

# Immigrants are said to be stealing jobs but then are called lazy... they can't be both

Joginder Bains was once the national general secretary of the Indian Workers Association



## ANTI-RACISM ACTION IN DERBY TO HIGHLIGHT REALITY OF IMMIGRATION AND MINORITIES

By JOSEPH CONNOLLY

"WHAT is an immigrant? What are we? I've lived here for 52 years. Am I an immigrant or am I British?"

Joginder Bains was born in India and moved to Britain in December 1970. More than half a century on, she says that there's still a huge amount of work to do to banish racism in England. And she's taking action in Derby with colleagues at the city branch of the Indian Workers Association alongside Black Community Matters to highlight how prejudice can poison our lives.

"Racism has never gone away. But it comes in waves. Sometimes it'll slow down and then it'll peak again. And in the pandemic, racism that had been suppressed was exposed. Some people are under the illusion that racism has gone away but it hasn't and never did," she said.

She quotes the staggering percentage of black and ethnic minority (BME) deaths from Covid-19. She also reference surveys which showed that BME frontline workers felt they had less access to PPE during the pandemic.

Regularly, she also mentions the phrase "increasingly hostile environment."

Her view - and that of others - is that racism is on a rise that dates back way before the pandemic; it was just exacerbated by it.

She talks about Brexit and how immigrants were typecast as the cause of Britain's problems in an attempt to sway voters. Specifically, she refers to the Home Office's 2013 "home" vans campaign and P's infamous "breaking point" poster purporting to show queues of migrants waiting to get into the country. It was actually a photo taken in Slovenia.

It was the government's response to the Ukraine war which led to be the straw that broke the camel's back.

Ukraine war exposed racism

to the extreme," says Joginder.

"The government welcomed refugees with open doors. That was heart-warming. Refugees that were suffering were welcomed and given a human treatment. That's how every refugee should be treated. Because they've suffered enough in their own country. They've lost their home, lost their livelihood and lost their loved ones, and they're fearing for their own lives. That's why they flee.

"What about other refugees? They're not welcome. Other refugees are in exactly the same situation. But they're seen as burdens swamping the country and parasites. They're dehumanised. That really did cause a lot of pain. It wasn't to me directly but I feel it."

Multiculturalism under the Microscope is a bi-monthly workshop arranged by Joginder and her colleagues at the Derby branch of the Indian Workers Association (IWA), and Sonya Robotham, of Black Community Matters (BCM).

In the two-hour meetings, attendees are invited to discuss and debate topics introduced by the hosts surrounding issues concerning views on immigration. Everyone's invited.

"Anyone can come," says Joginder. "That's what we're here for. Let's look at every human being as a human being and look at the bigger picture."

Previous meetings were held at

the Multi-Faith centre on Kedleston Road, but the hosts are searching for a venue closer to the city centre to make the meetings more accessible. The next edition is likely to be in April, following the premiere in October and a successful follow-up in January.

While the atmosphere of the meetings is friendly and welcoming, the topics up for discussion are more serious. The idea for a workshop to "raise awareness" and to get people to "ask questions" of what they see and hear came not out of desire, but necessity.

Joginder believes the stance of the media and politicians has contributed to the hostile environment. She wants to use the meetings to open people's eyes to "the reality".

She said: "People view immigrants as being given priority over nationals. But that's not the case. They have to live on £37.50 per week. Some live in appalling situations when they're housed, shoved into one room.

"Simultaneously, immigrants are said to be stealing jobs but are then called lazy. They can't be both.

"Immigrants are not the problem. They are the solution sometimes. There are currently 48,000 nursing posts vacant. Immigrants could fill those. In some circumstances, immigrants create new jobs, new ideas and new culture.

"Foreign students pay three times more fees than national students

do. They supplement the higher education system in this country and bring in £14 billion pounds every year for the economy. But these are the things that people don't know. The media don't show it and the politicians don't speak about it."

As well as the institutional racism Joginder speaks of, there's also the overt racism which has undoubtedly contributed to hers and others' feeling that a workshop such as theirs is needed. It's something she's dealt with herself as recently as a few years ago, when a friend argued to her that immigrants were undercutting the wages.

It was also a friend that commented that they'd only get a job if they painted their face and wore a skirt way back in the late 1980s. And it was a manager who scolded her in the early 2000s for speaking Punjabi to a friend while answering the phone.

She's seen fingers pointed, people spat on and abuse in the streets outside her house in Normanton. But she thinks there's hope.

"Some people that have come to the workshops will come with one view and leave with another," she says. "They're not overtly racist when they arrive, but will make comments which imply that they have certain, embedded views on immigrants."

It's not just white British nationals either. She says she'll hear negative views on immigration from people of her own background. But the aim is just to spread their truth.

"Our hope is to raise awareness," she said. "We don't want to raise any aggression or create a counter-hostile environment. It's the opposite. We want the hostility to be reduced and banished eventually. The world may be too big to totally diminish it but if we can achieve it in our community, convince someone and get them to pass the message on, hopefully it will snowball."



UKIP's infamous "breaking point" poster was actually a photo taken in Slovenia