



A Defining Struggle: The Stephen Lawrence Campaign

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1 Exposed

"I USED to talk to Stephen about the dangers of being out and the dangers of the police as well, because of stories that you hear that used to frighten me. The stories that you would hear would be about walking on the street on your own or with your friends or whatever, and the police would stop you and bundle you in the back of the van and beat up the kids. That is the story that would be going round, especially with black children.

Stephen's attitude towards the police was always: 'Well if I'm not doing anything wrong how could they do that to me?' I used to say to him from what I am hearing you don't have to be doing anything. I didn't trust the police, I never have done, and I certainly don't now. Stephen did not have that mistrust, however, because as far as he was concerned, if he wasn't doing anything wrong he had nothing to worry about. That was his attitude".¹

¹ Statement of Doreen Lawrence, 8 March 1998 Appendix 6, The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Appendices, The Stationary Office Limited, (February 1999)

**}DOREEN LAWRENCE'S testimony to the Macpherson Inquiry 8 March
1998**

In May 1997 Tony Blair's New Labour party was swept into office with a left wing mandate from voters (but a right wing reformist political programme). In the run up to the general election the Tories had in desperation tried to play the race card and appeal to bigotry. Tory strategist Andrew Lansley had advised that "Immigration as an issue played well in the last election and still has the capacity to hurt our opponents".²

However, part of the general mood in the country for change was the feeling that scapegoating politics wouldn't save the Tories' necks this time. Two examples from the 1997 election exemplify how voters rejected what they saw as the Tory politics of division: Wolverhampton MP Nicholas Budgen, defending Enoch Powell's old seat, took Lansley at his word, played the race card over immigration and expected to hold his seat. Instead he was soundly defeated by the Labour candidate. In Exeter the religious right Tory candidate Adrian Rogers, who considered homosexuals as leading "deviant lifestyles" ran a vitriolic campaign against openly gay Labour

² Quoted in Alban Pryce, "Immigration: Dealing With The Race Card", *Socialist Review*, March 2005

candidate Ben Bradshaw. West Country voters responded by rejected the totality of Roger's politics and beliefs and sent Bradshaw to Westminster with a healthy majority.

During the eighteen years of Tory rule there had been a quickening of state racism. The riots of 1981 and 1985 had revealed how the police acted as an army of occupation in the multiracial and multicultural areas of the inner cities, daily dealing brutal racism out to black people, including indiscriminate stop and search, fitting up black men for crimes they didn't commit and murdering them in custody. It was the death of Cynthia Jarrett during a police raid on her house that had sparked the Broadwater Farm Riot in October 1985. The Tory persecution of asylum seekers also climbed through their years in office, eventually building an inhumane edifice of state racism including barbed wire surrounded detention centres staffed by private security firms, and snatching whole families for deportation.

The racism deployed by the Tories through the Thatcher and Major years always provoked a response by those directly under attack, who more often than not would be successful in drawing active support around them, even if they did not all succeed in their aims. For example there was a sustained campaign to shut down the immigration detention centre at Campsfield, near Oxford, that had opened in 1993. Many hard fought, imaginative and well supported anti-deportation campaigns attempted to prevent asylum seekers being sent back to their persecutors.

Black deaths in police or prison custody continued during the Tory years, with victims including Winston Rose (1981), Colin Roach (1983), John Mikkelson (1985), Clinton McCurbin (1987), Leon Patterson (1992) Joy Gardner (1993), Shiji Lapite (1994), Brian Douglas (1995), Wayne Douglas (1995), Ibrahima Sey (1996). All provoked family campaigns supported by their local communities that eventually gelled into a nation-wide united co-ordinating body. ³

By the late 1980s the Tories drip-drip reliance on racism had succeeded in resurrecting the far right, with the British National Party finally dragging itself out of the ruins of the National Front. In 1990 the BNP opened up a shop-front headquarters in Welling, South East London, and begun to provoke, encourage and organise racist sentiment against the area's relatively small black and minority ethnic population. Police racism and far-right inspired violence fed into each another, leading to murders by gangs of youths whose racist motivation was then downplayed or denied during the subsequent police investigations. Given the police's institutional starting point that black people were the problem, it was not surprising, although alarming, that the police habitually failed to catch the guilty or break up the gangs. This in turn encouraged the BNP and the racists under their influence to think of themselves as untouchable and commit further atrocities. In February 1991 Rolan

³ Institute of Race Relations, Black Deaths In Custody, 11 November 2002, <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/black-deaths-in-custody/>

Adams was murdered in Thamesmead by a gang shouting “nigger” before stabbing him in the throat. The police treated it as a territorial dispute between gangs. Then Rohit Duggal was stabbed to death by a gang outside a kebab shop in Eltham in July 1992. His murderer had called Rohit a “paki”, yet the police again denied a racial motive, inferring the Duggal was somehow to blame. ⁴

On 22nd April 1993 a black teenager Stephen Lawrence and his friend Duwayne Brooks were ambushed at a bus stop in Well Hall Road, Eltham, by a group of young white racists one of whom shouted “What, what nigger”. Duwayne managed to escape his attackers, all of whom were local to the area, but Stephen was caught, surrounded and knifed to death.

The failure of the police to catch the killers in the hours and days following the murder is well documented. ⁵ The killers were allowed to escape to their nearby houses, construct alibis, dispose of the murder weapon (that has never been found), destroy clothing and other evidence and set about intimidating witnesses. They also quite likely colluded through criminal connections with a corrupt officer or officers in

⁴ Institute of Race Relations, Deaths With A (Known or Suspected) Racial Element 1991-1999, 8 November 2002, <http://www.irr.org.uk/news/deaths-with-a-known-or-suspected-racial-element-1991-1999/>

⁵ The best account of the Stephen Lawrence murder, investigation and inquiry is “The Case of Stephen Lawrence”, by Brian Cathcart, Penguin Books, (2000)

an effort to shield themselves from arrest. The behavior of the police who initially investigated Stephen's murder was best summed up by his mother Doreen in her submission to the Stephen Lawrence inquiry:

“We were told [by the investigating police officers] that there was a wall of silence. We couldn't understand this because people were constantly visiting us and phoning our home giving names and information...We also now know that the police received a vast amount of information, not only from the public but several police officers via their informants. ..These boys...were known to the police because of the other stabbings they had committed. ..Racism is institutionalised...It's like “Who are you to think I am racist”. Well I say - how dare I think you are not, because nothing in your actions has proven to me you are not, and I see no other explanation for your attitude and behavior”.⁶

The growing realisation that the police investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence was heading for failure, with the fear there would be an escalation of racist attacks and killings in that part of South East London, catalysed a campaign in support of the Lawrence family and their insistence on justice with a wider call for

⁶ Continuation of Statement of Doreen Lawrence, 11 June 1998, Appendix 6, The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Appendices , The Stationary Office Limited, (February 1999)

the BNP headquarters be closed down. The police reacted precisely as they had done in past similar circumstances – they denied any racial motive in the killing (leading to the dismissal of vital information including intelligence), they sought to undermine the credibility of the family and attack anti-racist campaigners as criminals and the source of the problems in the area.

