

# Black & Blue

Racism and the Police



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## Notes on Contributors

**Stuart Hall**, Professor at the Open University, opened the conference.  
**Basil Manning** from the Scrap SUS Campaign.  
**Ian Martin** from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants.  
**G S Dhesi** from the Indian Worker's Association of Great Britain (general secretary Prem Singh).  
**Tony Bunyan**, author, active in *State Research*.  
**Stephen Sedley**, lawyer.  
**Dorothy Kuya**, worker in education.  
**Winston Pinder**, youth worker, active in the Afro Caribbean Association.  
**Nazir Ul-Haq** from the Kashmiri Workers' Association.  
**Brenda Kirsch**, member of the Lambeth Trade Council Enquiry into Police Community Relations.  
**Neelim Zabit**, active in Brixton Womens Group.  
**Vishnu Sharma** from the executive committee of the Communist Party.  
**Martin Rabstein**, CRC worker from Lewisham.  
**A Jouhl**, general secretary of the Indian Workers' Association of Great Britain.  
**Dave Cook**, national organiser of the Communist Party, introduced the Charter of Demands.

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Cover photo: Wolverhampton 1978—arrest of an anti-racist demonstrator (Andrew Waird/Report)

# Inner City Crisis



A crisis has exploded on the streets of our cities. That crisis is political. It is concerned with power.

There have been sporadic upsurges over the last 10 years: 1972 in Toxteth, 1977 and 1978 in Notting Hill Gate and, above all, 1980 in Bristol. Then there were the Easter 1981 Brixton disturbances. But in the fortnight beginning July 3, 1981, virtually every one of England's major population centres exploded.

There were major incidents in Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, Leeds, Bradford, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Huddersfield, Halifax, Knaresborough, Stoke on Trent, Southampton, Aldershot, Portsmouth, High Wycombe, Leicester, Nottingham, Fleetwood, Derby, Blackpool, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Maidstone, Cirencester and Luton.

In London, there were disturbances in Brixton, Fulham, Woolwich, Peckham, Wood Green, Stoke Newington, Tooting, Notting Hill Gate, Forest Gate, Southall, Battersea, Chelsea and Dalston.

No one disagrees there is a crisis. Even the view that some of the incidents may have been 'copycat riots' does not contradict this. Where there is disagreement is over the causes of the crisis on the streets and its solution. Within the establishment there is disagreement. Within the left there is disagreement.

Only on the streets is there relative unanimity. There the view is quite simple. Over-bearing police power—expressed through harassment, vindictiveness and unjustified use of force—has provoked rebellion. And that rebellion has been most intense where the harassment has involved racial harassment, where vindictiveness has been directed at black people in the first instance and where black people in the main have been subjected to unjustified use of force.

In other words, the stated object of attack is police power plus police racism. And these were precisely the themes at the Communist Party's January 1981 conference on Police and Racism\*, an edited transcript of which is published here.

## Police Powers

About 150 people—from many walks of life—attended the conference. Without knowing it at the time, we were looking at the whys and wherefores of what was to explode shortly afterwards on the streets.

• *The Conference was jointly chaired by RON HALVERSON, national chairman of the Communist Party, and ASQUITH GIBBES, a member of its executive committee.*



It needs to be recognised in any analysis of disturbances that the key demand of those involved—the curtailment of aspects of police power—is linked to a large number of other political, social and economic questions. The establishment has mainly been prepared to see a link to some political and social questions. The left has mainly seen a link to some economic questions.

It also needs to be recognised that the youths involved were not entering, as far as they were concerned, a new arena of struggle. Power on the streets has been a burning issue for them for a long time—that is where their experience lies. Hitherto this has consisted of isolated skirmishes—confrontations with authority in the shape of the police officer.

Many commentators have noted the rise of anti-authoritarianism among young people today. It finds clear expression in youth cultures and was a basis for the success of Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League. But that anti-authoritarianism did not emerge spontaneously. It is firmly based in concrete changes in the actual conditions of young people's lives.

One of these changes is the trend toward authoritarianism—a phrase first coined by Jack Woddis and documented by people like Tony Bunyan, one of the participants at the conference. That trend has involved major changes in police organisation with the emphasis on national co-ordination, the introduction of units such as the Special Patrol Group, the use of sophisticated technology and hardware, training for riots, training with guns and CS gas and the emergence of the Police Federation as the ever-present campaigning lobby for tougher policing policies.

The trend toward authoritarianism has also found expression in most other spheres of life. But on the streets it has been heaviest.

Within the police, two main factions exist—those that favour a crackdown and those that favour the softly-softly approach. Merseyside's police chief Kenneth Oxford is well known for his tough line while Devon and Cornwall's John Alderson is known for his advocacy and practice of community policing.

But perhaps the most significant contrast is the position of the top representatives of the two views.

In his report this year to the Home Office, the Chief Inspector of Constabulary James Crane said that after the 1980 Bristol riot it was 'clear' the police needed 'to pursue with renewed vigour the many efforts already being made to achieve a better understanding of and with the ethnic minority communities.'

Then, after rejecting arguments for riot squads, he states unequivocally that 'the need for the police service to strengthen its links with the community as a whole is accepted by all'.

He also urges the police to 'redouble their efforts to engage the sympathies of the ethnic minority communities'. He is 'pleased' that more officers are back on the beat and describes community policing schemes as 'invaluable'.

We can compare this with the views expressed by Police Federation



Brixton 1981

chairman James Jardine at the federation's 1981 annual conference. In talking about the disturbances he makes no reference whatsoever to the areas covered by Crane.

Instead the only changes he advocates are more police riot gear and training, dropping a strong hint that he advocates a new Riot Act. He decries 'the spectacle of elected politicians, community workers paid out of public funds, sociologists and instant pundits, all talking at once about a breakdown in relations between police and public.'

And he distorts the positions adopted by Crane: 'The rule of law cannot be maintained if one section can plead for a special way of policing, or for a special way of applying the law on the grounds that they happen to be specially under-privileged in our society.'

### The Left and the Police

This divergence of police views should not surprise us. The state is not a monolithic entity in Britain. The police force is a section—with a certain degree of autonomy—of the state. Struggle occurs around it. But also within it.

The left makes no significant organised intervention within the police. Current recruitment procedures tend to guarantee that, as does the independence of chief officers from local government. And, historically, the left has not taken struggles around the police very seriously—apart from threats to picketing—as Dorothy Kuya's contribution here points out.



Yet there is conflict around the police. And, inevitably, those people who are in sharpest contact with the police are in the forefront of that struggle. Anarchically—yes. Negatively—yes. Individualistically—yes. But, nonetheless, in struggle. And those people are sections of Britain's youth, especially black youth.

This, it needs to be stressed, is not of their own volition. Young black people have been put at the forefront of struggles around police power because of the racism in the police force, as in society at large.

