as an issue and to help individuals threatened with

deportation or turned back at the airport. The notorious virginity tests, and the so-called 'phoney' bride racket are two of the weapons immigration officials have used to prevent Indian women from entering the country. Vishnu Sharma of the IWA Southall in his capacity as chairman of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants ran an office dealing with problems faced by immigrants at Heathrow. In the 1980s the two biggest immigration campaigns co-ordinated by CARL and involving both IWA (GB)s are the immigration widows campaign and the campaign against the Indian governments visa system.

The anti racist campaigning history of the IWA has been comprehensive as they dealt with all issues as they arose. Possibly what is significant about the IWA is not the actual campaigns in which they have been involved, these are predictable given the areas in which racism has surfaced over the years, but their campaigning style which includes the ability to mobilise large numbers of people and to join with other groups. Equally important is their persistence. The fact that IWA leaders are extremely articulate people has also meant that they are always able to inform people of the issues through their pamphlets and newspapers.

Conclusion

The IWA has been a particularly active black organisation with a strong political philosophy and an untiring leadership. It is always difficult to assess the extent to which particular changes are the direct result of the efforts of a particular group or a part of more general processes. In the case of the IWA there have been some clear victories such as in their work on the forged passports issue, their success in forcing specific unions to accept Indian members and in their campaigns for individual victims of discrimination. They have also added their voice to others in calling for things such as Asian languages to be taught in schools; something which is now becoming a reality. In fact many initiatives in which the IWA and other groups were involved and issues which they identified, have finally been taken on board by local authorities and CREs. That work has therefore had an effect. Whether this effect spells the fruition or the death of the political importance of such initiatives is a different issue (see for example Bourne, 1980; Sivanandan, 1985).

More importantly, the IWA has consistently and systematically identified, and provided an organised opposition to all forms of racisms and racist laws and to the erosion of the rights of working people. This work has had the result of raising the awareness of Indians and people in Britain in general and of establishing the IWA as an important political force.

Chapter 5: IWAs and Employment

Although it has been said that the IWAs initially were concerned with non-employment issues (Duffield 1988) certainly from the late 50s they became increasingly concerned with both conditions in the work place, with the issue of middlemen and bribery and with the fact that certain industries were not open to Indians. This led IWA activists to deal with both management in these industries and with unions operating restrictive practices.

Although the IWAs discovered early on, the racism of both employers and trade unions the answer here was to fight to get jobs and insist on members joining unions whatever the obstacles. Where there were no unions, Indian workers organised themselves and formed shops within the TGWU.

Like all immigrants the first employment issue to affect Indian workers was finding work. Due to restrictive practices a number of industries were not open to Indians or only certain grades of work were available to them. One IWA member from Coventry described his experiences of trying to find work in the car industry around 1961 and stressed that the issue was colour and not merely being a newcomer to the area. (Interview 5.7.1988)

At that time people from Ireland, Scotland and Wales could come into Coventry and get a job in the car industry right away. We were of the feeling that we were also paying our rates and taxes so we should be entitled to jobs in any industry on fair grounds. So I went there and they told me there were three jobs. I said could I apply for one. Well they said as far as Personnel department is concerned you can have the job the problem is with the union, there was a sort of closed shop, only union members could apply for the job. I said I am a union member. He said in that case you must go to Transport House, Union Headquarters in Coventry and get a card from them. That didn't apply to other people, only to coloured people. I went and asked them for a card. I didn't get a card. There was racial discrimination from the union and the employer. They couldn't give semi-skilled or any other job in the car industry (which was well paid at the time) to Asian immigrants. We in the IWA raised this issue from time to time.