The sense of urgency was ratcheted up when in September 1993 the BNP's Derek Beackon narrowly won a council seat on the Isle of Dogs in East London, the election campaign being accompanied by a wave of brazen and violent attacks on local South Asians, including an attack on 17 year old Quddus Ali, who was kicked to within an inch of his life and left permanently brain damaged. In a significant move activists eventually pushed the TUC to call a demonstration that marched through east London in March 1994. This marked the turning point in the campaign against the BNP and fascist influence in the East End. Two months later Beackon was defeated in council elections.

Protests and demonstrations against the BNP headquarters had to endure police harassment, attacks and arrests (including Duwayne Brooks at one point), culminating in a savage assault against the 60,000 strong Unity demonstration of October 1993, which began with the truncheoning of the march's chief steward and ended in a frenzied police riot against the anti-racist protestors. The next day the

Mail on Sunday ran the headline “Masked Mob Stones Police”.⁷ The truth is that if the protestors had been allowed to demolish the BNP headquarters brick by brick, things would have been very different. It was not lost on anyone that day that the police had put considerably more resources into battering anti-racist demonstrators and protecting the BNP HQ than they had done thus far in catching the killers of Stephen Lawrence. Mass arrests took place during the march and after of individual protestors attempting to defend themselves against police attack and in September 1995 nine Welling protestors were sentenced to a total of 20 years and six months in prison. And still Stephen’s killers, whose identities were widely known, walked free. Yet the Lawrence’s continued to gather wide support. Many organisations and individuals rallied the family’s cause, with the trade unions being the most consistent.

At the same time the Metropolitan Police, who were wriggling under the pressure of unprecedented negative publicity, including an intervention by Nelson Mandela on a visit to London that had forced them to finally round up the prime suspects, continually assured the Lawrence family and their lawyers that they were doing their best to catch Stephen’s killers. They sought to marshal “evidence” to support this

⁷ *Mail on Sunday*, 17 October 1993

fiction. In November 1993 an internal police review of the investigation led by DCS John Barker (a former head of the Scotland Yard Flying Squad) concluded that “the investigation has been progressed satisfactorily and all lines of enquiry correctly pursued”.⁸ The review was subsequently roundly condemned by the Stephen Lawrence inquiry five years later as “flawed and indefensible” with Barker admitting in evidence that he was told by senior officers “not to be heavy-handed” or to “undermine” officers.⁹

A second, also unsuccessful, police investigation was mounted in 1994. This was followed in 1997 by a Police Complaints Authority (PCA) investigation into an official complaint lodged by the Lawrence’s. It was not an independent report and was carried out by neighbouring Kent Police. Although it criticised the first investigation (how could it not at this point) its overall thrust was to exonerate the police of the main criticisms made by the Lawrence’s. It found no evidence of corruption or collusion with criminals and summed up by stating “The complaint investigation has not produced any evidence to support the allegations of racist conduct by police officers nor has it produced any evidence to support many of the specific allegations made by the Lawrence family in relation to events on the night of the murder. The

⁸ The Report by Detective Chief Superintendent Barker of his Review, November 1993, Appendix 13, The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Appendices, The Stationary Office Limited, (February 1999), Page 1

⁹ On Barker’s evidence at Macpherson see Cathcart, op cit, pp 341-343

evidence shows that the police operation undertaken immediately after the assault on Stephen Lawrence was well organised and effective”.¹⁰ . As Doreen Lawrence later pointed out the police and authorities were, above all, pursuing a strategy of containment. “By keeping us occupied they kept the black community quiet, it gave us a false sense of security and it made black people feel that justice could be achieved”.¹¹

In April 1994 the Lawrence family and their legal team were forced by the lack of police progress to mount a risky private prosecution against the suspects. Eventually three of them, Neil Acourt, Luke Knight and Gary Dobson, were sent for a trial beginning April 1996, but the case collapsed after the judge ruled that Duwayne Brooks’ identification evidence could not be heard. All three were acquitted with the result that that they could now not be tried again for the same crime under existing “double jeopardy” rules. It was a terrible blow to the family and their growing body of support.

¹⁰ Report by the Police Complaints Authority on the Investigation of a Complaint against the Metropolitan Police Service by Mr N and Mrs D Lawrence, Appendix 2, The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Appendices , The Stationary Office Limited, (February 1999), page 13

¹¹ Continuation of Statement of Doreen Lawrence, 11 June 1998, Appendix 6, The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Appendices , The Stationary Office Limited, (February 1999)

In February 1997 the inquest into Stephen's murder was marred by the reluctant appearances of the key suspects who refused to answer any questions put to them by the coroner instead repeating "I claim privilege". This incensed all who witnessed it, including the coroner Sir Montague Levine. The inquest and the arrogant behavior of prime suspects were widely covered in the media. The inquest jury delivered a verdict of unlawful killing, adding the significant rider that Stephen had died "in a completely unprovoked racist attack by five white youths" – in other words pointing a finger directly at brothers Jamie and Neil Acourt and Luke Knight, Gary Dobson and David Norris as the killers. The verdict once again highlighted the failings of the police. The following day, 14 February 1997, the *Daily Mail* – following in the wake of the principled and courageous stance of the inquest jury – splashed the front page headline "Murderers: The Mail accuses these men of killing. If we are wrong let them sue us" with photos of the five suspects underneath.

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It was then that the shadow home secretary Jack Straw, a few months away from a general election, told the Lawrence's that should New Labour get into office he would grant a public inquiry, a demand that the family campaign had been agitating for since 1993.

¹² <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2080159/Stephen-Lawrence-case-How-killers-finally-brought-justice.html>

Despite the *Mail* retrospectively claiming a key role in the Lawrence's 'campaign for justice, any honest account would recognise that the main pressure on the establishment to deliver any kind of justice was generated by ordinary people, black and white, up and down the length of the country. It was the grassroots that had supported, marched, petitioned, lobbied, fundraised and turned the screws on the powers-that-be, with the trade unions acting as the backbone of that movement. The Lawrence's were invited to speak at many union meetings and union sponsored rallies. As Neville Lawrence said, speaking at the 1998 TUC about the dark days following his son's murder, "I thought, 'who am I going to turn to? I did not have the money. Where will I get support?' and I remember meeting a group of trade unionists who said 'we are going to help'.¹³ This base of support was reflected in the trade union solidarity days that were organised during the Lawrence inquiry. There were no equivalent "*Daily Mail*" days.

In June 1997 the newly installed home secretary Jack Straw met the Lawrence's, their lawyer Imran Khan, Michael Mansfield QC and two MPs – Bernie Grant from Tottenham and local constituency MP John Austin-Walker. A month later Straw

¹³ Quoted in "Stephen Lawrence murder: How unions played a role in fighting for justice", Socialist Worker, Issue 2285, 14 January 2012, <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=27157>

announced that there would be an inquiry “into the matters arising from the death of Stephen Lawrence on 22 April 1993 to date, in order particularly to identify the lessons to be learned for the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crimes”.¹⁴ This was a wide remit. Straw appointed whom he considered a safe pair of hands in former high court judge Sir William Macpherson of Cluny as the inquiry chair. Macpherson’s past record as a judge looked so unpromising that the Lawrence family legal team attempted to get him replaced on the eve of the start of the inquiry. Yet during the course of the inquiry Macpherson was clearly so horrified by the unfolding evidence that he became determined to deliver wide ranging conclusions.