It is no surprise that young people should find themselves in this situation. Being single, living with parents, growing too big for the house, denied work or adequate education and training, lacking proper local leisure and recreation facilities—all these factors must mean that young people will spend more time on the streets.

An emerging phenomenon within this is the support that black parents are beginning to demonstrate for their children. Basil Manning's contribution describes how black parents in Lewisham started the campaign against Sus because they saw their children as victims. This campaign is one of the few times in living memory that a mass campaign has succeeded in changing the criminal law in favour of civil liberties (although as Basil makes clear we should also look closely at what is planned to replace Sus).

Alongside the black parents' groups there are usually to be found other community groups and self-help organisations. All these forms of organisation—along with more 'official' bodies sometimes—are actively tackling the nitty-gritty problems of arguing for and seeking a more accountable police force.

But often these groups are out of contact with the organised left. And the organised left is out of contact with them, as it is with most youth. Hence the problem for the left is how it can put forward the legitimate demands of young people and seek to be involved with them in non-anarchic, non-individualistic, positive forms of mass action.

Unfortunately, the problem for the left is not just how to do this but also sometimes the more elementary problem of recognising that it needs to be done. Thus, after the July disturbances many were slow to recognise the demands youth were making.

The left insisted on changes in economic policy or the defeat of the Tories as the only solution to the crisis on the streets, failing adequately to take on board the demands for an end to the abuse of power by the police and an end to racism in the police. Communists and Young Communists have also sometimes failed in this respect.

At the same time, the Charter of Demands presented by the Communist Party at the conference was a big step forward and was timely in the extreme. Then there are such developments as the TUC's policy statement on Regenerating our Inner Cities issued in July and the May local election manifestos from the Labour Party. Here we find important proposals for democratisation of the police.

The mass fight for the implementation of all these policy statements is crucial not only to the development of the broad democratic alliance, but also, as a part of the alliance, to the forging of links with young people

who are out of touch with the mass organisations of the left for 'simple' reasons like unemployment or because the left seems remote and unattractive.

Mass campaigns have, in practice, tended to exclude young people almost as much as does the establishment and its organisations—if not more so.

To overcome this, the left needs to work directly with young people. The TUC's plans for centres for the unemployed could, if carried out in the most democratic way possible, help to tackle this. But there is also a need for direct contact between community groups, political groups and parties and trade unions and the places where many young people are to be found—youth clubs for instance. Concrete forms of help to and support for young black and white people in such clubs now need to be on the left's agenda.

### Democracy and the Law

In the wake of the disturbances, we can seize the time. The law and order brigade are well and truly exposed. Their policies have demonstrably failed. With governments granting their main demands for a decade and more, we have seen the biggest outbreaks of civil disturbances for generations. The policies of the law and order lobby have neither prevented the disturbances nor cured them—they have merely aggravated the situation.



London 1981



The Communist Party is committed to the maintenance and strengthening of all forms of democratic and popular struggle. Such struggle is concerned not only with the rights of political expression, but also with the rights of the 'non-political' individual—the right to be free of harassment, the right to walk without fear in the streets and so on. Those rights lie within the province of daily police work.

Hence our objective must be to make the police the real servants of the community and that includes the black community. Such work is a major part of the process of assuring a socialist and democratic transformation of society.

The Police and Racism conference was an important step by the Communist Party because it helped put these questions on the agenda. The Charter of Demands, which is also published here, proposes concrete demands that we can fight for.

But the conference was also a significant development in terms of a style of work. It was a consultation conference. Communists, in other words, wanted to listen to what others had to say. They were admitting they did not have all the answers. They were demonstrating their commitment to learn from others not through chats in smoke-filled back rooms but through public debate.

And the debate was not merely an abstract discussion. It was linked by the charter to the process of democratic policy formulation. Through bringing together different strands of thinking among black and white on the left, the Communist Party was performing its key role of welding together some of the forces that will go toward the construction of the broad democratic alliance, and helping get greater understanding of and involvement in the questions raised in this pamphlet, by the powerful organisations of the Labour Movement.

## **Dave Cook and Martin Rabstein (Editors)**

**October 1981**



# **Policing the Police**

**Stuart Hall**

There is sometimes a temptation to assume that if only one could bring to a halt the formal and informal practices of racism in the police, in some way the causes of racism itself would thereby be dealt with. But, in my view, if the police were to undertake a real pledge to abandon and abolish every taint of racism in their practice, the problem of British racism would still be the same.

Nevertheless there is a specific and dramatic problem of how to oppose police racism. That is the sharp end of racism. It is where blacks and others encounter a drift and a thrust towards making the whole of society more policed.

I want to say a few words about what seems to me the general context within which that has arisen. First, there is a very general pressure to expand the place and the role of policing. In industrial relations, in the surveillance and information keeping on radical and black groups, in the exercise of the immigration laws, in a whole number of ways there has been a push in society over the last 15 years towards the enforcement of stricter police practices.

Second, the black communities have become the targets of intensified policing. They have become stigmatised as areas of endemic crime and political unrest, of an alienated and increasingly foreign sector of the population, which need a substantial blanket police presence.

This stems from the political polarisation of the past 15 years and the 'criminalisation' of the black community.

There has been a large scale national thrust to draw policing, the law and the courts directly into the control of political and industrial problems. This has increased the ability of the police to bear directly on local communities, and to be formally more racist.

The issue of law and order generally, and specifically in relation to the way black people have to struggle for existence, has been made one of the most contentious and explosive questions today.

In my view, the left is unprepared in dealing with the political context of 'law and order'. Traditionally law and order is either seen as an issue which relates to civil liberties (which are separated out from hard politics) or as an issue which 'people of good will' who are not themselves involved in criminal activities, can take out of politics.

One of the first tasks therefore has to be a shift of attitude within the left organisations—not black organisations, because they already know. The issue of law and order has to be politicised. Unless that happens, the left will turn a blind eye when the state draws on authoritarian and police



backed solutions to political and industrial questions.

How has the thrust towards a more policed society affected the black communities? Here, I think, we can speak without exaggeration of the increasing criminalisation of the black community in several senses. First, as a consequence of black people's place in economic and social structures, increasing numbers of young blacks are driven to petty crime as a mode of survival.

### **If You're Black . . .**

The second, and much more widespread way in which the black population has been criminalised, is that it has been stereotyped as criminal by nature. Thus in the press, in public discussion, and especially in policy making behind the scenes, it is assumed as a matter of commonsense, that black communities require more and tougher policing than other sectors of the community.

As a consequence, the police forces themselves have increasingly operated with that stereotype, especially in their relations with young black people that walk along the public highway. Black clubs have also been subject to persistent harassment over long periods of time.

It took a demolition job to discover that behind the Bristol incident in April 1980 lay long and persistent harassment by the police of one of the few places left where blacks felt free to go. Police entry into the last bastion of Bristol's black community sparked off the so called Bristol riots.

The immigration issue is used to supply the police with the discretion to go into houses and ask questions. There are places in Britain where most adult blacks, especially Asians, will now carry a passport in order to provide ready identification on the street.

