

INDIAN WORKERS' ASSOCIATION (SOUTHALL) *bharti mazdoor sabha* 60 YEARS OF STRUGGLES AND ACHIEVEMENTS 1956-2016





A BRIEF HISTORY:

Context in which Early Asian Immigrants Settled

Immigration: After World War II, Britain had an open door immigration policy and actively encouraged migrant workers from their former colonies to come to Britain to meet its demand for labour. From the early 60s onwards and in response to growing concerns and hostility towards the increasing numbers of immigrants from Commonwealth countries, the Government introduced numerous Immigration Acts to control this immigration.

Discrimination and Racism

Housing: Immigrants experienced racial discrimination in securing public housing, rented accommodation and in purchasing houses which created overcrowding. Signs of '*No blacks, No coloureds*' in housing were commonplace. Ealing Council tried to implement a 15-year residential qualification for Council housing to effectively deny access to housing to Asians which was later outlawed under Race Relations Act of 1965.

Employment: Finding work was extremely difficult with immigrant workers subjected to overt racial discrimination, often turned away and refused employment. Those in employment were routinely subjected to unequal wages and worse working conditions than their white counterparts.

With little knowledge of English, most were subject to exploitation and victimisation of trade union activists was rife. The employment prospects

of educated immigrants, who spoke English and possessed qualifications, were no better and they were forced into manual jobs as the first step into employment.

Trade Unions: During the 1950s and 60s the exploitation of immigrants was made far worse by the fact they worked in factories that did not recognise unions or actively opposed attempts to unionise.

The segregation between the white and immigrant workforces was often very clear, with immigrant workers confined to dirty manual and low paid jobs. Unequal wages and unfair treatment was a common experience amongst immigrant workers.

Social and Cultural Life in the 1950s & 60s: The early settlers had virtually no social or recreational life, regularly working 60-70 hours a week. The first Sikh temple in Southall was a terraced house on Beaconsfield Road and wedding ceremonies were usually attended by a handful of people and celebrated in houses.

The purchase of the Dominion Cinema by IWA in 1965 and the showing of Indian films along with hosting of cultural events provided the first major opportunity for Asians to begin to participate in and benefit from social and cultural activity.

Formation of IWA Southall: 1956

Bharti Mazdoor Sabhas (Indian Workers' Associations) had existed in Britain for many decades before IWA (Southall) was established and had been established primarily to raise consciousness of the struggle for Indian independence in Britain.

IWA (Southall) along with the other IWA branches in Britain were set up to organise workers and address the challenges facing the new immigrants, the majority of whom could not read write or speak English, were confined to manual and labouring jobs, subject to unscrupulous and exploitative employers and racial discrimination.

IWA (Southall) was set up in 1956 and its founding members included Amar Singh Takhar, Jaswant Singh Dhami, Ajit Singh Rai, Harbans Singh Ruprah, Vishnu Dutt Sharma and Rattan Singh Sandhu.

From its inception IWA (Southall) aspired to promote mass community and worker participation cemented by its commitment to secular values. This visionary aspiration and commitment by its founding members became its most distinguishable hallmark. IWA (Southall), unlike any other IWA in Britain, emerged as an Association in which individuals of differing political affiliations, persuasions and interests would become engaged and collectively work in the interests of the whole Asian and immigrant communities.

IWA: Supporting Asian workers in industrial disputes

The IWA's early work was against the endemic exploitation of and overt discrimination facing Asian workers such as low and unequal wages, long working hours, bad and unsafe working practices, employers' failures and refusals to address workers' grievances, unfair dismissals and so on.

Strike at Rockware Glass, Greenford 1962: This strike was one of the first industrial action by Asian workers in Southall. Prominent IWA leader, Vishnu Dutt Sharma, led the workers' 'walk out'. An estimated 165 workers were sacked including Vishnu Sharma.

Dura Tube & Wire Ltd Strike 1965: This strike centred around low wages, cost cutting by management and right to organise a union. The workers, led by a number of activists, including Gurdial Dhami and Darshan Singh Giani (both later IWA Presidents) organised and recruited most of the Asian workers into the TGWU union and went on strike for 2 weeks.