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The inquiry began its public hearings on 16 March 1998 at Hannibal House, Elephant and Castle, South London and ended in Birmingham on 13 November that same year. It considered 100,00 pages of written documentation, sat for 59 days in South London, 88 witnesses gave evidence and 12,000 pages of transcript were produced. The final report ran to 340 pages accompanied by appendices of similar length.¹⁶

¹⁴ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson, The Stationary Office Limited, (February 1999), Chapter Three, page 6

¹⁵ See Cathcart, *op cit*, pp 312-314

¹⁶ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson, The Stationary Office Limited, (February 1999), Chapter Three, page 3

Even before the final report was published in February 1999 the hearings alone had resulted in a deep crisis of legitimacy in a key organ of the British state – the Metropolitan Police - that had given good service to the Thatcher government particularly during the 1984-85 Miners Strike and the Murdoch Wapping dispute the following year. The Tory years had seen an inexorable paramilitarisation of the police, who had been showered with new weaponry and powers, ending any fantasy of Dixon of Dock Green style "policing by consent". As Audrey Farrell had pointed out in 1992, "hatred of police action has spread far wider than the establishment would have liked it to. Resentment is no longer mainly restricted to black people, young people and the left. Large number of 'respectable' working class people have seen their attempts to save jobs and communities dealt with by the blows of a police truncheon".¹⁷

Outrage at the police's failure to catch Stephen Lawrence's murderers mounted as the inquiry went on. Each new event or revelation slotted another piece of the puzzle into place, building a total picture in the minds of the public. The behavior of the police officers called to give evidence in the trial, all of whom clearly still believed that there was little or no racial motive to Stephen's murder; the compelling narrative that the hearings had constructed of police racism, indifference and very likely corruption; the blank refusal of Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Paul Condon to admit that his force was institutionally racist or corrupt; the repugnant strutting of the suspects whose freedom rested on the botched police investigation;

¹⁷ Crime, Class and Corruption, by Audrey Farrell, Bookmarks (July 1992) page 9

the public hearings in other parts of London and other cities that were filled by accounts of relentless stop and search, police brutality and extreme racism; the growing disbelief at what was being revealed to them etched on the faces of Macpherson and his inquiry team; the forensic examination of witnesses by Michael Mansfield; the dogged determination of the Lawrence's to see justice done; the aggressive cross examination of Doreen Lawrence and Imran Khan by barristers representing the police; the huge and vocal presence of ordinary people daily packing out the public gallery; all of these factors created a political whirlwind with the Metropolitan Police at the centre. It threatened to suck in other police forces along with wider institutions of the state, and raise fundamental questions about the nature of society and the pillars it rested on. This force surrounded not only the Met Police but Jack Straw and the New Labour administration that had set the ball rolling.

There was also a wider context to the inquiry. In the very same month that the five suspects in the murder of Stephen Lawrence were forced to give testimony, celebrations took place to mark the 50th anniversary of the docking of the Empire Windrush at Tilbury docks on 22 June 1948. The Windrush anniversary of the first significant arrival of Caribbean immigrants after World War Two took on a symbolism far beyond its original purpose. It was expected to be purely a celebration of post war black presence in Britain. Now many were asking how far black people had advanced in British society in that half century and whether an end to racism would ever be in sight? The Lawrence's battle has raised a vital question for all

society~how was it at the end of the 20th century, in a supposedly modern, multicultural Britain, indeed a "New Britain", that black people could still suffer the most profound and structural racial discrimination seemingly more akin to the 1950s than late 1990s? When Doreen Lawrence asserted that no police officer had tended to her dying son because they did not want to get "black blood" on their hands she produced a powerful symbol of all that seemed to be wrong about British society. She exploded the self congratulatory myth constructed by established politicians of a "tolerant" Britain. That the family had chosen to bury British-born Stephen's body in a Jamaica grave sent an uncomfortable message.

The Lawrence affair itself demonstrated the contradiction between the uneven experience of black people in Britain in a stark way. On the one hand there were millions of people, black and white, from Aberdeen to Plymouth, who urged on the Lawrence's and their supporters to push it all the way. On the other hand the most powerful forces in the land resisted this process of exposure, most notably the police.

The reputation of Metropolitan Police's Commissioner Sir Paul Condon (now Baron Condon), who had declared on his appointment, made just three months before Stephen Lawrence was slain, that he should be judged on his success or failure to

tackle racism and police corruption, lay in ruins when his inaugural pledge came back to haunt him in ways he could never have imagined. ¹⁸

The Lawrence team were the only element at the inquiry who sought to fully explain exactly why the police investigation into Stephen's murder had gone so horribly wrong. If police racism was staring you in the face, it was police corruption that cast a long shadow over the entire Macpherson inquiry. During the inquiry Michael Mansfield and the Lawrence's legal teams were prevented from fully following the leads they had uncovered particularly linking David Norris's career criminal father Clifford Norris with officers on the murder team. As the Lawrence team argued, "There is a matrix of quite exceptional coincidences and connections here which weave such a tight web around this investigation that only the ability to suspend disbelief can provide such an innocent explanation. ¹⁹

As Neville Lawrence himself argued in his evidence, "I would say that both racism and corruption played a part in this investigation...As to corruption I think that some

¹⁸ See Cathcart, op cit, page 47

¹⁹ Final Submissions With Regard to Part 1 of The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry On Behalf of Mr and Mrs Lawrence, page 21

police officers investigating my son's death were connected to the murderers in some way or other".²⁰

Today given the revelations of corruption surrounding the police and News International it is not difficult to imagine that some of the police officers were open to criminal influence. Yet in 1998, despite the insistence of the Lawrence family and their legal team, it was assumed that corruption had not played a part. The inquiry brought to bear a criminal standard of proof over allegations of corruption – in other words it had to be established “beyond reasonable doubt” that an officer had been corrupt, a bar set impossibly high given that the Lawrence team (and the inquiry team) had no access to police intelligence or internal investigations into police corruption (which we now know to have existed). The inquiry concluded that, “It is right that we should say at once that no collusion or corruption is proved to have infected the investigation into Stephen Lawrence’s murder. It would be wrong and unfair to conclude otherwise”.²¹ We now know that it was wrong for the inquiry to come to this conclusion. Since the report was published there has been a steady stream of information pointing to precisely the opposite conclusion to that drawn by

²⁰ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson, The Stationary Office Limited, (February 1999), Chapter Eight, page 43

²¹ The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson, The Stationary Office Limited, (February 1999), Chapter Eight, page 45

the inquiry. It is now accepted, even by top police, that there were corrupt links between a particular police officer central to the investigation and Clifford Norris. If all the evidence had come out at the Macpherson inquiry it would have been a hammer blow to the Metropolitan Police in its guise as a legitimate state institution. The repercussions would have been immense.