This respondent had the same experience with Coventry City Transport:

We couldn't get a job even as a bus conductor let alone as a driver. Normally they promoted drivers from bus conductors. But people from Ireland Scotland and Wales could come here and apply for a job and get it straight away. So I applied for a job and didn't get it. Most of our people applied for jobs and didn't get them. For nine years we (IWA Coventry) kept going to the local council, which was Labour controlled, to put our case. Other councils in England were employing coloured bus conductors, why not Coventry? There was one convener who said as long as he was convener he wouldn't let any coloured people be employed as conductors. Eventually he retired.

Where Indians could find employment because of the strength and discretionary powers of white foremen and the frequent necessity to use Indian intermediaries, a system of bribery developed whereby workers had to pay for the privilege of getting work (Aurora, 1967:81; Duffield, 1988:43-44). The extent of the insecurity this created for Indians even once employed is stressed by Aurora who writes that 'even when the firm is keeping its workforce constant, some Indians are fired in order to employ in their place a fresh group for bribes' (op cit 81-82). At a conference organised by Smethwick Trades Council and in a statement issued on behalf of the IWA on 2.3.1963 Avtar Jouhal reported that Indians had to pay up to £50 in order to get a job and then more in order to keep their job and be allowed to work overtime. The statement continues to say that the IWA had been campaigning against the practice for the last three years. Although calling for trade unions to take actions against bribery and suggesting

various punitive measures in respect of the workers paying the bribes, the IWA statement and later interviews make it clear that they consider such workers to be the victims of a racially discriminating society and the real problem to be combated to be that of discrimination. (Express & Star 3.10.63, Smethwick Telegraph, 4.10.63, and others in I.R. file)

The industry which did employ many Indian migrants was the foundry industry and in certain foundries large concentrations of Indians were allowed to build up. According to Duffield this situation developed because there were no strong unions in these foundries and therefore the 'gentlemen's agreement' which existed between unions, management and government and led to the control of the employment of immigrant workers and to their dispersal could not obtain. Paradoxically, although it was the lack of strong unions which enabled these concentrations to build up, the Indians, particularly those involved in IWA (GB) were determined to form powerful unions in their work place and the fact that they were there in such numbers provided them with the possibility of doing so. The reasons for wanting to unionise can be seen as twofold. To begin with, IWAs were committed to the labour movement as discussed above and therefore it was important in principle to join trade unions. Secondly, because of conditions at their work places it was imperative to have a strong voice. The rise of the Indian shop steward movement in the foundries, the development of a racially segregated workforce and racially polarised trade unions are issues which have been analysed by Duffield (1988). Here I want to indicate the kinds of problems Indian workers were facing in these industries and the role of the IWA in mobilising around these struggles.

The strike at Coneygre Foundry in April 1967 is illustrative of a number of the issues which concerned Indian workers. Approximately 70 per cent of the 500 strong Coneygre workforce was Asian. White workers were classified as experienced and skilled while Asians filled the semi and unskilled grades. (Duffield 1988:86) In 1962 many Indian workers had joined AUFW, the only union in the company, but found the white shop stewards inactive on their behalf. In 1966 those members and other Indian workers who were not yet union members all joined the TGWU and elected their own shop stewards (Ibid:87). In April 1967 due to falling orders, management closed one section and made 21 Indians redundant. (14) In an effort to avoid redundancies the Indians proposed work sharing as an alternative. The company rejected this. They then suggested using the last in first out principle but this too was rejected (Duffield p.87). The Indians, Pakistanis and one Englishman (in all between 350 and 370 people) walked out. (15) The TGWU did not make the strike official but gave its support (NDH; IWA statement). The 150 AUFW members did not come out (ibid) and a local AUFW official stated that his members 'were not involved in the redundancies and therefore not in the strike (Duffield, 1988:88 from Express and Star 25.4.67) The strike lasted four weeks and then the management gave in and took back ten of the 21. The rest 'did not wish to go back' (Duffield, 1988:89).

