

## Newham 8

Racism was a fact of life for Newham's young Asians in the 1970s and 1980s.

I lived most of my life as a youth in fear. You couldn't go to sleep at night because you had youths running up and down the road with the Union Jack and every now and then you'd know that some poor Asian family's had its window smashed.

Abdul Karim, school student

In September 1982, aged fifteen and a student at Little Ilford School, Goga Khan was in the playground after lunch.

About five or six older guys came through the gate. They just started hitting a couple of my friends that was standing near the gate, punching, kicking them, shouting racist abuse. So as one of them comes to hit me, I've hit him back and everyone's started to fight. The teacher broke it up. Later I was in my Maths class and the deputy head and two policemen walked in. They put me in the back of a police car and they've taken me to Forest Gate police station and locked me up in a cell.

Goga Khan

Goga was terrified of his father's reaction but his dad confronted the police:

'Would you have wanted my son to be in hospital now? He was in school. Why was these guys coming into school to beat him up? What did you want him to do? Good, he done the right thing....'

I felt like, yes, he's got his arms round me and I feel good.

Goga Khan

Goga was released, but word went round that friends of the man he'd hit were coming back to kill him. A week later on September 24th:

The younger kids said 'we're scared to go home.' So [I and some other guys] said 'OK, let's walk around in a group and whoever lives where can just slip off as you're getting near to your house.'

A car screeched up and three guys jumped out with sticks and attacked two of my friends. Our reaction was these were the guys that said they was coming to kill me. Half of us run off and the few of us that stayed started fighting back. The next thing, a police dog van screeched up and they arrested eight of us and took us to Forest Gate police station.

'You guys just beat up police officers, you're in big trouble, you're really going to go to prison'. That's when we realised, these guys that attacked us, they was police officers!

Goga Khan

They decided to call on school students to strike and join a picket outside West Ham Magistrates Court when the eight appeared.

**It wasn't just a Little Ilford thing. The girls from Plashet School helped us in the campaign, the kids from Langdon School, Trinity School. That's what brought us together.**

**Goga Khan**

**Me, my sisters and classmates discussed who would strike and not go to school for the magistrates court picket. I went absent and my parents got a letter from the Head, we all did. I was called in by the Year Head to be "spoken to".**

**I was 15, and sitting exams that summer, so it was a "big deal". I felt strongly any child has the right to go to school without fear or danger.**

**Schoolgirl, Stratford School 1982**

When the day came, hundreds of Newham pupils joined the strike. The Newham 8's defence team barristers were all leading human rights lawyers.

**They opened up the case and showed the jury and judge what had actually been happening in Newham up until that particular day. I remember one thing the solicitor always said – 'as long as you tell the truth you can never go wrong.' Yes, I hit a police officer... but I hit him to defend myself.**

**Goga Khan**

A year later, when the case was heard at the Old Bailey, students from several Newham schools went on strike again and formed a picket outside the court for several days.

**You'd have 250 people outside with banners and placards and that. Because we was schoolkids and defending the other schoolkids.**

**Racists were attacking Asian schoolkids, so we meant it when we chanted 'Self Defence is No Offence' outside the Old Bailey. ... There was a real sense of community and looking out for each other. It was truly amazing!**

**Goga Khan**

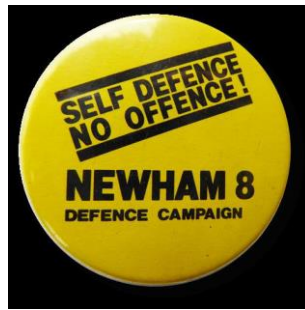
The judge accepted that the young men had acted in self-defence and directed the jury to find Goga and three others not guilty. Four were found guilty of affray but their punishment was fifty hours community service at their own youth club!

**Nothing, however, happened to the police, exposed in court for carrying out the attack. Nevertheless, it was the start of the change ... the roll of the ball.**

**Most of all our parents - they stood up behind us and said 'we're not going to let this happen to our children.' We grew up with these racists living next door to us and thought 'no, we're not gonna take this no more.' It brought me a lot more closer to my father because he really defended me, 100% supported me. If it wasn't for this I wouldn't have seen that side of him, if it wasn't for him I would have done not half of this.**

**Goga Khan**

[Text and quotations taken from exhibition panels: for full story see [here](#).]



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School students on Strike outside the Old Bailey during the Newham 8 Trial  
The slogan on the yellow banner is "Defend the Newham 8! Self Defence is No Offence"  
School students are wearing yellow campaign badges (top).

Photos ©Ilona Aronovsky, courtesy of Newham Monitoring Project.

Newham Monitoring Project will be publishing a comprehensive teachers resource pack  
on the Newham 8 story, trial and campaign later in 2020.