The most significant finding of the Macpherson inquiry was that “institutional racism” was the main reason for the police’s failure. Although Condon fought a rearguard action against its inclusion in the report, it represented an advance from the Scarman Report into the 1981 Brixton riot that had put police racism down to the “bad apples” theory of prejudiced individual officers acting in extreme “frontline” circumstances. It was a combination of the arguments of the Lawrence’s and their team, hardening public opinion against the police, and officers’ performance in the witness box, that drove the inquiry team to a deeper understanding of the nature of the problem confronting them.

Condon’s wretched performance in front of the Macpherson inquiry when he appeared in October 1998 centered around his refusal to admit his force was institutionally racist. Questioned by Macpherson as to whether he thought that the Lawrence scandal added up to “a collective failure” and “general malaise” (in other words institutional racism) Condon sought to cloud the issue: “The notion of a mysterious collective will is a difficult definition to acknowledge” he replied. Condon

defended his force by raising the canard that no serious critic had advanced - that institutional racism meant that all officers under his command were hardened racists who went to work to “play out a racist agenda” as he put it. Lord Macpherson retorted testily: “How can that [collective failure] be dealt with if it isn’t accepted that it exists? But Condon refused to be “hung up on the words”. Condon begged of Macpherson that he not be forced to utter the words “institutional racism”. For him even an acknowledgement that racism was “widespread” in the police was beyond the pale. “I’m not in denial,” protested Condon during questioning by inquiry member Tom Cook, himself a former West Yorkshire top officer. “Just say yes,” pleaded inquiry member Dr Richard Stone, to no avail. ²²

But despite Condon’s efforts there was no doubt that the inquiry would identify the police as institutionally racist. This was a crushing blow to the police, particularly the Met.

However in the final reckoning the Macpherson report was to throw the police and the wider establishment a lifeline. The final report cited but passed over the definition given by 1960s US Black Power theorists Stokely Carmichael and Charles

²²Sir Paul Condon, testimony to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, 1 October 1998, Author’s notes.

V. Hamilton that institutional racism "originates in the operation of established and respected forces in society".²³

Carmichael and Hamilton had explained that "Institutional racism relies on the active and pervasive operation of anti-black attitudes and practices". The police, operating as an established and respected force, has a particular role to play in fomenting and reinforcing racist ideas and actions by cementing in people's minds notions of criminality, difference and inferiority imputed to black people (or Asians, Gypsies and Travelers, Muslims) as a group. Each contact that the police have with black people – from stop and search, excessive force, heavy policing or "swamping" areas perceived as "black", disproportionate arrests and incarceration, the construction of stereotype "black" crimes such as mugging, drug dealing, rioting and gang culture and refusing to protect them against racist attacks seeks to confirm these notions. For example the infamous "sus" laws (stop under suspicion) were deployed to stigmatise black people as inherently criminal by arresting innocent individuals and dragging them before the courts.

"As criminologists Ben Bowling and Coretta Phillips have documented,

²³ Black Power, The Politics of Liberation in America, Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, Pelican Books, 1969, page 20

“Research evidence over the past three decades has found that specific stereotypes are commonly used by police officers to classify people on the basis of their ethnic origin. Studies found that Asians tended to be regarded as devious, liars and potential illegal immigrants...The pliability of stereotypes of Asian and particularly Muslim people has been documented in recent research, which has suggested that perceptions of Asian and particularly Muslim people have undergone a transformation. Stereotypes, which assumed that Asian people were conformist, are now thought to be less applicable and rather, the very stereotypes assumed to explain law-abiding behaviour (e.g. family pressures, tight knit communities and high levels of social control) are now thought to promote criminal and deviant activity amongst Asian youth... The shift in the perception of such groups has been located in both local and global notions of Asian youth as increasingly involved in gangs, violent, disorderly, riotous and, more recently, as potential terrorists. Stereotypes of black people have been more consistent in that they are thought to be more prone to violent crime and drug abuse, to be incomprehensible, suspicious, hard to handle, naturally excitable, aggressive, lacking brainpower, troublesome and ‘tooled up’...These findings have not been restricted to constables but have been found throughout the ranks.”²⁴

²⁴ Policing ethnic minority communities, Ben Bowling and Coretta Phillips (2003) Available at LSE Research Online: (July 2010). <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/9576/>

If we look wider we can see that this phenomenon is not confined to Britain, but is global and historic. As Audrey Farrell argued, “Across the world, police racism is best understood by looking at the function performed by the police within capitalism rather than by looking at the composition of the police force or the characteristics of individual policemen. It is certainly not explicable in terms of the behavior of those they police”²⁵

The treatment of black people by the police was raised on numerous occasions during the Macpherson inquiry. It was revealed to be deep-rooted and systematic. For example, at the West London public hearing the Southall based Monitoring Group told the inquiry that, “from our experience we’ve identified two key trends; firstly, victims of racial harassment do not receive a fair, just and acceptable service from the police and secondly, when victims call upon the police it is they who are treated as perpetrators and criminalised”. A local vicar, the Reverend David Wise, drove home the point saying that as far as his Baptist congregation was concerned, “the experience they have of the local police is more like the Monitoring Group picture than the police presentation [which had started the hearing]”. Wise recounted how one of his congregation, originally from Barbados, “was returning

²⁵ Audrey Farrell, op cit, page 125

from college on a Saturday evening when he was pulled over by a police car. “He was asked to get out of his car. He asked why. A police officer said, ‘we’ve got a call. You’re a fucking druggie. You black people are all fucking druggies’. He was searched and sent on his way frightened and intimidated”. The man refused to lodge a complaint. “He was afraid that the police would target him, or if he needed the police in the future, they wouldn’t come”.²⁶

What Carmichael and Hamilton **did not** argue was that anti-black attitudes and practices “infected” otherwise legitimate institutions expressing themselves in “unwitting” acts of discrimination. But this was the notion that Macpherson and his team settled upon. This led the report to the coining of the wholly inadequate formulations "unwitting racism" leading to a “collective failure” to describe the behavior of the police over the Lawrence affair. This was in one sense a collapse back to an aspect of the findings of the Scarman Report into the 1981 Brixton riots. It was Scarman who had rejected any idea that the police were a racist institution, but that it might possibly "unwittingly discriminate against black people".

²⁶ Public Meeting, Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Ealing 8 October 1998, author’s notes

The report quoted Lord Scarman in his report into the Brixton riots: "In that seminal report Lord Scarman responded to the suggestion that "Britain is an institutionally racist society," in this way:-

"If, by [institutionally racist] it is meant that it [Britain] is a society which knowingly, as a matter of policy, discriminates against black people, I reject the allegation. If, however, the suggestion being made is that practices may be adopted by public bodies as well as private individuals which are *unwittingly discriminatory* [my emphasis] against black people, then this is an allegation which deserves serious consideration, and, where proved, swift remedy".

Macpherson then went onto argue that "Lord Scarman accepted the existence of what he termed "unwitting" or "unconscious" racism. To those adjectives can be added a third, namely "unintentional". The report then sought to employ these definitions to build a linguistic bridge between the inquiry team and Paul Condon:

"All three words are familiar in the context of any discussion in this field. The Commissioner used all three in his letter written to the Inquiry on 2 October 1998, after his appearance at Hannibal House during our hearings.