Besides its apparent success and the fact that it contributed to the growing realisation that Indian workers were not 'docile' other important features of this strike which were apparent in both earlier and later action by Indian workers were a) the ability of a union (the AUFW) to condone strike breaking when Asians were in dispute (see Duffield, 1988:88); b) the inter-union rivalry and racially polarised membership of the TGWU and the AUFW. This was to come to a head two to three years later in the same group of factories and formed an important part of the CIR investigation and report (Commission on Industrial Relations, 1970); c) Finally, and this issue will be discussed further at the end of the section, the real and supposed influence of the IWA in instigating industrial action.

Another form of racial discrimination or 'colour bar' the IWA worked to dismantle in earlier years, was the practice of providing separate toilets in factories for Asian and English staff. (correspondence between IWA and AUFW,

'65-'66 relating to Midland Motor Cylinder Ltd.) This issue, in at least one case, was taken up first with management and then with the union.

Many changes have come about since the heyday of the Indian shop steward movement in both trade unionism and in the foundry industry; indeed there's hardly an industry to speak of now. However IWA people still organise in the foundries and still encounter opposition to unionising in the smaller companies D.C. Neville, now reopened as Goodridge Castings Ltd. is a case in point. This is the account of events given by an IWA member who organized within this foundry:

He went back to the foundries in 1976 and became foreman at D.C. Neville. He unionized the workforce within TGWU but in 1984 the management refused to recognize the union. They took them to the tribunal and won the case. On 22nd December 1984 management called him and told him there was not enough work and sacked him. They also gave letters of dismissal to two other men. All three refused to accept the letter because there had been no consultation. Nearly all the members (49) agreed to start industrial action in January 1985. Management said they could unionize but by using correct procedures. They tried to bring in scab labour -55 people- so the strikers started picketing. The firm took out an injunction. The case was heard at Balsall County Court and the firm lost the injunction. They picketed for another year (a total of 56 weeks) to no avail and then took the case to an industrial tribunal. The hearing took three days and the union won as the firm had already recognized the union and then denied this. The firm had 41 days to appeal. They declared themselves bankrupt and by the time the appeal came up the receiver was there. The appeal court could have made the firm pay 1 years compensation to the ex-work force and forced them to reinstate but this could not happen as the firm was in the hands of the receiver.

To return to the question of the extent of the influence of the IWA in these actions, it is very difficult to assess their precise role. One of the problems is that due to the paranoia of management which saw outside agitators in the form of IWA militants behind any unrest they publicly 'blamed' the IWA for all trade union activity. The IWA, for their part, were happy to take 'credit' for organising all activity, resulting in the press always publishing IWA statements on disputes and interviewing IWA leaders, particularly Joshi. So for their different purposes, employers, the IWA and the press make each dispute look IWA inspired even when according to other sources the IWA had little or dubious involvement such as in the Imperial Typewriters dispute (Race Today Collective, 1983). However, for the most part, given that in the sixties almost half of the Punjabis in certain centres in Britain were members of the IWA these people were obviously adequately represented in these workforces, and therefore were bound to be part of any action, not as outside agitators but as part of the workforce. The IWA commitment to unionisation and collective action already discussed and their political sophistication would also result in IWA members of the workforce having a bigger role. In addition the IWA as an organisation does attempt, whenever it can, to give leadership and support when there is industrial action, particularly when this action involves Indians or arises from racial discrimination. Examples of this have been given above and include raising funds, talking to other members of the community, arranging meetings, leafleting, putting workers in touch with the TGWU, standing on picket lines and so on. However as various commentators have noted, while possibly playing a bigger role than other organisations, they were not alone in giving this kind of support. Gurdwaras, for example. have also supported striking workers (John 69:148).