The R. Woolfe's Rubber Factory Strike 1965: The Rubber factory became synonymous with the early Indian Panjabi settlers and occupies a unique place in their as well as Southall's history. The strike again centred around anti-union practices, unsafe working conditions, low wages and other grievances. Prominent IWA leaders including Ajit Rai, Vishnu Sharma, Jaswant Dhami, Harbans Ruprah, Piara Khabra worked or were working at the Rubber factory and IWA played a prominent role in supporting the strikers.

The IWA was central to the movement that would emerge amongst Asian workers to organise and unionise themselves, oppose exploitation and assert their rights in employment, driving and fronting the demands for change, equal treatment, dignity and respect. Its work inspired generations of immigrants nationally to stand up, self organise and fight against discrimination and challenge unscrupulous and exploitative employers through collective and industrial action.

The IWA emerged as a national representative voice of Asian communities and over the decades developed a close working relationship with the trade union movement to protect the interests and rights of immigrant workers.



Dispersal and Bussing of Asian schoolchildren in Southall

The policy of dispersal and bussing of '*coloured children*' was introduced in Southall in 1965 to prevent there being more than 33% of immigrant children in any one class. Immigrant children were '*bussed*' from Southall to other schools across the Ealing borough.

This racist policy of '*Bussing*' of immigrant school children was introduced in response to opposition from white parents and residents that the large numbers of 'coloured and immigrant children' undermined the education of their children and that they should be 'dispersed'.

Over 50 coaches descended on Southall on a daily basis to pick up hundreds of 'immigrant' children mainly Asian from designated 'pick up' points. No white child was 'bussed' in or out of Southall.

For over 10 years the IWA campaigned tirelessly against the introduction of 'bussing' and the racism underpinning the policy arguing that the solution was to build more schools in Southall.

Finally a decade long campaign spearheaded by the IWA led to the ending of 'bussing' of immigrant school children in 1976.

Though 'bussing' was declared illegal in 1976, the practice continued until about 1981. Between 1976 and 1981 the justification for continuing this racist practice was no longer on grounds of integration but on the grounds that there was lack of funding to build new schools in Southall.

No Discrimination
in Education

We Want
MORE SCHOOLS

We want Action
not promises



Dominion Cinema

In 1965 IWA, whilst under the leadership of its President Mr. Harbans Singh Ruprah and General Secretary, Vishnu Dutt Sharma, purchased the Dominion Cinema for £75,000 as it needed an independent base and a venue for political, social and cultural activity for the growing Asian community in Southall. The IWA took out a loan of £50,000 and raised the remaining £25,000 from its members and the local community.

The Dominion Cinema began showing Indian films and this proved extremely popular, attracting huge audiences in the absence of any other social outlet or activity for the Asian community at the time. By the 1970s, films were shown throughout the week and the cinema attracted tens of thousands of film-goers every week. The films generated substantial income which IWA utilised to fund its social and welfare support services including its immigration, information and advice work as well as other cultural and political activity and campaigns.

With the advent of video films in the mid-1970s, cinema audiences plummeted and IWA's also income plummeted. The IWA became unable to meet the costs associated with maintaining the cinema and its welfare service and offices which were dependent on the income from the cinema. Over a period of a few years, IWA faced a spiralling debt of £120,000.

In 1982, facing a crippling debt, the IWA was forced to lease the Dominion Cinema building to Ealing Council for a term of 99 years as part of a deal

in which the Council paid off the IWA's debt, provided IWA an independent building and a one off £50,000 payment.

The site of the former Dominion Cinema today accommodates the Dominion Community Arts & Cultural Centre and Southall Library.



IWA Welfare services

IWA first launched a Welfare Service in 1957 at Southall Community Centre on Merrick Road on weekends to provide support to the early immigrants, many of whom could not speak, read or write English and had no knowledge of public services or the role of public institutions

In 1962, with a growing Asian population and increased demand the IWA opened a Welfare Centre and appointed full-time staff to provide information and advice along with a Reading Room and Adult Education activity on 18 Featherstone Road. This Centre also acted as the main IWA base and accommodated its political campaigns and work.