“Unwitting racism can arise because of lack of understanding, ignorance or mistaken beliefs. It can arise from well intentioned but patronising words or actions. It can arise from unfamiliarity with the behavior or cultural traditions of people or families from minority ethnic communities. It can arise from racist stereotyping of black people as potential criminals or troublemakers. Often this arises out of uncritical self-understanding born out of an inflexible police ethos of the "traditional" way of doing things. Furthermore such attitudes can thrive in a tightly knit community, so that there can be a collective failure to detect and to outlaw this breed of racism. The police canteen can too easily be its breeding ground”.²⁷

In the final analysis the definition of institutional racism adopted by the inquiry amounted to a compromise with the state. It held out to the police the possibility that if it pledged to reform itself, by recruiting more black officers for example, it could eventually dig itself out the hole the Lawrence scandal had dropped it into. However there was another powerful factor at play that did not hold out the prospect of easy containment – the changing attitudes of the population towards the police.

²⁷ See The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson, The Stationary Office Limited, (February 1999), Chapter Six, Racism pp20-42

A Gallup poll taken on the eve of the publication of the inquiry report in February 1999 found that those "satisfied" with the police had fallen sharply from 74 percent in 1989 to 58 percent in 1999. Those who said they were "very satisfied" with the police had fallen from 26 percent in 1989 to eight percent a decade later. Thirty eight percent considered police officers "racist" with 31 percent regarding officers as "dishonest" ²⁸

An ICM poll produced at the same time found that a quarter of the population believed that "most police were racist". In a figure that shows that the general public had understanding of the concept of institutional racism, one in three people believed that, whatever the personal intentions of the officers involved, the way the police work led to discrimination against black and Asian people. ²⁹

This shift in attitudes was partly to do with people's individual experience of the police, the role of the police in major events such as the Miners Strike and the Hillsborough football disaster, but also increasingly a recognition that the police singled out black people for "special treatment". The willingness of people to sign petitions in support of the Lawrence's' demand that Condon be sacked was as strong in small towns in Scotland as it was in Inner London.

²⁸ Gallup/ Daily Telegraph Poll, 8 February 1999. Summary can be found at "Confidence in police declining", news report BBC, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/uk/275156.stm>

²⁹ ICM/Guardian Poll, Guardian, 9 Feb 1999

The inquiry itself demonstrated that racism was not confined to the capital. The Macpherson team mounted a short tour round England as Part Two of their inquiries, holding one day public hearings in Manchester, Bradford, Bristol and Birmingham, as well as West and East London. All top police officers who came before the inquiry team sought to head off criticism, attempting to persuade the Macpherson team, usually with the silent or near silent presence of a black or Asian junior officer by their side, how eager they were to embrace change and to lay out the race initiatives they were engaged in or planned in the future. In Manchester on 13 October 1998 the city's chief constable David Wilmot even went so far to jump before he was pushed and declare that he accepted his force was "institutionally racist" thus effectively undermining the stance taken two weeks earlier by his London counterpart.³⁰

At the hearing in Birmingham a month later West Midlands police officers boasted that their practices represented a return to policing by consent and sought to give a sparkling view of policing in the region. Unfortunately for them their testimony was followed by a number of speakers who accused the police of gross racism, violence towards the black community and a failure to protect the city's black citizens against racist violence.

³⁰ Public Meeting, Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Manchester 13 October 1998, author's notes

The hearing heard from local young black man Carl Joseph who had been stopped in his car by the police 34 times in two years. So weary was he of having to give in his documents at the police station after each search that he eventually lodged his driving documents permanently with West Midlands Police (they were somewhat ungratefully reluctant to acknowledge this helpful gesture). At the end of the day's hearing a sombre and rather depressed inquiry member West London GP Dr Richard Stone declared that, "I feel very sad after today~this visit is the most sad of our visits so far". In a rare public expression of his troubled mind Neville Lawrence stood up in front of the public gallery and referring to the police said, "I'm really a little bit disappointed. We need to accept the inevitable~that things are wrong before people can go ahead. To make changes people have to admit what's wrong".³¹

In the wake of the inquiry came a whole number of other widely supported campaigns – for example supporting the family of East African Indian student Ricky Reel who was found drowned in the river Thames after being chased by racists, and vigorous and very political campaigns against deaths at the hands of the police (which united black families such as the relatives of Roger Sylvester in Tottenham, Christopher Alder in Hull with the Irish Harry Stanley family in Hackney). In every town in Britain any one of these campaigns could pack a community hall and be the subject of a trade union resolution.

³¹ Public Meeting, Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, Birmingham 13 November 1998, author's notes

In September 1998 a black man stepped forward to address at a public meeting against police racism held in south London's Brixton. The audience fell silent as in understated tones Kwesi Menson proceeded to lay out the truly shocking account of his brother's Michael's death and the events that followed.

Kwesi explained how at 2am on the morning of the 28th January 1997 he had been woken by the police. Officers told him that his 30 year old brother Michael, a former musician with prominent '80s band Double Trouble, had been found by motorists staggering along the North Circular Road, Edmonton, north London, flames leaping from his back. By the time police arrived the horribly injured Michael was almost naked, his clothes leaving a burning trail across the road as they melted and dropped off him. Michael had massive burns to his back, torso and buttocks. Kwesi then told how, when he rushed to see his brother in hospital Michael had been lucid: "When we saw him he was lying on his back, he was alert and the hospital staff had done a good job minimising the pain and he was able to talk to us". Michael spoke to his brother, saying that "four white lads, they set my back on fire-why did they do this to me?" Kwesi recounted told how, "I was shocked and urged them [the police] to come and take statements". He then explained how the family had "told everybody" at the hospital what Michael had said and asked why the police had not even taken a

statement. Kwesi recalled that, “one of the sisters said she would be contacting the police and urge them to come down directly. She was shocked and angry”. He explained how subsequently a police officer had come to the hospital, but had “indicated he wasn’t going to ask any questions and he left the room”. Michael slipped into a coma and two weeks later died of what a pathologist would describe at his inquest as “multi-organ failure as a result of severe burns”. No statement had been taken from the dying, but initially conscious, man. ³²

Of the police Kwesi told the shocked Brixton audience, “From the outset I asked for a thorough investigation and I was assured that was the case”. Kwesi’s Brixton speech came just days before the inquest into his brother’s death opened in Hornsey Coroners Court in north London. The questions that would be implicitly raised during the inquest and explicitly by the Menson family in their campaign that followed were; had Michael Menson been failed by the police because of racist “assumptions” that officers had made about him from the moment of their first contact with him?; Had the officers approached Michael in the same way as the officers involved in the Lawrence case had done?; What if Michael Menson had been white and smartly turned out – would he have been treated any differently?

³² Kwesi Menson, speech to public meeting, Brixton, September 1998, author’s notes

The inquest opened in north London on 7th September 1998. The police argued that there was no evidence of a crime and therefore no crime scene had been established, and no forensics had taken place, and that Michael Menson had most likely set fire to himself in a suicide attempt.