A major issue is that the result of the IWAs reputation for being behind all industrial action and the fear of their influence, whether this was warranted or not, meant that they were able to threaten to utilise the strength of the Indian workforce nationally and highlight the consequences if they were to act in

concert. For example, during the strike by Asian workers at Woolfs 1965/66, although the strike had been organised by Southall IWA, Joshi of the IWA (GB) besides fund raising for the strikers said to the press 'We are...asking all our members in local union branches, of whatever union, to get the factory involved blacked'.(16) During the Coneygre dispute the IWA issued a press statement in which is mentioned 'trying to get other Indian workers in the area to hold sympathy strikes'. The article continues 'The effect of this, if successful, could be disastrous for Midlands race relations. If a chain-reaction were started it would be, in the under-statement of a union official, 'most unfortunate'.'(17)

In conclusion, besides the actual work carried out by the IWA in respect of any particular workplace, their reputation and the amount of newspaper space given them, meant particularly in the sixties and early seventies, that they were able to have an overall effect on industrial relations through spelling out the power of the Indian workforce.

Sweat Shops

At the present time the major employment issue to be faced is that of sweat shops, and particularly sweat shops run by Asians.

According to IWA sources those Asians who had accumulated some capital before the redundancies in the foundries made them unemployed, then tried to set up small clothing factories. Official statistics indicate that whereas in the country as a whole manufacturing has gone down dramatically, clothing manufacture in the West Midlands has actually risen. For example in Coventry between 1974 and 1987 the number of clothing firms rose from 22 to 66 (Healey, Clarke and Shrivastava 1987:2), and furthermore these firms are nearly all owned by Asians with a predominantly Asian workforce (ibid:7). In the West Midlands as a whole it was estimated in 1984 that there were some four hundred small clothing firms with a workforce of approximately 20,000 (WMLPU, 1984:10). It is estimated that at least 80 per cent of these manufacturers are Asian (ibid:11).

A number of reasons have been given for the growth of small clothing firms from the late seventies; on the demand side, the need for cheap casual wear created a gap in the market to which existing manufacturers had not responded and which could not be filled by imports since, due to rising labour costs and other disadvantages they were becoming less competitive (ibid); on the supply side, conditions in the West Midlands made it a suitable location for the industry to develop. The recession, which hit the West Midlands particularly badly, as well as creating redundancies among manual employees resulted in a large number of industrial premises becoming available. Between 1978 and 1983 the number of such premises for rent or sale went up by 450 per cent. The regions central location and the existence of a large Asian population were also relevant factors (ibid:11).

Published sources support the IWA assertion that many of the clothing factories were started by Asians who were made redundant in the foundries. The capital required to set up small clothing factories has always been small and it was possible for these men using their redundancy money, savings and money borrowed within the community to set up small factories (ibid:12). Labour could be easily recruited particularly among Asian women who, at the beginning might have been relatives or close contacts, and outlets were initially market stalls and small shops run by other Asians. (ibid:12).

Many of these factories are not independent producers. The work they do, known as Cut, Make and Trim, involves assembling garments using the materials and design of larger producers or retailers (ibid:13). This is the pattern of the majority of 'ethnic' sweat shops and means the profit margin is not very great.

The actual assembly of the garment might take place in the factory or be carried out by homeworkers.

Small clothing factories have a long tradition of bad working conditions and low pay hence their common designation as 'sweat shops'. It is also the section of the industry which is least likely to be unionised for a variety of reasons. IWAs therefore felt they had a role to play in helping to organise these workers, and this they did.

A case which received a great deal of publicity was the dispute at Raindi textiles and Supreme Quilting, both owned by the Raindi family. There had already been problems with low pay at the factories and the workers were attempting to organise within the TGWU. While the union was negotiating recognition, management sacked three TGWU members. The union gave the company a deadline for their reinstatement and recognition of the union. There was no response so the strike began, involving more than 180 of the workforce of 300. One of the directors said the strike was politically motivated and that the IWA had disrupted normally good relations between staff and management (New Statesman 17.12.82). An IWA member said the workers (mostly Punjabi women and some men) came to the IWA to ask for help and they put them in touch with the TGWU. Only 12-15 of the men took any initiative while 35-40 wouldn't join the strike and broke the picket line. He and another IWA member stood with them on the picket line. They also went to their houses and spoke to their husbands and told them not to hassle the women or get in their way. (Interview) Another sweat shop they were involved in unionising in the early 80s was Sundring Khang. This was a much smaller company employing 27-28 people.