The main areas of welfare support focused on problems and issues related to forged passports and irregular status of workers, immigration, taxation, accessing basic rights and public services such as education and housing, discrimination in employment, bringing in spouses and families into Britain and translating and interpreting support.

Over the decades the IWA's Welfare Service, particularly its information advice and legal service work on immigration became nationally acclaimed services. The IWA supported people affected by immigration laws on one hand and campaigned against unfair immigration laws on the other hand. The IWA supported tens of thousands of people annually from across the country and from all communities.

‘Virginity’ Tests on Asian women

On 24th January 1979, a British subject of Indian origin wishing to enter the UK to marry her fiancé at Heathrow Airport was subjected to a *‘virginity test’*, a medical examination to determine if she was a virgin or not.

‘Virginity testing’ as it became nationally known as, was effectively an immigration ‘control’ measure designed and targeted at making it difficult for women, particularly fiancées and married women from the Indian sub-continent, to enter Britain. The British Government initially denied the existence of the degrading, inhumane and racist practice of ‘virginity tests’ by Immigration Officers at Airports or at British High Commissions in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The IWA launched a massive national opposition campaign and made representations to the Indian Government which made representations to the UK Government and took the matter to the UN Commission on Human Rights.

After intense national and international pressure, the British Government was forced to concede and accepted that *‘virginity tests’* had existed since October 1975 and announced the stopping of this practice.

The IWA’s intervention and campaign against *‘virginity tests’* is one of its greatest achievements and without it, this degrading, inhumane, racist and sexist practice specifically targeted at Asian women from the Indian sub-continent would have continued.

Murder of Gurdip Chaggar: 4th June 1976

On 4th June 1976, Gurdip Singh Chaggar, a local student was stabbed to death by racists opposite the IWA's Dominion Cinema and in front of The Victory Pub on The Green Southall, in the heart of the Asian community.

The community particularly young people outraged by racial violence and the lack of response from the police erupted in anger, staging incidents of sporadic civil opposition and protest. Young people also vociferously voiced their anger and criticisms against the established 'community leaders'.

The IWA leadership acted as chief negotiators with the Police on the release of local young people arrested and taken to Southall Police Station in order to diffuse the situation.

The IWA subsequently led and coordinated meetings to bring together different interests, unify community responses and organised a Unity March in Southall which was attended by thousands of local residents, other sympathisers and anti-racists from across the country.

The murder of Gurdip Chaggar exposed the growing schism between the younger generation of Asians and the 'old and established guards' and community 'leaders'. The IWA leadership recognising the changing community, influenced Balraj Purewal, one of the founder members and General Secretary of Southall Youth Movement, to become involved in the IWA. Balraj Purewal became a member of the IWA Executive Committee from 1983 to 1994, serving as Assistant General Secretary and as General Secretary of IWA.



NATIONAL FRONT (NF) MEETING IN SOUTHALL TOWN HALL: The Murder of Blair Peach: 23 April 1979

The NF fielded a candidate in Southall for the May 1979 General Election and proposed to hold a meeting at Southall Town Hall. The IWA coordinated mass community mobilisation, set up a Coordinating Committee to bring together all local organisations at a meeting at Dominion Cinema on 11 April 1979. It organised a March and a mass demonstration to Ealing Town Hall on 22 April 1979 and presented a petition with 10,000 signatures to Ealing Council to refuse permission to NF to host any meeting in Southall.

In spite of widespread community opposition, Ealing Council allowed the NF to hold a public meeting in Southall Town Hall on 23 April 1979.

The IWA promoted protest in the form of a 'Hartal' (a common protest of civil disobedience used in the Indian freedom struggles), decided 'not to resort to confrontation with the police' and planned a 'massive peaceful sit-down' outside Southall Town Hall.

2,875 police officers were deployed to protect the NF's right of assembly and against the wishes of the community. Over 800 protestors were arrested of which 342 were charged.

Blair Peach, a teacher and an anti-racist who had come to Southall in support of the community, was killed by police and over 800 protestors were arrested and many injured.