This was the view of WPC Johanna Walsh in her evidence to the inquest. She was on night duty in an unmarked car when she heard the call for an ambulance to attend Michael. When she arrived she found a black man “burnt all over his shoulders, down his back, side of the body and the top of his buttocks”. Walsh said that Michael “behaved as if he were in a trance. When I arrived at the scene I had an open mind” she testified, but then she began to believe he was mentally ill-“I came to that conclusion”. Walshe added, “I didn’t believe at the time he knew what he was saying”.

However, this was not the assumption of others who went to Michael’s aid. David James, an off-duty fire-fighter based in the West Midlands, was driving along the North Circular when he spotted flames. He was shocked to see that they were emanating from a man, who, by the time he saw him, was naked apart from his socks. James helped the police who arrived first and assisted the paramedics. James

under questioning from the police legal team was firm that “It didn’t cross my mind that he [Michael] was mentally ill.

A forensic scientist and fire investigator called to give evidence to the inquest utterly destroyed the police’s chain of assumptions. James Munday testified that the nature of the spread of the flames consistent with the burns found on Michael meant that “Michael Menson’s jacket was ignited by a naked flame while he was lying down-the fire consuming most of the coat-before walking away...While I can’t eliminate Michael Menson lit the back of his own clothes while lying down, that method would have been unique by my experience”. In other words Michael had been deliberately set on fire by an attacker or attackers. The inquest jury returned a verdict of unlawful killing. ³³The police were forced to belatedly open a high level murder investigation and in December 1999 three men were found guilty of murder. They had come across Michael, robbed and assaulted him, taunted him, poured an accelerant on the back of his coat and set him on fire. One of the killers, Mario Pereira, on being questioned about the murder had replied “So what, he was black”. ³⁴

³³ Testimony to the Michael Menson inquest, Hornsey Coroner’s Court, north London, 7th – 16th September 1998

³⁴ See Michael Menson killer jailed for life, Guardian, Wednesday 22 December 1999, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/1999/dec/22/race.world5>

Each time another example of the police's treatment of black people became known, it served as another blow to the police and their claim to be a legitimate force for law and order. For the powers that be a line had to be drawn in the sand. Jack Straw had refused to sack Metropolitan Police commander Paul Condon, upon whose watch the Lawrence debacle had taken place. He was allowed to retire shortly afterwards with his pension intact.

In parliament it had been down to Tottenham MP Bernie Grant as a lone voice to call for the resignation of Condon. (The following year Straw appointed Condon's deputy John (now Baron) Stevens to the post of commissioner in a move to reassure the ranks that there would be no fundamental change).

During the inquiry pressure had also been applied behind the scenes by politicians to make sure that a mooted national demonstration in support of the Lawrence's and against the police would not take place. If the march had taken place it would have not only have been huge in numbers but would have set an agenda that would have seen the police and the government's room for maneuver all but disappear.

2 The backlash

The police, particularly the lower ranks, instinctively understood the fundamental nature of the attack that the Lawrence affair represented on their hitherto unbridled right to be racist and abuse their powers.

On the morning of 19 May 1999 ³⁵hundreds of burly suited and booted men streamed into Blackpool's Wintergardens conference centre. Amongst the square shoulders you could glimpse a handful of women and if you were sharp-eyed the one or two black people present.

It was the trade union annual general meetings season- but this was a trade union gathering with a difference. The Police Federation was Britain's only union to have been set up by an Act of Parliament. It has come into being in 1919, as an outlet for rank and file officers' grievances after the ruling class had been scared rigid by police strikes during the revolutionary upheavals of that year. At its inception it had been nicknamed the "goose club" because its members were expected to march closely in step with the authorities. But eighty years after it was set up a battered Federation was feeling out of step with widening sections of society, which it knew held its members in deepening contempt.

³⁵ Police Federation Annual Conference May 1999, Blackpool Winter Gardens, all quotes from author's notes

The rank and file of Britain's police was gathering together by the seaside just three months after the release by the Home Office of the most damaging document in their entire history. The Federation itself had to admit, "the Macpherson Report is the most searing indictment of policing ever published".

Fred Broughton, the then chairman of the Federation, moved quickly to reflect the defiance that dominated the conference – he had the officers stand in silence not for Stephen Lawrence or even the many other recent victims of racist violence as one may have expected him to do but for TV presenter and police heroine, the recently murdered Jill Dando and two officers who had lost their lives on duty in the previous 12 months. (The Dando example later took on an unfortunate significance for the police – Barry George, the man convicted in 2001 of the murder, was cleared of the killing eight years later, after a jury found that he had been wrongly convicted and had suffered a gross miscarriage of justice as a result of the police fitting evidence around him).

An indication of rank and file officers' attitudes in the wake of Macpherson could be gleaned from an anonymous letter printed in the question and answer column of the Police Review in house magazine available at the conference: "I am thinking about trying to start up a police association for white male heterosexual officers. Is there anything in the Police Regulations to prevent me from doing so?" The officers' query

was replied to by the magazine's legal editor thus: "Sadly I learn that there are perceptions within the service that such an association is needed".

However Broughton did not attempt to hide the problems his besieged members faced- "The twelve months which have passed has been the worst the police service had ever seen- wherever we look there are problems". But Broughton, in tune with the mood of the conference, was not about to give an inch to the critics. Yes, the Lawrence murder had been an "outrageous crime", yes the investigation had been "flawed" but that was as far as he was prepared to go. To huge applause he defended the "one humble inspector [who] faces the full might of disciplinary procedure" before condemning the public inquiry as "more like a kangaroo court than a judicial inquiry". (The aspect the police most hated about the inquiry had been the mostly black people in the public gallery who had made their views known especially when police officers in the dock came out with what they saw as an outrageous personal opinions or obfuscations).

Broughton refused to contemplate that the officers involved in the investigation had been racist. But he was also looking to a longer strategy and turned his mind to what he saw as a pressing matter – the need to get more black and Asian faces in the ranks. Broughton was articulating the argument put by sections of the police and the

government that black recruitment would be the only way to put off charges of racism in the future –after all if a black man was stopped by a black officer, how could that be a racist act?

So Broughton used to opportunity of the conference’s opening to unveil a new set of recruitment posters under the banner “Fairness... Equality...Diversity” which in a ham-fisted way sought to upend racist stereotypes, for example showing the picture of a black man “What Do You Call a Black Man in a BMW?” (the answer being a police officer). Unfortunately for the police the ironic play on stereotypes fell flat, the poster only reminded people how racist the police were – stopping black men in posh cars being well known as the historically favoured “sport” of racist police officers. The tensions in Broughton’s “anti racist” approach were revealed when, having unveiled the posters, he railed against the small Black Police Association (BPA) who had in his eyes tried to “sabotage” the campaign by telling the press that the Federation lacked “credibility” when it came to issues of racism.

Later on in the day the Federation’s delegates were treated to a stock pro-police speech by then shadow home secretary, Tory MP Sir Norman Fowler. Fowler described himself as “a long term admirer of the Police Federation”. He clearly held to the conspiracy theory much favoured by delegates that sinister left wing forces had used the Lawrence inquiry to undermine the rule of law and order. (This belief had

manifested itself during the inquiry itself in a lame and aborted attempt by police lawyers to put Lawrence lawyer Imran Khan under the spotlight.) “We do not have a racist police service in this country” smoothed Fowler - “The enemies of the police should not pervert the message of the police”.