It is sometimes said that since Britain is very largely racist you have to expect the police force to be racist too. I suppose it follows that since very large numbers of people in Britain commit crimes, you should expect a very substantial proportion of the police force to commit crimes too.

If you were able to produce evidence to senior policemen of the extent of crime within the police force, they would feel obliged to do something about it. But when you say that it is an offence that a policeman in a car driving along a street, coming alongside a black lad, feels able to abuse him verbally, the police do not feel, apparently, any pressure to do anything about it.

I believe it would be possible, if not for the black communities, then for the police's own disciplinary procedures, to make it unacceptable for verbal racist abuse to persist. But anybody who knows how the police behave on the street knows that it is customary for blacks to be discussed in the most abusive terms.

When they take blacks into the station, do they even begin to respect the rights of suspects? Is physical intimidation avoided? In practice, there is a suspension of the so called Judges' Rules.

You will know of countless stories of young people taken in whose parents do not even know where they are for 24 or 48 hours; people taken in who do not know what it is they may be charged with; of people who are

told they may be charged with one thing, and are eventually charged with something else, partly because, having been physically or verbally abused, they respond. If they weren't guilty when they came, they're guilty by the time they leave. If you hassle a community it will react, and then you can charge it with reacting.

It is in these everyday ways that the old style, liberal defences against abuse of state power over individuals have been progressively eroded. The police feel they are able to get away with it behind close doors because, in general, there is now a very strong official view that society has been allowed to go lax, and that Britain has to recover morally as well as economically. Indeed, these two aspects are very closely linked together. One main instrument of moral discipline is the police.

The Thatcher government has given this enormous thrust, although it's something which was quite deeply enshrined in the policies of the Labour government. But it is also a thrust which has come from the police themselves. There is a very long history in this country of popular suspicion about the police. It took nearly a hundred years to set up an organised, paid police force. Yet now the assumption is: 'Well, of course, crime is a matter which belongs in the police domain. They have to fight it'.

One of the most dangerous things we have seen in the last 10 years is the ending of the requirement that the police, though they apply the law, don't get into the business of shaping it. Increasingly the police are the best organised and the most effective campaigning lobby for the expansion of police powers.

They have become the required spokespeople you listen to on TV or radio on questions of police power. Law and order is not debated any longer unless you call on Jim Jardine of the police federation.

On every issue where the question of democratic control over the nature of policing is concerned, the line has been redrawn continuously in favour of the police. The police themselves have set the agenda. The Royal Commission on Criminal Procedures report yielded in significant ways to pressure for an expansion of police powers. In one or two instances, it extended the protection to suspects, but the ground ceded to the law and order lobby is much more extensive than the safeguards recommended. That is not to say that we may not find ourselves using what safeguards exist. That is a fact of life.

I want finally to say something about what might we begin to do about this situation. It is unlikely that we will have immediate successes. As a consequence of a persistent and long standing campaign, formally, the Sus law is to go. Although most of what the police were able to do under the Sus law they will now be able to do legally once again through the criminal attempts law, we are not so overwhelmed by success as to be able to ignore that victory.

### **Policing and Politics**

We've had other important victories, not of the formal kind, but still most significant. For example, the Anti-Nazi-League. We were within an ace of the National Front and its allies making really deep penetration



into and gaining support among white youth. Although we may not have stemmed the tide for ever, the intervention of the Anti-Nazi League, generating public support for an anti racist stand in the streets, was of crucial importance.

It is unlikely that any one strategy on its own will suffice.

First is the question of what formal and legal guarantees we can get—even though they are minimal—for populations and individuals exposed to the endemic racism of the police.

Second, one ought to seize every opportunity to take the question of policing out of its non political framework: this has to go on not only in the communities, but also crucially, in organisations of the left, and especially in the labour movements.

The question of policing is a matter of politics, and it is vitally urgent that the labour movement takes back these politics of law and order, the state and police into its heart. One has to shift the public attitude which accepts the credibility of the police against the credibility of blacks and black organisations.

Third, if any area of society needs democratic accountability, it is the police. For example, to whom is a Chief Constable responsible? What exactly local authority powers are over their forces is very murky territory indeed. These questions are increasingly important, and it is our business to make them an issue.

The problems of police and black communities no longer concern black communities alone. We want to say to the labour movement: if you allow the police the kind of latitude which you have permitted in the black areas, they will come into your own parish too, using the same tactics of surveillance, intimidation and control. The black community has simply been at the forefront of what a policed society means.

There is a widening gap between what is formally supposed to go on and what in practice happens on the streets. It is in that gap the liberties and rights of black people have been constantly eroded. So, even if we win more effective safeguards in the law, unless we can make them effective in the street, we might as well not try to win them, and that means the community must understand the question of policing.

Local organisations of whatever kind need to be capable of mobilising support and of checking police powers. Unless you can effectively get into the police station and bring to blacks and others who are exposed to intimidation, the kind of legal and social support which they require, there is no point in having a better or worse code of police practice. A code of practice is only effective when people enforce it.

# Immigration and the Law

## Ian Martin

The theme of our evidence to the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedures was that immigration control should be decriminalised, because it has become one of the ways in which the black community has been criminalised.

Just as young blacks are projected as potential 'muggers', so every Asian is projected as a potential 'illegal immigrant', though there is also a grudging acknowledgement that the Asian community is law-abiding in order to emphasise the criminalisation of the West Indian community.

We sometimes meet the argument that since immigration is a matter of the past, we are not really interested in it any more. We are concerned about the situation the black community faces here. But the point is that immigration control is not just a way of keeping people out. It is also becoming a very powerful way of harassing the community that is here and attempting to undermine the legitimacy of its right to be here.

I want to mention four areas of police involvement in immigration control, and, indeed, in nationality.

First, there are the massive workplace raids. Scotland Yard has its own Illegal Immigration Intelligence Unit, and the Home Office Immigration Service has its own Intelligence Unit at Harmondsworth Detention Centre, near Heathrow Airport.

Those two units work closely with each other. The raids that received a great deal of publicity last year were planned and organised by the Immigration Service in co-ordination with the police. There was a strong political reaction, and Home Secretary William Whitelaw promised to review procedures. His eventual statement offers absolutely nothing, indeed it makes clear that such raids will continue.

Second, overstaying (or illegal entry) is a criminal offence: a police officer has the power to arrest without warrant anyone he has reasonable cause to suspect of the offence.

Thus police officers can question people about their immigration status, even though police handbooks state that questions on immigration status should **not** be asked during interviews or unrelated matters. The only way that we will stop the police questioning the legitimacy of people's presence is to decriminalise immigration control.

Third, the police carry out interviews for the Home Office. These concern, say, the accommodation available for dependants whose entry is being considered, or whether a marriage is genuine.