In Coventry in 1977, the IWA maintained there were 15 Asian owned factories paying minimal wages to their Asian workforces (18). Two such factories hit the headlines in the summer of 1977: Forward Trading Company and Loeffric Shirt Company. In both cases the Asian women workers complained of low pay and, tried to unionise within the TGWU with the backing of the IWA. This resulted in the union leaders being victimised and then made redundant. The women workers then went on strike for higher wages, recognition of the union and the reinstatement of the women made redundant (summary of press reports in Coventry Evening Telegraph August 1977). The dispute at Forward Trading had an additional element: the owner, Surinder Singh, was a member of the Communist Party. He was eventually expelled as it was decided the actions he was pursuing were inconsistent with membership of the Communist Party.

This brings me to the main discussion point of this section which is that the workforces involved in these strikes are supposedly unpoliticised Asian women while the owners are Asian men. These men are often left wing. Also some of these factory owners are members of the IWA although I have no information of disputes at IWA owned factories. The issues raised by this situation are first, how should we see the IWA at a time when employers are more likely to form its membership than the employees of these small firms? and secondly a number of issues connected with male female relations and the role of each sex in working class struggle.

In an interview with Avtar Jouhal I asked whether there was a dilemma for the IWA in respect of these firms. He said there was no dilemma; it was a clear question. He distinguished three situations:

1. Self-employed without employees other than family. This situation is not one that concerns the IWA.
2. Small employers. If these small employers respect the trade union the IWA enrolls them as members.
3. Large employers.

Jouhal said the IWA differentiates between different categories. There is a contradiction between big and small, between monopoly and small business. When they start organizing the workers of big business the smaller firms are very

happy to side with them and donate money. They tell the smaller firms that eventually they will come to them. If an employer is not paying trade union rates they approach him and tell him to pay the rates. Sometimes they say 'don't organize the workers, we'll pay them the rates'. But they can't be sure that they will continue paying the rates so they would rather see all firms organized. If a firm opposes the union they would be banned from membership of the IWA or expelled if they are already members.

I raised the situation of Akel, the Cypriot communist party which is happy to have big businessmen as members because they make generous donations which can be sent to the central party back home and help with the struggle there. He agreed that money could help with the struggle and said big businessmen used to pay £200-£600. However they were able to raise money from the whole community. When workers identified with them they could give a whole wage packet. They bought a building in that way (Soho Rd). He said there are more workers than bosses and therefore they can get more money from the smaller contributions of workers. Also, workers give physical support. Bosses give money but don't turn up for demonstrations and so on.

This leads to the second issue which is the gender one. Traditionally, members of the IWA were men and a great many of them were workers. Despite some attempts to recruit women the IWA remains a male organisation but in respect of the clothing industry most of the 'workers' are women. The situation then is one where a male organisation whose membership, so far as it is involved in the clothing industry, is mostly involved as employers, is attempting to defend the rights of the female workers in that industry whom it has not succeeded in recruiting to the organisation in a meaningful way. This is not to criticise the IWA. An organisation that recognises what is happening to these women and attempts to intercede on their behalf with Asian men and to help them to organise within the TGWU is clearly taking its responsibilities seriously. However it is a very different situation from that of the 1960s and early 1970s when it was organising its own members. It also highlights that the 'workers' is not as easily definable a group of people as it was in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This paper has concentrated on mapping out the history of the IWAs and identifying present positions. It is necessary to know the history and understand the conditions under which people can work together as one organisation and the conditions under which they cannot, in order to appreciate how movements can be built up. Clearly for the various IWAs differences in their political ideologies and campaigning strategies have created schisms within the organisation. The issues which have been vital in forming the positions of the IWAs have been the following:

