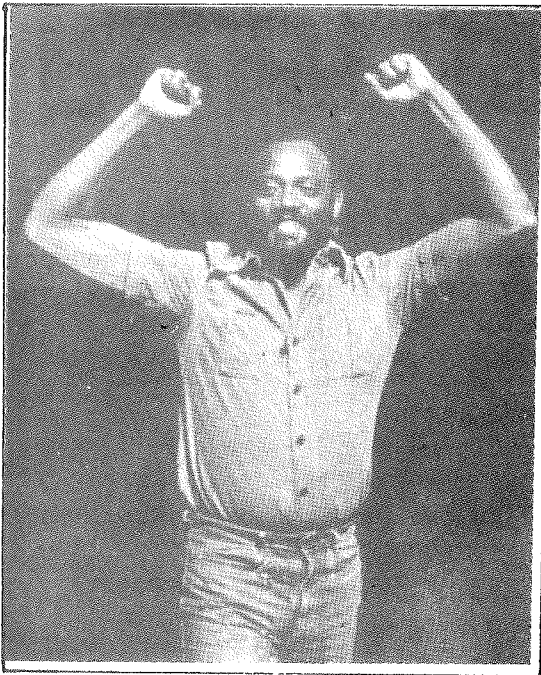


SELF DEFENCE IS NO OFFENCE



Darcus Howe, a Trinidadian residing in the Black community of London, is a well known political activist. He has travelled up and down the country assisting the struggle of Black people. He is uncompromisingly outspoken in his beliefs on the importance of the Black community organising to defend itself against the attacks from the police and other racist elements in Britain. As Editor of Race Today he has a strong voice and one to be reckoned with. Darcus played an important role during the Bonfire Trial of 1975 and was frequently in Leeds working with the Defence Committee.

His more recent work involved him as Chairman of the Carnival Development Committee, fighting for the right to hold carnival in the streets where it belonged - a difficult struggle since the violent attacks on the Carnival in 1976.

the incident

On 25th May 1976, Darcus Howe was returning to Brixton from Lords Cricket Grounds. He had just seen the West Indies beat England in a Test Match. He was, naturally, in high spirits. At Notting Hill Gate underground station he bought a ticket to Brixton. He walked through the exit barrier showing the ticket collector his ticket. The ticket collector, Mr Conlon, stuck out his arm and said, "where the fuck do you think you are going you black bastard black cunt."

This took place the week that Enoch Powell had made his inflammatory racist speech that resulted in the death of Grudip Singh Chaggar in Southall and Asian students in East London.

Darcus swept the loose change in Conlon's ticket box to the floor and pushed him. A black inspector intervened and said, "don't bother, he is not worth it." When the argument was finished and Darcus was preparing to leave, a white barrister, Paul Camp, came rushing towards him with an umbrella, and began poking him shouting, "stop, I am a barrister." Darcus' reply was, "you could be the Prime Minister of England."

Darcus and Camp, in Camp's own words, "exchanged blows." Mrs Camp called the police. On arrival, PC Mc Cullogh spoke to Camp, and the white ticket collector, Conlon. Darcus was taken to Notting Hill police station in a van, and Camp in a car, where, after being detained for several hours, Darcus was charged with Actual Bodily Harm against Camp.

As a result of a blow delivered by Camp with the umbrella, Darcus suffered a dislocated thumb and was unable to use his right hand for two weeks. Camp had no serious injury.

the trial

The trial began on 5th September, 1977, in front of Judge Clover at Knightsbridge Crown Court. The prosecution witnesses were Mrs Camp and the ticket collector, Mr Conlon. Darcus called an independent witness who had seen what took place. He defended himself. The trial lasted three days. In representing himself and in his closing speech, Darcus spoke of the inconsistencies in the prosecution's evidence. None of the witnesses' version of what had happened were the same. He spoke of the police attitude against him. He also told the all white jury that they were unfortunate in not having a black member among them who could enlighten them on the question of race in Britain. There was, he said, after Enoch Powell and National Front activities, an unwritten law "that meant that a lot of us are not going to allow anyone to abuse us without a response - it is not arrogance - I make no apologies for my actions." His defence was always one of self defence and on the offensive. It was pointed out by his defence witness, that if anything, Camp should have been charged!

In his summing up, Judge Clover told the jury that he did not feel it would assist them to have the cases for the prosecution and the defence put before them again. Rather, he would paint a picture. The picture he painted was of Darcus the Black aggressor against white 'little Mr Conlon' and respectable Mr Camp, who was only doing his duty. It took the jury precisely 15 minutes to find Darcus guilty.

The judge in sentencing Darcus told him he was an arrogant man who had lost his temper. Although he had no previous convictions Darcus was sentenced to three months imprisonment and fined £100.

Darcus Howe has a long history of fighting on behalf of the black community in Britain and for blacks internationally. Recently through Race Today, and the Carnival Development Committee he has been in the forefront of the struggle for an independent West Indian Carnival in Britain.

There is no doubt in our minds that he was committed and savagely sentenced because of who he is and what he stands for.

We in Chapeltown News Collective were shocked, alarmed and disgusted by the jury's verdict and the sentence passed by Judge Clover at the trial of Darcus Howe. We abhorred

the deplorable manner in which the Judge's summing up was reflected in the quick and precise verdict given by the jury. Darcus Howe was obviously on trial for his political beliefs rather than the alleged crime of Actual Bodily Harm.

We feel that the result of the trial can be seen as an insult to, and a direct harassment of, the Black community.

the appeal

The appeal was heard on the 14th September, at the Royal Courts of Justice. At the same time the Action committee held mass picketing outside the courts and the prison where Darcus was held. The appeal was successful and Darcus was freed immediately. The campaign to free Darcus was a triumphant victory demonstrating the power of the Black political presence in Britain.

We hail to that power. Freedom ever.