Fourth, Special Branch interviews people who have applied for citizenship by naturalisation. Special Branch's report is the basis of the Home Secretary's decision. If the Nationality Bill goes through, far more people will become subject to that kind of interview, because the Bill removes the absolute right of many black people to become British citizens.



# Scrap SUS

Basil Manning

The Scrap Sus Campaign started from the initiative of a group of black parents, particularly women in Deptford, where they and their children had experienced the sharp end of police racism. It was initiated to raise the issue of racism in the police force and to bring that whole issue, through campaigning, onto the agenda in this country. I think it has helped in all our efforts to do this.

In response the state, and particularly the Home Office and some senior police, said there was no problem: 'Sus is not a problem. The problem is some agitators within the black community who are trying to stir up the black community.'

The moral of the campaign has been that the black community itself will mobilise around the issue of racism as it experiences it. Racism permeates the whole of society. It is understandable therefore that the state and its representatives will intervene to protect the racism in the society and to blame outside agitators.

Now the Criminal Attempts Bill has received its second reading in Parliament. All of a sudden William Whitelaw had become a champion of the scrapping of Sus. That in itself was a rather stupid thing for Mr. Whitelaw to do, because it alerted many of us to take a closer look at this law. The press has concentrated on Clause 9 of the Bill, which deals with 'car Sus'.

Very little has been said, except in the **Morning Star**, on Clause 1 of the Bill, which gives the police powers they don't have in the 1824 Vagrancy Act, to arrest people on Sus. So the campaign against Sus is not at an end.

In a sense it will never be at an end, because Sus is not section 4 of the 1824 Vagrancy Act. Nor is it Clause 1 or Clause 9 of the new Criminal Attempts Law. It isn't just the immigration laws and procedures or the Nationality Bill. Sus is a name for racism within this society. By virtue of being black you are suspect in this society.

There is not a single arena in this society that matters to the lives of black people where racism is not experienced: racism has permeated the whole, and that includes the consciousness and organisations of the left.

We must not forget that, so that when we talk about alliances as a means through which black and white people can unite against a common oppression, then we have to take on board the reality of racism in the whole of society. We must start with the racism within the left.

Racism is prejudice plus power, and it is here that our prejudice combines with power to perpetuate and also to collude with racism. We will not be able to attack it in the police force if we are not able to attack it in our own practices, institutions and decisions.

# Long Arm of the State

G S Dhesi

The police are there to prevent crime, the police are there to control crime. But above all, the role of the police is to contain revolutionaries, to contain the revolution, to disrupt the movement of the working class.

This has been very effective so far as the black community is concerned. In police eyes today every black person is a criminal until proven innocent. We are all criminals until we prove that we have a legal right to be here. The state resists us becoming citizens of this country. This is done just to find scapegoats.

They are telling the white working class: 'You need not worry. Our problem is to contain these people, so you shouldn't struggle. We are fighting your cause'. This is the main thing we can get from this conference.

To give you just an idea how the police look at this problem, I was at a meeting where a police officer said: 'If you want to know the problem of my area, there are 54,000 black faces in his area, and that is the size of my problem'.

I told him: 'No, brother, you are wrong. Your problem is much more than that. Multiply that number by 30, because that will be the white population who are racist in this area. The problem is in their heart, not in the heart of the 54,000 people. That is your problem. But you don't consider that the problem. You are playing their game'.

The police are on the racist side. They are against us because they want to contain the struggle of the labour movement for socialism.



Lewisham 1977

Andrew Waird/Report



# Authoritarianism

Tony Bunyan

The Institute of Race Relations submitted evidence to the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure in a pamphlet *Police Power and Black People*. It was totally ignored. We were told that it was too big a question to be included. But one of our conclusions was that the experience of the black community showed that any extension of police powers would not protect society against the offender: it would put everybody at risk.

Our evidence was seen as something separate. This perception of the experience of the black community as something separate shows that what has to be combatted is not just the police, or the institutionalisation of racism, but widely-held attitudes.

Our evidence also said that what was happening to the black community was a precursor of what would happen to everybody unless increased police powers were opposed. The powers that the police were asking for were already being used against black people.

Moreover, if you give them the powers that they are demanding, then their practice will move in advance of that because there is no concept of accountability in the Royal Commission philosophy. Who watches the police who are meant to protect the whole community? There's no answer to that.

In 1972 the Institute of Race Relations gave evidence to the Select Committee on Race Relations, saying that the police themselves make the law by their practice, which was determining a racist society. But with the growing of a popular morality that talks of: 'the alien wedge'; the 'strangers'; the 'cultures that we cannot understand'; the 'natural street culture of West Indian youth', the police no longer just reflect or enforce this morality, they recreate it.

A recent book on mugging, by Michael Pratt, who works at Scotland Yard, looks at 3,771 cases of mugging in London. Over the period he covers the number of reported violent attacks on black people (which is liable to be a massive underestimate because of the lack of faith in the police) was 3,429. Now, if that is a problem, where are the special squads, the video-cameras, the show trials to tackle it?

What is happening to the police's role in society? In my view the old 'consent' model of policing is out of the window. What we have now are 'high crime areas' (a police term) and 'containment'. How has this come about?

When the black community first became a 'problem', the concept of community relations was created in and around both them and working

class white people. Suddenly black people weren't part of the community as a whole, they were a 'special problem'.

A special branch within the police force, with liaison committees, liaison officers, was created.

That period, in my view, has now passed. Police demands to the Royal Commission for increased powers of detention, to search, set up road blocks and so, is the recognition that policing by consent is not working. In particular, it is not going to work during a recession and high unemployment.

# Capitalism and Crime

Stephen Sedley

During the inquest on Blair Peach, the tapes of police messages were played over a public address system to the court. The eagled-eared press missed a very interesting passage, nothing drastic, in which the police inspector in charge of the cordon outside the Town Hall at Southall sent a message to Control. It went: 'Got a couple of spades here and they want to get into the National Front meeting'.

The interesting thing about it was that it was so unconsidered. So completely casual. The National Front is referred to respectfully by its full title. And the word 'spades' is used as the ordinary police parlance for black people. It passed completely without remark, apparently, even by the police, who you would expect to have been embarrassed about it.

Stuart Hall mentioned that nowadays a great many young blacks are driven by economic hardship to petty crime. One has to be very careful about this. As a proposition it is true, but it's also necessary to recognise that petty crime is one of the most divisive things within the working class movement. It is an offence now, and will be an offence in a socialist society.

I resist very strongly any argument that, because crime arises out of hardship, therefore the defence of the right to commit crime becomes a part of the defence of those suffering hardship. It doesn't. One hears such arguments, for example, in support of the Red Brigade and anarchists generally.

The racism of the police force is not something that arises within the police. It's the most intensive expression of something which





John Sturrock/Network

Brixton 1981

unfortunately is endemic in the working class: white racism.

This racism tends to get selected in the recruitment of the police force, the recruitment of the most authoritarian and petty-minded elements of the working class into a job within a uniform, a truncheon and people to push around.