The body of Blair Peach was laid in repose at the IWA's Dominion Cinema, with a guard of honour from members of Southall Youth Movement. An estimated 10,000 people paid homage to Blair Peach.

On 28 April 1979, the IWA organised a Unity March through Southall, attended by approximately 15,000 people, in memory of Blair Peach.

The IWA coordinated and launched a Defence Committee and a Defence Fund to support those arrested.



National and International Work and Campaigns

IWA was one of the leading and nationally acclaimed organisation within the Asian, African, Caribbean and Refugee communities and recognised by successive Governments as the authentic voice and representative of the Asian community. Throughout the decades, IWA actively engaged in numerous strategic national working groups and committees to protect interests of immigrant communities and influence central government policy on immigration, community and race relations.

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)

Vishnu Sharma was one of the co-founders of the JCWI, the leading national body specialising in and campaigning on immigration, nationality and asylum issues.

Coordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CCARD)

IWA was involved in setting up of CCARD and its representatives were Vice-Chair and National Treasurer of CCARD respectively.

Race & Community Relations

IWA worked at various levels in different national committees including the forerunners of the Commission for Racial Equality, Race Relations Board and on the Race Relations Act 1965.

Immigration Acts & British Nationality 1981

The IWA campaigned against unjust and unfair immigration laws throughout the last 6 decades

UK Amnesty for Illegal Immigrants

The IWA's national campaign was instrumental in the Government's Amnesty for Commonwealth citizens and citizens of Pakistan on 1 January 1973.

Indian Dual Nationality Campaign

IWA was for decades in the forefront of the campaign on Dual Nationality for Non-Resident Indians.

Expulsion of East African Asians from Uganda

The IWA supported the resettlement of these refugees, raised funds, coordinated temporary accommodation and general relief work.

Political Rallies and Meeting

The IWA was famed for its political activities and meetings and attracted prominent international and national figures including: Indira Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi (Prime Ministers of India) and other Ministers from India; Michael Foot, Neil Kinnock and other leading Labour Party figures; Ministers of successive Governments and leading Trade Union movement leaders and activists.

IWA Elections

IWA elections symbolised its popularity and ability to engage tens of thousands of people and remains unparalleled by any other community organisation in Britain until today.

In the 1968 election, 95 candidates contested the 21 IWA Executive Committee (EC) positions available with an average of 5 candidates standing for each of the 11 different 'Officer posts' and 46 candidates contesting the 10 Ordinary EC member positions. Five parties namely United Front, United Democratic Front, Janata Front, Broad Alliance and Indian Workers' Front each fielded a team of 21 candidates and elections were conducted through polling booths in local schools.

The IWA Annual General Meetings regularly attracted between 700 to 1000 members. Over the decades the IWA election ballot paper became so long that it became virtually impossible for its members, many of whom had difficulties in reading English, to find their preferred candidate amongst a huge list of contenders. This led the IWA to introduce the 'team voting' system, where only teams of 21 candidates each, could participate in its elections.

The scale and cost of the elections, which attracted more voters than the local ward Council elections to elect councillors, resulted in the IWA amending its constitution. With effect from 1989, IWA began holding its elections every 4 years, instead of 2 years.



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ਮੀਤ ਪੁਰਖਾਨ



ਨਿਆਮਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਪਾਠਾਣਾ
ਸਨਾਫ਼ ਮੋਟਰੀ



ਸੁਰਿੰਦਰ ਸਿੰਘ ਸੰਗਲ
ਕਸ਼ਮੀਰ ਮੋਟਰੀ



ਪ੍ਰੀਤਮ ਸਿੰਘ ਸਿੱਧੂ
ਵਾਈਟੇਮ ਮੋਟਰੀ



ਨਿਆਮਾ ਸਿੰਘ ਪਾਠਾਣਾ
ਮੋਟਰੀ ਮੋਟਰੀ



ਹਰਜਿਤ ਸਿੰਘ
ਵੈਨੇਜ਼ੁਏਲਾ ਮੋਟਰੀ



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ਵਿਧਾਨ ਵਿਰੋਧੀ ਹਰਕਤਾਂ ਨਾਲ ਮਜ਼੍ਹੀ ਰੱਖਣ ਵਾਲੀ
ਯੂਨਾਈਟਿਡ ਫਰੰਟ ਦੀ ਧੜਾ ਪਾਲੂ ਜੁੱਝਲੀ ਨੂੰ ਹਾਰ ਦੇਣ