Relationship to Indian political parties

The most direct relationship to an Indian political party is that of the IWA (GB) P. Singh which, through the Association of Indian Communists in Britain, has a direct link with the CPIM. The other IWAs can also be linked to parties and people outside the groups claim they have such links but these claims are not accepted by the members concerned and, in any case, such relationships where they do exist are not straightforward ones. Southall, at present, is said to be linked to the Congress party (and certainly some of the leadership have been members of the overseas congress, while Mr. Noor's group has been linked with the Akali Dal. Mr. Noor himself recognises the CPI-M. The IWA (GB) Avtar Jouhl has had links with the CPIML and various Naxalite groupings though it is doubtful that the links still exist and, in any case, the leadership point out that the Association as such does not have any links with any parties even if some of the membership do.

What is the relevance of whether a particular IWA has strong links with parties in India or not? It is seen as significant for a number of reasons both by IWA members themselves and by commentators. Is the main focus of the IWAs India or Britain? What effect do Indian politics have on the IWAs? Are IWAs independent groupings in this country or are they mouthpieces for political groupings back in India? Are IWAs independent and aware enough of what is happening in Britain to be able to take effective action or are they mostly concerned with events in India? Is the main concern of IWAs the welfare of the membership here in Britain or spreading the political views of the party back home? These are some of the questions and issues regarding the relationship of the IWAs to India. At present the view freely given by most of the IWAs with the exception of the IWA (GB) P Singh has been that it's crucial that IWAs should reflect the needs of Indians in Britain and anything smacking of directives or undue influence from back home is problematic. On the other hand, links with parties makes it possible to get support from back home in order to build up a strong association. It is also an important way of keeping the relationship and communication channels between India and Britain flowing. Punjabis in Britain are passionately concerned with politics back home. It has also been suggested that Indian Communist Parties are greatly influenced and to a large degree sustained by their overseas members. It is therefore not just a question of the influence of Indian Parties in India on organisations and parties here but also how these parties influence the parties back in India.

Relationship to British political parties

The only time IWAs had a direct relationship to a British political party was at the time when Indian communists were still in the CPGB. At present they will tend to tell their members to vote for either the CP or the Labour Party but it is doubtful that support would go further than this. Southall may not even suggest to the membership that they should vote in a particular way. A number of issues are raised when considering the relationship of the IWAs with British political parties. Since the IWAs are clearly political groupings the question of whether they can work with British political parties is obviously important. If they cannot, what type of parties would they be able to work within? The

answer of the IWA GBs would be 'not bourgeois parties'. There is also the question of what types of alignments can be made with existing parties. It is relevant to note that the IWAs do not support black sections (with the possible exception of Southall). When I asked someone from the IWA-GB P. Singh about black sections and about getting black MPs into Parliament his response was that if the point was to get black MPs to pass Labour policies there was no reason in the MPs being black. He asked what the point would be of getting a black Roy Hattersley into parliament. If they see the Labour Party as racist and as holding policies which would not bring about social and economic changes then having a black MP fighting for such policies is no better than having a white MP doing it. However IWA members do join the Labour party and a better relationship is now developing between the IWA (GB)s and the Labour party than has existed in the past.

Relationship to British State

This issue has been a crucial issue for all the IWAs. Whether to accept financial help and whether to sit on co-optive bodies have been particularly vexed questions. Most of the arguments for not accepting state funding and for not participating on government bodies are well known. It is felt that it is not possible for a group to remain autonomous if it is being funded by the state and in a situation where a group is fighting the state it appears as nonsense to do this using state funds. In terms of participation the argument is that if a group, in this case black people in Britain, want to change certain structures which are oppressive to them then this cannot be done by participating on bodies which are generated by those oppressive structures. The counter arguments are that for pragmatic reasons it is sometimes necessary to accept funding and it is sometimes appropriate to sit on bodies for a variety of reasons. On this question, too, the IWA (GB)s of the 1980s are thawing.