It is right that no one here suggests the recruitment of more black policemen as an answer to police racism. It's the traditional social democrats response. It's good to see that there hasn't been a rush of blacks to get recruited into the police force.

An end to police racism isn't going to be achieved short of the achievement of socialism, but it is very naive to argue that we can't start cracking this problem until we've got a socialist society.

With that sort of argument, we shall never get a socialist society, because one of the major problems any 'transitional government' is going to have to face is the fact that, unless we manage to change things now, it will have a solid, pro racist force capable of obstructing almost anything that a transitional government or even a left Labour government tries to bring in.

And that really highlights the urgency, for any future hopes of a just society, of making every inroad possible into the general powers of the police to push people around, including the specific problem of pushing black people around as the scapegoat.

# 100 years of Abuse

Dorothy Kuya

I come from a very old black community, established for well over 100 years in Liverpool. It's had 100 years of abuse and beating up from the police in Liverpool.

We have black families whose grandfathers and great grandfathers were beaten up by police. We have black families that have been criminalised continually generation after generation by the police. The first black person to die in a race riot was Charles Whitcombe in 1917, when he was thrown into the river by a crowd of people, while the police stood by and watched.

I'll give you an example of one operation which I know a great deal about, because I was a community relations officer for a while in Liverpool.

One night, a young black man was standing at a corner waiting for a friend. It was a summer's night, about 9.30. He knew the friend was coming from the youth club. He was set upon by a couple of white boys, and the incident was watched by a black woman who immediately rushed out to help him when he was knocked unconscious.

With another woman, she carried him into her house and rang for the police. They came round, but took very little notice of what she said, although she knew who the boys were, and she knew their names. They came from a family known for harassing black people. Anyway, the police took very little notice, were abusive to her and went out of the house.

When they came outside, the youth club up the road was closing. It was 100 per cent black youth, and these young people were walking along the road. The radio message that went out from the police was: 'My God, all hell's broken loose.'

All hell did break loose, because those police had seen those groups of black youths as a retaliatory force. And they called in the whole of the Merseyside police force to deal with them. Fifty people—young and old—were arrested that night.

Police smashed front doors and arrested whole families when the kids were trying to escape from something that they knew nothing about. All they saw were police coming in from all over the place, with batons, in coaches, in buses and in cars. One whole family was arrested because they were accused of setting their dog on the police officers who smashed down their front door.

That was only one of the hundreds of incidents. The anger and frustration of people there knows no bounds.

They are now getting rid of the Sus law, but Liverpool has had its own



local Sus law for about 100 years. My father was from Nigeria and he was often subject to that. Many a time he came off his shift in the middle of the night and was stopped by the police walking home from the docks, and searched and taken in. He was a very quiet and gentle old man.

### **Bitter Experience**

The most bitter part of this experience for those of us who have been part of the labour movement for a long time, has been the lack of response from the labour movement of our feelings and our experience.

In 1974 we persuaded the trades council to make anti racism the slogan for the May Day demonstration. The black community took part and made their own banners and posters. But lots of trade unionists objected to banners that said, for example: 'The Police are Pigs'. They didn't want them in their nice demonstration. That was very typical, and a very sad response.

I live in North Kensington now, and Carnival becomes a 'threat' not just because black people take over the streets, but because they are organising themselves. And that form of organisation is a major threat to British institutions. We are told: 'We don't have things like that in Britain.'

Yet last October I went to Stratford-on-Avon, Shakespeare's birthplace, a very English town. I went on a Friday for a weekend and most of the shops in the town were closed up and barricaded, a bit like they are in Notting Hill around carnival time. I went into one or two shops that were open and said: 'What's going on?'

'Oh, it's the bloody mop fair, we've had it for 300 years, and we get all this crowd coming in.' This fair takes over the whole of the town because, by tradition, they have the right to take over those streets.

You don't see it headlined in the press as a major problem, because all those white people are moving in and taking over. We've always had these events, but when black people decide to have one, whether it's on the streets or indoors, it becomes a threat.

What's the reaction when black comrades get together on their own to have a meeting? Some white comrades take strong objection to it. They want to be in there, maybe dictating to black people how they should play the game. They assume that blacks can't do anything, can't control anything, can't organise themselves.

In Liverpool the local authority only woke up over the police after the Jimmy Kelly incident. They ignored the blacks' protest for years. But as soon as a white man was killed they suddenly woke up and found they should do something about it. Then the Labour councillors found they had no control.

Can we regain control? What we want as a controlling body is a mixture of the local authority and key communities in that area that are effected by the police presence on a day to day basis.

## **A Special Brand**

### **Winston Pinder**

First I want to put the issues into an international context. We spoke today about the police as though they're carpenters and engineers, as though they are ordinary people in society.

The police are a special brand of people. We understand that in the Caribbean, and I'm sure that my African friends understand that.

Let me give some instances. In the 1939 race riots in the Caribbean, in another uprising there in 1965, in the so-called Mau-Mau events in the 1950s, the police were there to quell them. That's how we see the police.

In 1955 we have Councillor Cochrane lying dead in the street in Notting Hill Gate. That was a declaration of war between the black communities and the police. To this day, his murderer has not been brought to justice.

We, in the black communities, are under no illusions about the role of the police. The police are an arm of the state.

## **BRIXTON**

### **Brenda Kirsch**

Brixton, in the centre of Lambeth borough of London, is the best known of those areas which the police have designated as high crime areas. The community in Brixton has suffered both from that police designation, and from the media's similar one.

There has been a systematic use of Sus against young black people over the last two years. We have had a number of occupations by the Special Patrol Group.

One of the high points was the 1978 SPG raid with a siege in Railton Road—right in the heart of Brixton—where they set up road blocks and stopped people walking through. There were even vehicles there from the anti-terrorist squad.

The SPG would arrest masses of black kids coming out of school. It also affected the 'white' left. They were being picked up by the SPG on their way home from meetings and being asked to disclose the contents of the briefcases. So that produced a high degree of tension all round.

The events which sparked off the setting up of the working party into the police-community relations in Lambeth involved an incident where a





John Sturrock/Network

Brixton 1981

police officer was attacked in a pub in Clapham.

It was said that the person who did this was a black man wearing a sheepskin coat. The next morning, the police went into the offices of the Community Relations Council in Lambeth, because they knew that one of the community relations officers (CROs) was a black man who had a sheepskin coat.

They then proceeded to take him down to the station to help with their inquiries. But two other black CROs also pointed out that they had sheepskin coats. So all three were taken down to the police station and held there for a number of hours.

Now, that seemed absolutely ludicrous, but it indicates the extent of the non-relationship that the police still have with the community in Lambeth. It made a complete nonsense of the liaison committee that was set up between the community Relations Council and the police. The result of the incident is that the CRC withdrew from the committee.

But that incident infuriated councillors on Lambeth Council who agreed to set up a working party to look into the situation. I was a member of that from the Lambeth Trades Council.