A day later Jack Straw, despite being by far the most right wing Labour home secretary in history up to that point, got a very different reception than Fowler’s from the Blackpool delegates.

Before Straw mounted the podium to deliver his speech he had to endure a lecture by Broughton: “I want to make it clear that this Federation does not accept that the police service is, in Macpherson’s words ‘riven with racism’. Our point of departure with the Macpherson Report is in its blanket condemnation of the police service, which it expresses in such a way as to place the whole of the blame for the problems that police face, in dealing with ethnic minorities, on the shoulders of police officers”.

Quite what Broughton meant by the curious and revealing phrase “dealing with ethnic minorities” was clear in his next point – one which would be amplified by other police officers, the right wing press and politicians of all stripes in the months to follow.

For the right wing Macpherson had opened the floodgates to what was defined in the media as “black crime” principally street crime or “mugging”. Broughton asserted that, “Macpherson makes no attempt to understand, and shows no attempt of wanting to understand, just what it is like to be a police officer in the inner cities of Britain today. As a result, we fear that his report may add to, rather than solve, some of the problems that exist in those areas. In particular, it has been noted that there has been a sharp fall in the number of stops made by police officers, accompanied by a sharp rise in the number of street offences, including robbery and personal violence. ...There is a real danger that our officers, working in the high tension areas, may in the light of Macpherson, decide that discretion is the better part of valour”.

A somewhat chastened Jack Straw now took the platform to nil applause. He started by heaping praise on the police and their “bravery, loyalty and devotion” assuring them that “the British people are forever within your debt”. Straw dismissed any notion that the police were riven with racism -“it isn’t”- and repeated what was becoming an establishment mantra that the police were no more or less racist than the rest of society. Straw, replying to Broughton’s worries, pledged that “the powers of stop and search are going to stay – we have to work to ensure they are not used in a discriminatory way – be under no doubt you and your members should continue to exercise your powers...you have our backing”. Straw threw another bone to the police

by announcing plans to curb the right of defendants to trial by jury. Straw's Herculean efforts at groveling were rewarded at the end of his speech by a modicum of polite applause.

As soon as the Macpherson report was published powerful forces in British society moved quickly to undermine and dismiss its findings. The Tory press attacked the report in a ferocious and concerted effort to protect the status quo. The *Mail* condemned the report's rather mild recommendations as written by extremists (a retired judge, a Bishop, a retired policeman and a GP) and for going much too far in the other direction (as though the seeking of equality had its limits).

Hysterical descriptions by the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sun* of the Macpherson Report included Stalinist, Hitlerite, totalitarian, McCarthyite, Orwellian, and even "one of the worst things that has ever happened to race relations in this country". Former BBC Radio 4 Today programme editor and *Sun* columnist Richard Littlejohn attacked Tony Blair's "political correctness" writing, "Has Tony Blair become our first black Prime Minister? I'm surprised Blair didn't mention that his childhood hero was Malcolm X, that his favourite food was goat curry and yams, or that he changed his middle name to Linton as a tribute to Rastafarian dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson" and that "no one ever voted for a multicultural society. It was imposed upon them".

The day after the report was published *Daily Telegraph* editor Charles Moore wrote an editorial called "A misguided and Unfair Report", rejecting the findings of the police being institutionally racist. Moore labeled Stephen Lawrence's friend and murder witness Duwayne Brooks "obviously a difficult man" and that the report and the Lawrence's "attitude" "inflames racial feelings". The *Mail*, having championed the Lawrence's, did an U-turn, branding the Macpherson report a "witch hunt" and that enacting its recommendations would "irrevocably change the British way of life".

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Within weeks the newspaper began to run stories saying that because of Macpherson the police were afraid to stop and search black people and this had led to an increase in "muggings". The press, encouraged by politicians and the Police Federation tried to re-link in the public's consciousness that black man equals criminal, perpetrator rather than victim. It was an attempt to replace the face of Stephen Lawrence with that of a stereotyped black "mugger". The right wing were encouraged by black activist turned New Labour minister Paul Boateng who assured the *London Evening Standard* that, "No one should believe that they can use Sir William Macpherson's report as some sort of cloak for their criminal activities. We don't intend to allow that

³⁶ All quotes cited in *Socialist Worker*, 13 March 1999 (issue number?)

to happen. We back the police four-square in cracking down on street robberies. Stop and search is there to be used as part of the police's armoury. We expect the police to use it. There's no softly-softly policy, there's no hands off policy".³⁷

This establishment response, to protect the police and re-label black people as the problem, is a carbon copy of what happened after the Scarman Report. Following this report the then Metropolitan Police Deputy Assistant Commissioner Leslie Walker went on television to claim that 80 percent of all street crime in London was carried out by black people. This was then picked up by the national press who portrayed a "black crime explosion" as a consequence of Scarman. As Paul Gordon and David Rosenberg have written, "The release of the 1982 crime statistics and the way in which they were reported by the press amounted to an attempt by the police and the press to criminalise black people, especially young black men, and to blame them for violent crime in the inner city."³⁸

³⁷ Paul Boateng, London Evening Standard, 13 May, 1999

³⁸ 72 Gordon, P. and Rosenberg, D. (1989) Daily Racism: The Press and Black People in Britain. London: Runnymede Trust. p15. The Daily Mail ran the headline "ITS NO TO SCARMAN~Police must not have their police tied" (7 December 1981). Compare with "Why we must not let the PC lobby destroy the police" (Daily Mail 12 August 1999) and "Why we must not let race lunacy handcuff the police (Evening Standard 23 March 1999)

The five hour debate in the house of commons on the Macpherson report was marked by Tory MPs who lined up to attack it, including Woking MP Humfrey Malins who said, "When I hear it said by politicians that our Metropolitan Police are institutionally corrupt, institutionally racist and institutionally incompetent, I think that the world has sometimes gone completely mad", and that "the Macpherson report is another example of 5 percent of the population making 95 percent of the laws". Another Tory, Gerald Howarth, said that as far as he was concerned, "the report is driven by a desire to be seen to be politically correct". Howarth then went on to say that:

"It is fair to say that some unpalatable truths have to be faced, one of which is the fact that no government have ever received a mandate to turn the United Kingdom into a multiracial society. Despite the warnings given in the 1960s and 1970s about the inevitable social consequences of large scale immigration to Britain, successive governments have ploughed on regardless...I regret that some who have come here freely and others who have sought refuge in this county appear no longer content to learn and accept our native customs and traditions, but wish to assert their own". ³⁹

³⁹ Hansard 29 March 1999

The police's predilection for criminalising black people was not curbed by the Macpherson report. If anything, they were out for revenge. This was shown when Andrew Wilson, a black man, made history when he was charged and found guilty of "racially aggravated harassment" under new "race hate" provisions in New Labour's Crime and Disorder Act of 1998, which were supposed to deter racist attacks against black people, not be used against them. Who bought the charge against Wilson? The police. His "crime" was to have called officers searching him "white trash".⁴⁰

At the very same time as the Macpherson report was being debated New Labour intervened to shore up another plank of state racism - a new anti immigrant measure~the Asylum and Immigration bill. The man Jack Straw appointed to oversee the Macpherson inquiry, Michael O'Brien, was the same man empowered to drive through the bill.

