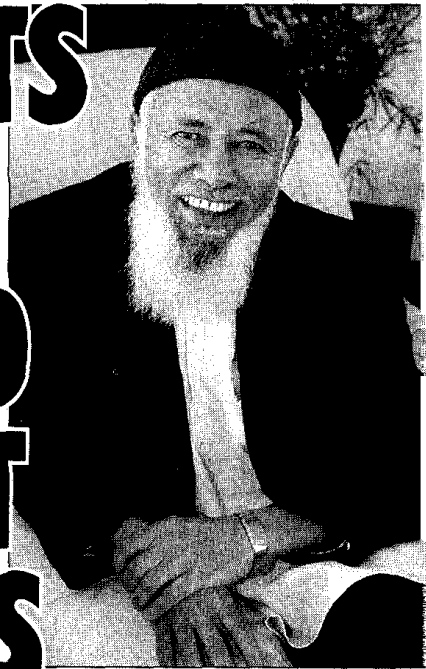


EX-PATRON CONDEMNS 'RACIST' RIGHT-WING AGENDA

EXCLUSIVE

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Investigations Editor

PEER QUILTS CHARITY LINKED TO RACE RIOT MILITANTS



NO CHOICE... Lord Adam Patel felt compelled to go

A LABOUR peer has resigned from a Midland charity amid claims that it has links with right-wing Hindu extremist groups blamed for provoking rioting in India.

And in a bitter parting shot, Lord Adam Patel accused Sewa International of aiding neo-Nazi style Hindu groups which have a "racist and anti-Muslim agenda".

His outburst came after it was reported that officials in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh had banned a charity, whose projects are part-funded by Leicester-based Sewa International.

State officials cancelled India-based Sewa Bharti's registration, saying intelligence reports showed that the charity planned to "stir racial hatred" in the city of Ayodhya.

The city has been at the centre of Hindu-Muslim clashes after Hindu militants demolished the Muslim Babari Mosque there in 1992, claiming it had been built on the site of a Hindu shrine.

Violence

Lord Patel of Blackburn said he had examined Sewa International's own reports, which suggested that it had provided funds for Sewa Bharti projects.

Sewa International was also channelling its funds to build Hindu temples in the Indian state of Gujarat, which has been blighted by fierce mob violence, mainly against its minority Muslim community, he added.

Charity Commission reports revealed that Sewa International's gross income rocketed from £748,355 in 2000 to £2,175,971 last year.

"I am satisfied that Sewa International is a front for controversial militant Hindu organisations and so I have been forced to resign my position as one of its patrons," said Lord Patel.

"I very much regret ever having been part of this racist organisation and I will be forwarding my complaints to the Charity Commission."

Sewa International chairman Shanti Bhai Mistry dismissed Lord Patel's claims as "unfounded and without any evidential basis."

He confirmed that his charity had funded Sewa Bharti projects but added: "Lord Patel's resignation will not affect us. He is entitled to his views, however warped they may be."

"Sewa International is a registered charity and we welcome any of our critics to come and see our work in India."

Lord Patel's comments bring to the fore the issue of right-wing Hindu extremism - a phenomenon which has largely been overlooked in the international War against Terrorism.

This is mainly because India's ruling party, the BJP, has traditionally been sympathetic to right-wing Hindu groups in the country, with



HQ... Sewa International in Leicester

many of its present leaders having been members themselves. Communal rioting in the Indian state of Gujarat earlier this year resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Muslims at the hands of vicious Hindu mobs urged on by militant outfits like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS).

Both groups have been blasted by human rights activists as well as by Indian Christian and lower caste groups, for their complicity in the violence that has recently marred the region.

The RSS or National Volunteers Association, whose members assassinated Mahatma Gandhi in 1947, was founded in 1925 with the twin-pronged ideology of Hindu supremacy and exclusion of other races and religions in India.

One of its early leaders praised Adolf Hitler, claiming that the Nazi notion of a pure

Aryan race was a "good lesson for us in Hindustan (India) to learn and profit".

The VHP was founded in 1964 by a group of RSS senior leaders and is widely acknowledged as having called for, and then orchestrating, the destruction of the Barbari Mosque.

Now a Sunday Mercury investigation has unravelled disturbing links between Midland "Hindu awareness" groups and their more vociferous affiliates in India.

A Charity Commission check revealed that Sewa International is registered under the name of Hindu Swayamsewak Sangh UK (HSS).

Critics claim the organisation is the UK wing of the hardline RSS after one of its senior leaders recently admitted the group had actively sought to create similar organisations worldwide.

HSS joint general secretary

Dhiraj Shah, of Birmingham, denied any formal links but admitted that it had "loose associations" with the RSS and agreed it "admired" the right-wing outfit.

He added that HSS members had also helped Sewa International to collect funds for "relief work in India".

These views were echoed by a VHP UK spokesman, who confirmed that the group was affiliated to VHP in India and that it condoned the destruction of the Barbari Mosque.

Kishor Ruparelia said: "Ideologically, we agree with certain aspects of the RSS agenda but we abhor violence of any kind. Our members have attended RSS conferences in India but only as observers."

Terrorist

Mohammed Zina, of the Council of Indian Muslims UK, has written to the Charity Commission and the Home Secretary, calling for VHP UK to be declared a terrorist organisation.

He said: "Groups like the HSS and VHP UK are funding their affiliate organisations in India and are continuing to get away with it."

"The two groups work very closely and the president of the HSS sits on the editorial board of the VHP UK."

"Together they collect vast amounts of funds from wealthy Indian businessmen in the UK and I am sure a lot of the donors don't realise the money is being sent to help terror groups like the RSS."

He also raised concerns about growing VHP influence on Hindu students in the UK.

Nishma Shah, of the National Hindu Students Forum, which also helped make collections for Sewa International, said: "We admire and respect the VHP and we are sympathetic to certain aspects of RSS ideology."

"We are all for promoting Hindu unity and awareness among Hindu youth."

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