It was quite an experience. We sat for 18 months; we got submissions from 264 individuals and organisations. We had only 34 of those submissions favourable to the police, invariably from white, middle class people, usually head teachers who don't live in the borough. There was case after case of harassment, and examples of systematic racism by the police.

The first chapter of the report was entitled, Army of Occupation, because there is a definite feeling that the police have occupied parts of the borough like a foreign army.

## Racist Attacks

Nazir Ul-Haq

There is a constant denial by high-ranking police officers of the racist nature of racist incidents. Whether it is an attack on the black community, a false arrest of a black youth, an attack on places of worship, what we are seeing now is that black people are not safe even in the places of the worship.

A few weeks back, there was a mass attack on Luton Mosque. Racist thugs attacked that mosque, and when it was reported to the police, the police said, well, they were football hooligans.

These things happen in Birmingham where I live, they happen all over the country, and when it is reported to the police, they say, well, they are just young hooligans.

## Trade Unions

Neelim Zabit

As a member of a black women's group, we called a special meeting last week to draw up letters to the parents of the youngsters who died in the fire in New Cross. We came across a journal of the Grass Roots organisation called The Black Voice, dated January 1971. On January 3rd 1971, there was a fire bomb attack on a house in Forest Hill, near New Cross, in which youngsters were maimed for life.

What are we, the black community, going to do about racism in the police force? What are the white working class movements going to do? The trade union movement? What are the organisations represented here going to do about that particular problem? What kind of common basis can we come together to work out on that issue? And finally, what is going to be the response of the white left and progressive and democratic organisations when the black community turns round and says that we're going to organise certain protection for our own communities.

Have we worked out a response, for example, if the community says we want to set up vigilante groups, or we want to set up self-defence groups?

Because, let's not kid ourselves, that is going to be a response that's going to come up very shortly. We have to address ourselves to the fact that since 1954 there have been documented cases of racist attacks on black people, and yet we are still talking about the same kind of



responses. We're still talking about coming together and organising meetings with genuine representatives.

I don't doubt the validity of those kind of meetings, but I'm saying that we should look at the fact that the white left isn't hassling the trade union and labour movements when the police aren't doing something about racist attacks.

They need to set up local inquiries to look into those incidents. Let's not kid ourselves again, it is an unpopular demand in the trade union movement at the moment. But it's something that is going to have to be taken up.

And we should look at other ways. Perhaps a local authority could turn round to the police and say: 'We're going to stop our money to you from the rates if you aren't going actually to do something about the fact that there have been so many racist attacks in the last year, and you've not done anything about it. Are you going to set up special units to look into the question of racist attacks?'

## **SOUTHALL**

### **Vishnu Sharma**

In relation to the April 23 1979 anti-National Front demonstration in Southall, we should mention the arms which the police used. There was a list of these weapons at the Blair Peach inquest, unauthorised weapons, which were found in police lockers.

This list was read out at the inquest, but there was no consideration of this, although it is a very serious matter. Then there was the cordoning off of Southall around the Town Hall, for about six hours. That is another thing which we should learn from, concerning the strategy the police adopt on such occasions.

In Southall, the community felt we should sit in the streets and block the roads and streets which lead to Southall Town Hall, absolutely peacefully. These peaceful means were what the police did not want.

In Southall now, the police have changed tactics altogether. They are organising marvellous wine and cheese parties in the police station. Certain people are proud to go and shake hands with the commander and have a nice talk about the community and community relations.

So another lesson is that the police-community liaison committees, at least in Southall, will not, and does not, produce a damn.

You can talk there, you can present your cases to the police, but without any result. So Ealing Community Relations Council has now decided to disband its liaison committee, and it is being punished by the Ealing Council by cutting its £32,000 grant. The Tory councillors are clearly saying: 'You are anti-police and you are anti-Tory, so we won't give you the grant.'

## **LEWISHAM**

### **Martin Rabstein**

We should not lose sight of the fact that the principal experiences of people are 'small' everyday matters that disrupt their lives seriously, but which rarely come to light.

For example, a young black man was walking along the street the other day, talking with a friend. A policeman nearby overheard him use the word 'fuck'. The PC stopped him and said he was using abusive language. He demanded the young man's age, name and address.

He got this and radioed it back to his station to see if he was wanted. He wasn't. The police officer asserted that it was a false name and address and demanded to search his pockets. The young man was getting very annoyed.

He was pushed up against the wall and searched by the PC and his colleague. They found nothing, but decided to arrest him and took him down to the station. He protested. He was charged with using abusive language and with assault.

It's a classic case of police harassment which will be dealt with by a magistrate in a couple of minutes, but which will give the young man a record, deny certain jobs to him in the future, and reinforce the mistrust and resentment of the police by all his friends and acquaintances.

It is the problem of developing the forms of action appropriate to tackling this kind of issue that seems to me to be crucial to making 'politics' relevant to the direct experiences of ordinary people.

### **Maxwell Confait**

Maxwell Confait was found strangled to death in his Catford home in April 1972. Three minors who were in the vicinity at the time were arrested, and 'confessions' were obtained in ways that contravene Judges' Rules and the Home Office Administrative Directions.

Local MP Chris Price took up their case so that, in the end, the boys were freed. Sir Henry Fisher led an official inquiry which came forward with recommendations as to how to avoid future similar miscarriages of justice.

These recommendations included giving a statutory basis to Judges' Rules and the Administrative Directions, changing them in certain respects and introducing tape recordings of police questioning of suspects. The Fisher Report was published in 1977. Its recommendations have been ignored by government.

The miscarriage of justice was started as a result of obtaining confessions wrongfully. This could have been prevented either by rigorous enforcement of procedures and/or by the suspects having access





Mike Abrahams/Network

Lewisham 1977

to legal advice.

Such advice is now in principle available to anyone arrested in Lewisham through the community relations council's Civil Rights Adviser scheme, established two years after the Confait murder.

#### **Lewisham 19 Case**

Police surveillance of two separate bus stops in central Lewisham and in New Cross was initiated in April 1977. Still cameras and video-cameras were used. The video cameraman followed the movements of just one type of person: young, male and black (overwhelmingly). Names and addresses of 96 people were obtained from the filming by identifying faces.

In May, 60 homes were simultaneously raided all over South-East London, and 24 young black men arrested. Ultimately, 19 of them were charged with common law conspiracy to steal, but no theft charges were laid.

All the defendants were found guilty when they were tried in three groups. Sentences of up to three years were imposed. The case raised issues of stereotyping of black people, misuse of conspiracy law and the use of black communities as guinea pigs for new police technology.

#### **Civil Rights Adviser**

Britain's longest-running scheme for assistance on arrest covers this borough. It started life in 1973, following press reports of police brutality and a council call for a Home Office inquiry.

Under it, a team of a dozen local people nominated by LCCR (to be called civil rights advisers) made themselves available to be called out to any police station in the borough, should an arrested person seek advice.