Ethnicity and Class

This heading refers to the IWA's basis of unity. Should the IWA unite on the basis of ethnicity or class? One of the remarkable features of the IWA (GB) has been the continued loyalty to their working class members. This upholding of the workers' cause contrasts sharply with, for example, the shifting allegiance of Cypriot communists in the UK for whom the unity of the ethnic group is given precedence over the fight against exploitation by Cypriot entrepreneurs. Yet IWA Southall has in fact developed as an ethnic association and it is doubtful that it can still be referred to as a workers association.

However the IWA (GB) can now be seen as occupying a slightly different role not because it has changed its position but because of changes in the nature of the working class outlined in chapter 5.

Nationalism and Culturalism

This heading refers to the issue of Khalistan and also to the idea of Sikhism as an ethnicity and culture and has recently been central in the relationship of the IWAs with other Sikhs and also in the split with Mr Noor. As mentioned previously most of the IWAs, particularly their Birmingham branches, have been attacked by Khalistanis both physically and verbally, and the newspaper of the IWA (GB) has been publicly burned outside the Gurdwara. All the IWAs (GB)s admit to having lost membership through their anti-Khalistan stand but say they are building up again. The IWA GBs A. Jouhl and P.Singh do not consider Sikhism to be a nation or an ethnicity, but a religion. They consider the Punjab to be a distinct culture area and therefore want to promote Punjab culture but say this culture group includes Hindus and Moslems, not just Sikhs.

The issue of Sikhism and Khalistan are clearly crucial ones for the IWAs as they have changed the nature of Punjabi politics both in the sub-continent and in Britain. Like most socialists/communists the IWA (GB)s are not able to successfully deal with the phenomenon of nationalism.

The issues listed above are mostly ones on which there have been differences. I have stressed throughout that the organisations which have emerged from IWA schisms have persisted. This is not to say that the organisations are static. With changes in the political situation the IWAs have changed too. Hence, at present, the IWA (GB) Avtar Jouhal and the IWA (GB) Prem Singh are working together on a number of campaigns, and people from the IWA (GB) P.Singh have said that at the present time, racism in Britain and the question of Khalistan are issues to unite rather than divide them. The spirit of unity was also evident in a different direction last year when the celebrations of the IWA Golden Jubilee were carried out jointly by the IWA (GB) Avtar Jouhal and members of the IWA Southall. At the same time attempts were being made in Coventry to

create a new branch bringing together all the IWA elements with the exception of the IWA (GB) Prem Singh. There are suggestions that the IWA (GB) Avtar Jouhal has reformulated its position regarding a number of issues in Britain. For example, at a public meeting in 1987 Avtar Jouhal said the role of community organisations in the 1980s and 1990s is to work as pressure groups on mainstream political parties.

In the 1980s the IWA (GB)s cannot have the apparently revolutionary role which they had in the 1960s and early 1970s. Neither the general political climate nor the present nature of the industrial scene would allow it. The IWAs have been characterised as having become mediatory and reactionary by the Race Today Collective (1983) who consider the people at the forefront of present struggles to be the youth, fighting racists in the streets of Southall, and those striking Asian women who are at the sharp end of industrial disputes. The IWAs themselves all recognise the importance of capturing the youth and involving women. The nature of the various IWAs in the next phase of their development will depend on whether they are able to do this.