In the bill's white paper the government, without a hint of irony, praised the contribution of the Windrush generation before laying out draconian rules designed to deter asylum seekers.

⁴⁰ See report in The Voice newspaper, 26 July 1999

New Labour did their best to pull the mood against asylum seekers further to the right than it was before the 1997 general election. A poll taken in February 1997 found that although half of whites thought refugees "cause problems for Britain" "a majority (75 percent) agreed that most refugees arriving in Britain are in need of our help and support, with women and the young being particularly sympathetic".⁴¹

Warning bells soon began to ring that the brakes were being applied on the report recommendations by the New Labour government. As Vikram Dodd reported in the *Guardian* six months after publication, "Black and Asian unease is growing. The home office says that work on Macpherson's 70 proposals has begun, with most under review or out to consultation. Just a few have so far been implemented and, to some within the black community, this is the first sign of betrayal...Labour asked for time, but there are fears that it is quietly shelving the tackling of racism until its second term. The concern is if a consensus for reform cannot be forged now and acted upon, when the white heat of outrage at the scandal is at its utmost, it is never going to be".⁴²

⁴¹ NOP/IPPR/OLR survey, 5 Feb 1997

⁴² Vikram Dodd, "All hype and no action. So what is new: Six months after Macpherson's report, racism is actually worse". *Guardian*, Tuesday 24 August 1999, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/1999/aug/24/race.world?INTCMP=SRCH>

Another indication of the extent of the establishment backlash against Macpherson was the frenzied reception accompanying the publication of the report *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* published by the Runnymede Trust in 2000. The report was an analysis of the state of race relations in Britain, accompanied by a checklist of recommendations. It was not particularly well received by anti-racist commentators. However instead of debating the issues raised in the report the press picked out one passage in the 400-page report which said, "Britishness, as much as Englishness, has systematic, largely unspoken, racial connotations."

The report was called "rubbish", "balderdash", "sub-Marxist gibberish", "PC crap", "ludicrous", "offensive" and "garbage". The Tories demanded the report was "binned", and one journalist even called for its authors to be prosecuted under the Race Relations Act. The then Tory leader William Hague wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* that if the report's recommendations were implemented "then our police would be paralysed, school exams would be fiddled, classroom discipline would collapse and our political institutions would be stuffed with people on the basis of their colour rather than on whether they could do the job." Hague went on to say that in the 1970s the "threat" to British society came from "militant trade unions". The "danger" today was from "anti-British" campaigners against racism. New Labour ran

away from the argument. Home secretary Jack Straw distanced himself from the report, saying that he was "proud to be British".⁴³

Those attacking the Runnymede report were the same people who attacked the Macpherson report. One of the first Tories to condemn the Runnymede report was Gerald Howarth. Howarth said, "It is an extraordinary affront to the 94 percent of the population which is not from ethnic minorities. The native British must stand up for ourselves."⁴⁴

In 2001 Jack Straw was succeeded by David Blunkett as Home Secretary with responsibility for discharging the inquiry's recommendations. By 2003 Doreen Lawrence was warning that Blunkett had lost interest in the issue, how he was usually absent from the Home Office steering group charged with implementing Macpherson he was meant to chair. Doreen's warning had been prompted by Blunkett's publically stated opinion that "the slogan created a year or two ago about institutional racism missed the point".⁴⁵

⁴³ The report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain, Profile Books, October 2000. It can be accessed at <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/projects/meb/report.html>

⁴⁴ All quotes from "Outcry greets new report, Right wing wants to cover up racism" Hassan Mahamdallie, Socialist Worker, Issue 1719, 21 October 2000

⁴⁵ See "Blunkett trashes anti-racist fight", Hassan Mahamdallie, Socialist Worker, Issue 1835, 25 January 2003, <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=2690>

Doreen said that Blunkett had lost interest in Macpherson and combating institutional racism in the aftermath of the rioting by Asian youth that took place in the Northern towns of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in the summer of 2001. This was of course followed by 9/11 and marked a new era of racism, this time directed at Muslims.

Blunkett was succeeded as home secretary by Charles Clarke. In October 2005 Clarke announced in a cursory written statement to parliament,

“I asked my officials to carry out a review of race advisory panels within the Home Office to ensure that we are getting the most effective advice. The review recommended we move away from Standing Committees to a project-based approach, in which groups with relevant perspectives, community links and expertise are brought together to offer advice on specific issues within timescales that help us to deliver change quickly.

I have therefore stood down the Stephen Lawrence Steering Group”.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Hansard 21 Oct 2005

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/vo051021/wmstext/51021m01.htm#51021m01.html_sbhd3

The disbanding of the steering group sidelined Doreen and the other independent members, with the recommendations of Macpherson kicked into the long grass.

Doreen, once again, was forced to speak out publicly:

“I cannot believe we have achieved anything near what we should have done on the steering group. For the first time in British history we had independent people sitting around a table with the home secretary, acting as advisers to him as to how the community was feeling. The government should be applauded for that...but why have they dropped it?”⁴⁷

It was to be nearly nineteen years after the murder before the Lawrence family were to achieve partial justice, when in January 2012, due to advances in forensic science, Gary Dobson and David Norris were convicted of Stephen’s murder.

However there was no sense that the final chapter had been written in the case of Stephen Lawrence, or that institutional racism was a thing of the past. Doreen Lawrence, in a newspaper interview published after Dobson and Norris had been convicted said, “After the inquiry there was a sense that all the institutions wanted to do the right thing, they wanted to change. But I don't hear people talking like that

⁴⁷ Doreen Lawrence quoted in “Jack Straw: Charles Clarke was wrong to shut down Stephen Lawrence group” by Nicholas Watt, Guardian, Monday 16 January 2012
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/wintour-and-watt/2012/jan/16/jackstraw-davidblunkett>

anymore. I don't know whether they believe that it's been accomplished, that racism has been eradicated, but the reality is that it hasn't. What's happened is that racism still exists but it is not so overt, that doesn't mean it is not still there and in some ways it is worse having it underground.

“The inquiry gave an opportunity; there was a chance to change and things have changed but it's not gone far enough... People worry that it is out of their power to do something, but it is in all of our realms to change things.”⁴⁸

A new chapter seemed likely to open up in the spring of 2012, when home secretary Teresa May signaled that, given the serious nature of the allegations that Stephen's murderers had been shielded by corrupt police, she might allow another public inquiry into the police investigation.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Doreen Lawrence quoted in “Doreen Lawrence: Britain still blighted by racism”, Guardian, 3 January, 2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/jan/03/doreen-lawrence-britain-blighted-racism>

⁴⁹ “Stephen Lawrence murder: Theresa May considering new public inquiry”, Guardian, 22 April 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/apr/22/stephen-lawrence-new-public-inquiry>

The Stephen Lawrence scandal was a watershed in British history and continues to dog the police and the establishment, nearly two decades after the murder in Well Hall Lane.

All in all, this is very much unfinished business.