Over the years, the scheme was strengthened somewhat so that now police agreement exists that all arrested persons receive a copy of a CRC leaflet explaining the scheme and what they can get out of it, and that all charge rooms have a large CRC poster along the same lines pinned up in it.

Debate exists over the usefulness of such schemes. Some say that such schemes can be misused by the police to justify otherwise unacceptable actions on their part.

On the other hand, there is the point made by some sectors within the police that the existence of the scheme involves implicit recognition that all is not well in relations between the police and the community which that police force is said to serve.

#### **Council-police-liaison committee**

During the same period that the Civil Rights Adviser scheme was established, the borough council was also expressing concern about the local police and their relations with black people. This led to an agreement that a joint committee of local senior police officers and borough councillors (with proportional representation of the majority and minority parties) be set up.

The terms of reference were to discuss areas of concern, not specific cases in hand. It was the first such committee in London.

Some areas of co-operation have emerged, (eg the police have supported the establishment of a youth unemployment project as a result of their links to the councillors—as well as to the CRC).

There has also been conflict. For example, in April 1980, the National Front declared its intention to march through the borough. The council sought to ban the march. It put pressure on the local police. But Scotland Yard insisted that the march went ahead.

This issue, along with still continuing concern at police-black relations by councillors, led to a council motion threatening in the absence of changes to cut off the police precept from the rates.

This threat has coincided with a higher level of effort by the local police in listening to local feelings on a range of issues.



# Self Defence

## A Jouhl

In the present era the capitalist system is going through deep crises and the exploited workers are trying to rise up against acute oppression. As in the past at these critical times, the state uses its running dogs, the NF, BM, etc.

It passes racist legislation to incite racial hatred against black people. The purpose of this is to divide the working class and weaken them in their opposition to the ruling class. The police are used as an instrument of power to implement racist policies. They protect racist thugs and at the same time launch ruthless oppression against anti racist, anti fascist forces and the black community.

The police attack at Southall on April 23 1979, alone is sufficient example to justify IAW(GB) opinion that the police are not the servant of the community, but one of the chief instruments of power. We must not have any illusions.

The police create division among the black community. They labelled West Indians in general, and youth in particular, as 'baddies', and Asians as 'goodies', until Southall.

The problem of the relationship between the blacks and the police is just not one of racial prejudice on the part of the police. It is the problem of racism as a product of capitalism. It is the police who create the problem with blacks, just as the problem of racism has been created by the white ruling classes.

The IWA(GB) categorically states that there are not two sides to this problem. For example, the Stirling Road, Birmingham incident saw 100 police arrest one black youth, The police do not take a party of 100 to arrest a white youth if there is a brawl at a pub.

### Self Defence

Let me now discuss the outline Charter of Demands. It talks of change in 'certain respects'. If we start listing the 'certain respects' the list will become so long that it will cover virtually all aspects of life of black people.

Our point of view is that the treatment of black and white workers is qualitatively and quantitatively different. Under the immigration laws, all blacks, even those born in the UK, are suspected of being illegal immigrants. A black driver stopped for a driving offence is always likely to be asked if he or she is an illegal immigrant.

The CPGB should recognise that it's not only in 'certain respects', but in all respects that the treatment of black people by the police is

qualitatively different.

The IWA(GB) is not in favour of working class organisations entering into consultation with the police or active involvement of national black people's organisations in police training; of community policing; or of sitting on joint bodies with the police.

To enter into consultation with the police implies that they can be servants of the community. To believe this is to delude ourselves that in capitalist society the police can be converted to serve the people.

IWA(GB) knows from the past experience that to stop police malpractice, the best course to take is to organise the community to demonstrate against any excess of the police. To halt fishing raids, the best course for workers, black and white, is to down tools in protest against the raids.

Complaints against police can only be upheld by independent bodies if they are backed by mass pressure through actions. The demand for public inquiry on Southall has failed so far because many of us kept to passing resolutions and did not make serious efforts to organise the masses, particularly in the trade union and labour movement for mass action.

To get anything moving from the police for the protection of the black community under racist attacks, the black communities must organise their self-defence.

The first stage in any self-defence is to inform people of their basic civil rights and ensure they are upheld. Otherwise to rely on police protection will result in an inadequate protection and can be a risk to life and property.

Self-defence must be composed of the local community on the basis of defence in deeds or small groups of people roaming from one end of the city to the other without close links and liaison with the local community.

Self-defence must be composed of the local community on the basis of political and physical opposition to racist, fascist attacks and police malpractices.



Toxteth 1981

John Sturrock/Network



# Charter of Demands

Dave Cook

The Communist Party's national race relations committee puts these proposals forward to help discussion at this conference. They are not intended for voting or endorsement. This is a consultation conference, at which we hope the different experiences related and views expressed will deepen our, and everyone's, understanding, so that unity grows in action.

The black community suffers with all working people from every abuse of police power. But there are certain respects in which black people are particular targets for police malpractice, and it is to these police actions with a racist component that the demands below are directed.

This conference takes place in the context of the power reinforcement of police powers recommended in the Report of the Royal Commission, and many of these will bear down particularly heavily on black people.

## PROTECTION OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY

- The local supervision of police forces and the adjudication of complaints against the police to be placed in the hands of accountable and democratically constituted bodies, independent of the police and with a substantial element of black representation.
- Proper consultation between the police and genuine representatives of black communities, not with hand-picked individuals invited to the police station.
- An end to the designation of 'high-crime' inner-city areas, where many black people live and where policing is seen not as a question of protecting the community, but of keeping it under control. 'High crime' areas are 'high stress' areas. **They need community policing with democratic accountability and control**, not saturation policing.
- This means an end to 'fire brigade' and 'saturation' policing of areas where many black people live. We need community policing under community control in every locality.

However, little work seems to have been done on what this would actually mean in practice. It means far fewer pandas prowling and far more home beat policing. It should mean the police becoming more linked to the social services, as already happens with juvenile bureaux.

Community control should mean the local authority discussing local police policy in the council chambers. It should mean proper consultation with local organisations by the police for example, with black people's organisations, trades councils, trades unions, tenants and residents, women and local businesses.

- The highest priority must be given to protecting black communities under racist attacks. This is not so much a question of more police, but

of a different sort of policing, especially in speed of response.

It means that places where racists are known to assemble should be rigorously patrolled. The racist character of many attacks, often denied by the police, must be clearly recognised. Many attacks on black people are not random acts, but indicate a pattern of racist violence. These attacks should be regarded as a specific crime.

- Existing race relations and public order law must be firmly enforced against racists. These laws must be given more teeth to outlaw the advocacy and practice of racism.
- A difficult question is the growing use of racist chants and racist violence at football grounds. The club should ban supporters who chant racist slogans, and the police should enforce that ban—this is one approach. On the other hand, this might encourage racist fans to taunt the police by being still more blatant.
- Black people are often denied justice because of their (often justified) fears of reporting crimes against themselves to the police. These fears are based on the black communities' experiences of harassment and intimidation.