Footnotes

1. The IWA (GB) Avtar Jouhal consider him to have been a founder member while the other IWAs give him little prominence. Most published sources refer to him as a founder or the founder but an article in India Abroad (Summer 1988) claims he was not even in Coventry at the time of the setting up of the IWA.
2. It is often said that the IWA is a predominantly Sikh association. Many people go further and say it is a predominantly Jat Sikh association. IWA members get irritated by these claims and point to the existence of non-Jat Sikh members, to non Sikhs and to non-Punjabis. This is one of those point which can never be satisfactorily resolved. Certainly there are many non Jat Sikhs in the IWA. Jagmohan Joshi and Vishnu Sharma, two of the most central people in the IWA are Brahman. There are a number of Gujerati and Bengali members, particularly in the London branches. At least two of the people I interviewed were Ramgharia caste, and Dallats, (an Asian word meaning oppressed used to refer to the so called scheduled castes) abound. particularly in Derby and Bedford.
3. It is not always clear whether this category refers to actual itinerant traders or to people of the pedlar (Bhatra) caste. Desai says pedlars were Bhatra Sikhs (1963:4-5).
4. Though there is photographic evidence that the IWA Coventry existed, at least on paper, throughout these years (see Appendix 1). One informant said there was a revolt and the young people took over from the 'old guard' in 1953, so it may be more a question of a transformation than a resurrection.
5. For example Harry Baker of Birmingham Trades Council withdrew his support of an anti-colour bar statement issued by a group convened by Jagnohan Joshi, because it had Communist support (Evening Despatch, 10.8.1961). Much of the press coverage on the IWA throughout the 1960s was obsessed with whether or not they were communists. This reached a peak in the late 1960s over the question of IWAs and industrial disputes (see Duffield, 1988:131).
6. The different positions of the IWA Southall and the IWA (GB) in relation to CARD are discussed by Heineman (1972:95-96 and passim).
7. This is an impressionistic view supported by an analysis of the Punjabi press by Darshan Singh Tatla (personal communication).
8. For diagrammatic depiction of centralisation and splits see Appendix 3.
9. Unidentified newspaper clipping in resource centre NC4.
10. NC2
11. NC1
12. NC3
13. NC7
14. NC5
15. NC5 and IWA statement
16. NC6
17. NC5

18. NC8

Appendix

The aims and objectives of the centralised organisation were as follows:

To organise Indians to:

- i safeguard and improve their conditions of life and work
- ii seek co-operation of the Indian High Commission in the U.K. towards the fulfilment of its aims and objects
- iii promote co-operation and unity with the Trade Union and Labour Movement in Great Britain
- iv strengthen friendship with the British and all other peoples in Great Britain and co-operate with their organisations to this end
- v fight against all forms of discrimination based on race, colour, creed or sex for equal human rights and social and economic opportunities, and co-operate with other organisations for the same
- vi promote the cause of friendship, peace and freedom of all countries and co-operate with other organisations for the same
- vii keep its members in particular, and people in Great Britain generally, informed of political, economic and social developments in India; and to
- viii undertake social, welfare and cultural activities towards the fulfilment of the above aims and objects.

Constitution of IWA(GB) Avtar Jouhal

The Association shall work to organise Indian immigrants and their descendants in Great Britain to:

- A
1. Wage militant consistent and uncompromising struggle in every possible way against racialism and fascism in Great Britain in all its forms
 2. Organise safeguards against fascist attacks on life and property
 3. Fight against discrimination based on national origin, creed, sex, religion and equal rights of national minorities in all fields
 4. Unite with other black people, other national minorities and those sections of the indigenous population who uncompromisingly oppose racialism and fascism.
 5. Fully participate in the Trade Union movement and in all struggle of the British working class against capitalism and for socialism.
- B
1. Support all economic, social and political struggles of the Indian masses against semi-feudal and semi-colonial society in India and for a peoples Democratic India.
 2. Publicise the political, economic and social situations in India among its members and other people
 3. Seek co-operation and unity in action with other organisations working for the same end.
- C
1. Support the National Liberation Struggles of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples and cooperate with other organisations working for the same end.
 2. Support all the just struggles of the people of all countries against imperialism of all type.
- D
1. Promote welfare services, undertake cultural and social activities for the fulfilment of the above aims and objects.

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