ਲਈ 6 ਅਗਸਤ ਨੂੰ ਹੋ ਰਹੀਆਂ ਚੋਣਾਂ ਵਿੱਚ

ਥ੍ਰੇਡ ਅਲਾਇੰਸ ਦੀ ਟੀਮ ਨੂੰ ਵੋਟਾਂ ਪਾ ਕੇ ਜਿਤਾਵੇ

ਭਾਵ ਨਿਸ਼ਾਨ ਲੋਕ

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ਛਾਪਿਆ ਪਰਗਰਾਮ ਜ਼ਰੂਰ ਪੜ੍ਹੋ



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IWA Presidents & General Secretaries: 1956 - 2016

Term	President	General Secretary
1957–1959	Amar Singh Takhar	Ajit Rai
1959–1961	Jaswant Singh Dhami	Vishnu Sharma
1961–1963	Harbans Ruprah	Vishnu Sharma
1963–1965	Sardul Gill	Piara Khabra
1965–1968	Harbans S Ruprah	Vishnu Sharma Tarsem Toor
1968–1970	Darshan Singh Giani	Harjinder Dhillon
1970–1972	Darshan Singh Giani	Harjinder Dhillon*
1972–1977	Ajit Rai	Mohinder Padda*
1977–1979	Vishnu Sharma	Piara Khabra
1979–1981	Piara Khabra	Tarsem Toor
1983–1985	Piara Khabra	Tarsem Toor
1985–1987	Piara Khabra	Tarsem Toor Balraj Purewal
1987–1989	Piara Khabra	Jagpal Khangura
1989–2007	Piara Khabra	Jagpal Khangura
2007–2015	Gurdial Dhami	Tara Sidhu
2016	Darshan Nagra	Iqbal Vaid

** No elections were held due to legal action and/or disputes between incumbent and opposing groups*

BREAKING THE GLASS BARRIERS: from IWA to Mainstream Politics

The IWA played a critical role in paving the way for Asian community to enter and participate in mainstream politics.

Sardul Gill: First Asian Councillor in Ealing, May 1968. Sardul Singh Gill, one of the IWA Presidents, using IWA as a base, prepared the ground and took a historical first step, becoming the first elected Asian Councillor in Southall, inspiring and trail blazing the way for others to follow. By the late 1970s, Sardul Gill became the leading contender to dethrone the sitting Labour MP Sidney Bidwell as MP for Southall Ealing, a feat he was unable to accomplish despite a number of challenges.

Vishnu Sharma: Independent Candidate, 1973. Vishnu Dutt Sharma stood as an Independent candidate in the local elections in Northcote Ward, Southall. He lost to a Labour Councillor who had held his seat for 24 years and who had been a previous Mayor of Southall, by only 23 votes. Vishnu Sharma's achievement illustrated the community and political base and force that IWA could generate for its prominent activists and leaders.

Piara Khabra: First Asian Member of Parliament for Southall/Ealing, May 1992. This ultimate political aspiration and dream of the Asian community was turned into a reality by Piara Singh Khabra, President of IWA, who became a MP for Southall/Ealing constituency and who replaced the sitting MP, Sidney Bidwell, who had been an MP over nearly 3 decades.

Piara Khabra served as an MP from 1992 until his death in 2007 and paved the way for Virendra Sharma, who in the mid-1970s had also served as a member of the IWA Executive Committee to replace him as MP.

Over time the IWA's political strategy, recruitment drives, community base and mobilisation of Asian electorate and its own membership made it possible and indeed 'normal' for Asians to be nominated and elected as Councillors not only in Southall but in Hounslow as well.



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To view the film online visit: www.iwasouthall.org.uk



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Serving Our Community

tawn

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