To overcome this the police should make arrangements with community organisations to provide facilities for interviews where those reporting a crime or making complaints can feel secure from possible harassment and intimidation.

- Set up 'Help on Arrest' schemes in every police area—in liaison with the local community relations council or similar body, so that every person held at a police station has access to a civil rights adviser. 'Rights on Arrest' cards to be made widely available, printed in the main minority languages. Immediate access to a solicitor is a basic right.
- Stop using black people as guinea pigs for new eavesdropping techniques, e.g. video-photographing. No surveillance of community leaders.
- On the issue of immigration, anti-racists are united in demanding repeal of the present racist laws. We are totally opposed to any involvement of the police in enforcing them. End 'fishing expeditions', searching for 'illegal' immigrants.

Disband the Illegal Immigration Intelligence Unit. Similarly, as a consequence of the new Nationality Bill, the likelihood is a major increase in the involvement of the police in enforcing what could easily become a 'pass law' situation for many black people. Our opposition to both these proposals and such policing is equally clear. These racist laws must be repealed.

- Keep riot shields out of carnival and community protests and actions.
- Tighten the control of all weapons to police officers and apply stiffer penalties to all offenders.
- Disband the SPG. Keep it out of our communities.
- No use of Sus, and no replacement by new 'updating'.

## CONTROL OF THE POLICE

- Attitudes on race to be taken into account in police recruitment and selection.



- Initial police training and regular in-service training should contain an anti-racist syllabus, including racism awareness training to be worked out with black community organisations. The national training of police needs the active involvement of organisations like the Commission for Racial Equality and the National Association of Community Relations Councils, as well as national black people's organisations. Regular seminars and discussions should take place, led by community leaders, involving all police ranks.
- A continuing campaign of anti-racist education to be carried out in every police force.
- Racism to be treated as a serious breach of police discipline.
- In particular, disciplinary investigations to set up whenever:
  - (a) any policeman or group of policemen are found to have arrested or questioned a greater proportion of black people than it is to be found in the local community.
  - (b) the proportion of black people questioned or arrested on particular grounds exceeds the proportion of black people in the local community.

We put forward these demands so that people coming to the Conference could have something to think about in advance, and have before them a framework for discussion which is down-to-earth and detailed.

Just this week the Lambeth working party on relations between the police and the community in that borough, gave evidence of what it called 'extremely grave community relations', and blamed the police.

It is clear from the report that several of the increased police powers recommended by the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure are already being operated by the police there. For example, the power to stop and search for offensive weapons.

The implications of this are chilling. Almost anything—an Afro-comb, a penknife, tools in a car—can be an 'offensive weapon'. The need for 'reasonable suspicion' is easy enough to fulfil. A police briefing that 'there have been a lot of robberies by blacks in the area' or 'we have reports that this picket will be violent' is said to justify the wholesale stopping of suspected groups.

Police statistics reveal that between 35,000 and 40,000 people are stopped in London on suspicion of having stolen goods, of whom a mere 12 per cent are arrested. The price of each arrest in terms of more harassment, sharper conflict, deeper alienation, is unacceptable.

We have felt that it was vital to try and distinguish between the specific problems of the black community and the wider problems which the black community shares with all working people.

This is a consultation conference. Our party is seeking the views of black people and predominantly black organisations on the problems, and possible solutions confronting them concerning one particular aspect of the state—the police in the context of the legal system.

The outline of this consultation must clearly be to help the formulation of our policy. This benefits our party. What benefits do the participants get from the conference?

We hope the discussion will help clarify all our views and help focus attention on particular problems which need to be made campaigning issues. We pledge ourselves as a party to take back what we learn at this conference to all party members and to the left, as far as we can.

### **Ingrained Racism**

Of course it is completely wrong to imagine that the only area of concern for black people in Britain is the question of the police. This is but one expression of a deeply ingrained pattern of institutionalised racism found in every area of society—housing, jobs, schools, culture, language, immigration, law, to name the main areas.

The Communist Party believes that although important advances have been made, the attention which the forces of the labour movement, the trade unions, the TUC, trades councils, Labour Party give to these questions is inadequate. Tackling institutionalised racism must become much more part of the alternative for which the left stands.

The police are being dramatically transformed before our very eyes—learning techniques and operating under laws from Northern Ireland. State Research estimates that there are already at least 12,000 'riot-trained' police hidden in the ranks of the ordinary police. Twelve thousand police are now trained in the use of firearms. Every police force now has a Special Branch. Another surveillance agency is MI5, which maintains close checks on activists and has the names of probably two million people on computer.

But the police are not merely coercive. They also play a key role in the creation of consent to class rule. Former Metropolitan police chief Robert Mark was a prime ideologist here, working to clean out the bent cops and opposing capital punishment, not on humane or liberal grounds, but in order to remove the obstacles to getting all defendants convicted on the say-so of the police.

His successor is a crude authoritarian, but the difference really lies in his means, not his ends.

Nevertheless, under McNee, the inertia of the Metropolitan Police in the face of racism and fascism has become blatant, and of course, other Chief Constables like Anderton, are as bad or worse. The message from them is: There is no problem of racism or fascism—the problem is mainly blacks.

'Fire brigade' policing, SPG raids and technological methods of surveillance increase not only the power of the police, but also the authoritarian character of policing.

### **A Central Issue for the Left**

It seems that the element of decent and relatively unprejudiced policemen and women, which has always been a part of the force, is tending to shrink as police work becomes increasingly attractive to individuals who like the idea of a uniform and a truncheon (and probably a fast car and a



gun too).

And it is in the cities—where policing is at its nastiest—that practically the whole of Britain's black population lives, through economic and social constraint.

Desperate though this reality is, to challenge this racist, authoritarian, class system, is one of the central questions facing the left in the 1980s.

Our 'Charter of Demands' has drawn on other initiatives, for example, some of the Tribune Group, State Research, Labour Research Department, the Race and Class pamphlet, Police v. Black People, the work of the Haldane Society, and the Workers' Educational Association and the important conference called by the London Co-operative Political Committee last year on what sort of police London needs.

Most of all we have drawn on the experiences of comrades, black and white, in our national race relations committee and other comrades on the left.

In the Charter we draw attention to problems we found very difficult, e.g. racist chants and violence at football matches and how to deal with them and the training of police.

We are not speaking about winning a little island of non-racist practice, but about one component part of a programme to democratise, to force democratic victories in the teeth of what will be the most powerful opposition in various parts of the apparatus of state.

This programme, and struggle to achieve it, will have to involve the whole question of a democratic, accountable police force—with full democratic and trade union rights—something which is only beginning to become an issue in the labour movement.

These are vast objectives—and it is not easy to feel optimistic at this stage—but it is a task which the working class movement, anti-racists and black organisations will have to tackle—and I hope this conference and the 'Charter of Demands' will be a step towards this.



## Join the Communist Party

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